



Completely off the grid, with solar panels, a back-up generator and water tanks, this Capertee, NSW, home was a dream for Danish couple, Kristine and Michael Hansen. **FACING PAGE** The iconic rocking chair by Hans J. Wegner and the wood fire from Morsø are both Danish designs. Mille the wire-haired dachshund is also a Danish expat.



HOME

KRISTINE AND MICHAEL T. HANSEN

CAPERTEE NSW

IN DENMARK, IT'S a tradition for couples to celebrate their copper wedding anniversary (12-and-a-half years, or halfway to their silver anniversary). In a quaint but symbolic ritual, friends, neighbours and family will decorate an arch around the couple's front door — but it will only go halfway.

When Michael T. Hansen, then-Danish Consul General, and his graphic-designer wife Kristine reached this important milestone they were based in Sydney — halfway around the world — so they chose a romantic weekend in NSW's Wolgan Valley instead. Little did they know, this trip would set their family's future on a totally different trajectory. "On that weekend we just fell in love with the valley and the nature," Kristine recalls. "Those valleys and rolling hills were breathtaking — Denmark is just so flat!"

In 2009, when Michael, 45, Kristine, 44, and their two sons — Oskar, 19, and Carl, 16 — moved to Sydney, they were expecting to stay three years. Nine years later, they are still here and have built their dream home on a rugged rural block at Capertee, about 45 kilometres north of Lithgow, west of the Blue Mountains.

It was after the Wolgan Valley weekend that the entire family started visiting nearby Capertee to indulge their inherent Danish desire to be outdoors. On long family walks they explored the spectacular valley, known for its dramatic escarpments, sandstone cliffs and abundant wildlife. They soon learnt of a block of land that was up for sale, but it wasn't until two years later, in 2014, that they finally managed to purchase it. "We stayed in local cabins on the weekends, getting to know the area," Kristine says of this time. "It gave us a real sense of the best position for the views and the light."

A chance meeting led the couple to architect Joe Snell, who coincidentally had studied at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. "Because he's married to a Dane, we immediately connected with him," Kristine says. "We told him our dream of being totally off-grid and incorporating the craftsmanship of Australia with Danish design and simplicity, so he helped us implement that."

Situated eight kilometres from Capertee village and accessed via a winding dirt road, The Barn (which means 'the child' in Danish) is perched on a windswept hill with panoramic views of World Heritage-listed wilderness. From their deck, the family can watch kangaroos and wild goats graze among the rocky outcrops and eucalypts that punctuate the craggy

landscape (until Mille, their 10-year-old wire-haired dachshund, sends them scampering as she heads off on her solitary adventures).

Just five metres wide but 35 metres long, The Barn is simplistic and sensitive to its surroundings. "It's inspired by how Danish children would make a house," Kristine says. "It's basically a box with a roof pitched at 45 degrees — that's what we have in Denmark; otherwise, the snow gets too heavy and your roof will collapse."

Double-glazed glass windows by Australian company Rylock frame the incredible views from either end of the home, while light floods the elongated interior, thanks to 19 Danish-designed Velux skylights (these skylights also help with cross-ventilation in summer). "We can lie back and watch the stars at night," Kristine says. "That's one of the reasons we love it out here — because you are closer to the sky and can see the stars. You just feel smaller, and your troubles seem smaller, too."

Inside, a highlight of the home is the custom timberwork by Capertee carpenter Lance Owens. He used local timber to craft unique rustic elements, such as the island bench, stable door and branch handles on the sliding doors. "Lance has been amazing — he also did a lot of the metalwork," says Kristine. "I would simply give him some inspiration sheets and he would go off and bring them to life."

The whole family played a part in building the house. "Carl and Michael helped Lance in his workshop, and Oskar assembled the IKEA kitchen cabinets — he's the calm and analytical one. My main job was sweeping and keeping them all fed," Kristine says. Michael's father made the bathroom sink from Danish granite, while Kristine's dad travelled to Australia to help with building. A timber meat safe from Kristine's parents' home was transformed into a cherished memory box and now hangs on the wall by the sofa.

Kristine says the family would be devastated if they ever left The Barn, which was completed in January this year. Michael is now the managing director of Nilfisk Australia, a supplier of professional cleaning equipment, so the family are free to fill the house with more memories in the years to come.

"Now that it is finished, it's really nice to be together and do the things we want, like going for long walks and just talking to each other more... We don't have a TV; at night we just listen to music. There's something different about the time up here; it really slows you down."

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Carpenter Lance Owens and 16-year-old Carl made the dining table from leftover flooring. The Series 7 chairs are by Danish designer Arne Jacobsen and the Krusning light shade from IKEA. Louis Poulsen Tolbod lamps hang above the island bench.





Creating one metal runner linking the sliding doors was not without its challenges. "It took all of us standing on milk crates to get that 19-metre piece of metal into position!" says Kristine. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** An old meat safe containing art, plaster casts of the boys' hands and pottery birds; sitting above the IKEA Ektorp sofa are artworks by Kristine's aunt, who was an artist at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts; Michael, Oskar and Kristine; the master bedroom looks towards Turon Gates. "We often wake up with goats or kangaroos outside," says Kristine.

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The bathroom sink was made by Michael's father. The unpolished brass Circa tapware was sourced from Sussex Taps, while the bench was found in a council clean-up in Sydney. **FACING PAGE** Cushions and bed linen from Denmark feature on the bed in the main bedroom. The wall-hung La Lampe Gras lamps are from Curious Grace. Above the bed is a pair of artworks from the book *Picasso's One-Liners*.

