

Top honour for Sylvan Way house builder

by MARY-ANNE THOMSON

A SYLVAN WAY architecturally designed home with a focus on accessibility and maximising incredible views and all day sun has been honoured.

Maridale Construction Ltd won a gold award and its category in the Wellington Registered Master Builders House of the Year awards, announced on Saturday night.

The home owned by Phillip and Helen Blundell won the new homes \$600,000 to \$1 million category as well as the Mico Bathrooms Excellence Award and the Future-Proof Building Award.

Some ago, Phillip and Helen were living in Dowling Grove and saw a new subdivision on the hills above Silverstream - they took a drive and thought "why would anyone live up this steep road". A year or so later, faced with decisions about what to do in the future now their three sons had left home, they took another drive up to Sylvan Estate and everything became clear.

"There was one section left - it had magnificent views across the Upper Hutt valley to the snow topped Rimutakas and being north facing enjoyed all day sun. We thought 'this is nice'," Phillip recalls.

The couple bought the section and after detailed planning, with the help of former Upper Hutt Mitre

10 Dream Home builder, Brian Marriner, they built their "dream home".

This resulting home accommodates the needs of Phillip, a wheelchair user since a military helicopter accident 24 years ago. There are no steps or barriers of any kind. Everything is accessible from the gently sloping entry from the street via a full height extra-width door, to whole walls that open up at a touch to allow smooth progress from the interior polished coloured concrete floors to the 150 square metres of kwha deck surrounding the house. The decks have raised bed gardens at a height Phillip can enjoy tending, while everything inside the house has had the same attention to detail - internal cavity sliding doors with handles at metre height which are easy for Phillip to use, power outlets and data points at half a metre from floor level and kitchen bench and work spaces all at appropriate heights - which suits Helen as well as Phillip. Also in the kitchen the microwave oven opens downward and the oven sideways.

The couple did not want just a practical house - their brief to architect, Davor Mikulcic was that the house should be exciting and be flexible for them to live in as a couple but also just as great when the family comes to stay.

"We wanted something super functional but also warm, inviting

The view at night of the Blundells' award-winning house in Sylvan Way.

and future proofed. We specified maximum views, maximum sun, solar power and double glazing," Phillip says.

The home has flexible indoor outdoor spaces, which can be opened up or closed off depending on numbers, winter sun floods through floor to ceiling windows to be soaked up by a corridor wall of polished concrete blocks at the core of the house, solar panels provide hot water from October to May and under floor heating kicks in when the temperature drops. This heating system which allows for different temperatures in different rooms is powered by a German integrated gas and solar boiler in the garage.

As well as the home's three spacious bedrooms there's a large office and state of the art entertainment centre - both with laminated jarrah benches custom made for them - plus a room with a home exercise machine and equipment.

Every detail has been considered right down to the location of speak-

ers, power and data outlets and other fittings to provide for the Blundells' changing needs both as they age and as their sons and grandchildren visit.

Two of the three award winning wheel chair accessible bathrooms have wet shower areas, which also make visits a breeze for elderly parents, the chrome ladder towel rail systems are heated from the under floor system.

The Blundells worked closely with their architect and builder throughout the whole project. They say it would not have been so successful without that teamwork.

Brian and his team were fantastic.

"We'd have regular briefings and there wasn't one weekend in the whole time where I couldn't access the site - Brian would put planks across for the wheelchair," Phillip says.

"He really went the extra mile for us - nothing was a problem. Not only that, he is an ethical man, a

great tradesman who paid huge attention to detail and very easy to work with.

"A lot of people say building a house is stressful - this was the first house we have built and we didn't find it that way at all. We had done a lot of research before we started and had a good idea of what we wanted. Brian allowed us to be involved through the whole process. The teamwork between Brian, his carpenters, subcontractors and us was great," the couple say.

Brian had completed a renovation on the Blundells' Dowling Grove home which they were very happy with, but leaving nothing to chance, before selecting a builder for their new home, Phillip and Helen interviewed several companies.

"We got a feeling for what working with them would be like and we had a good feeling about Maridale Construction from the start. We had



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