

# Fernhill HOUSE

by Anna-Marie  
Chin Architects

• QUEENSTOWN •

The angular forms of this large house create a play of light and shadow that mimics the alpine environment in which it sits, breaking up the overall mass.

Words by Frederique Gulcher  
Photography by Marina Mathews

01 The layered, multi-faceted configuration of this house forms a distinct silhouette.

02 Clad in copper, this house both absorbs and reflects the light, merging almost seamlessly with its surrounds.



It is no mean feat to build a house that commands a presence against a backdrop of pine-covered slopes, jagged snowcapped mountains and a pristine lake, not to mention plenty of multi-level architecturally designed neighbouring dwellings. But the soft reflection of copper cladding of this holiday home, the unfolding silhouette carved out of the hill, and the shifting shadow and light of pitches and angles does indeed create a distinctive and dynamic feature in the landscape.

Architect Anna-Marie Chin, of Arrowtown-based Anna-Marie Chin Architects, says the finished result was a process of an ongoing dialogue between the exterior and interior space, while bringing to bear the practicality of a south-facing, six-bedroom holiday home with height restrictions and more than 1000m<sup>2</sup> of floor space needing to be carved out of a steep, rocky slope.

“The environment is remarkable. There are sharp and angular hills and mountains, and the light quality of this location changes

throughout the day,” says Chin.

“The folded form worked better as an interpretation of this environment, and allowed us to express the sense of the house unfolding down the hill.

“The copper reflects that light and changes colour against the hillside and through the seasons. But the copper is also low maintenance, which was important to the clients.”

The ‘unfolding’ forms, angles and shifting masses define the interior space too, and at times the need to create a certain interior space morphed the external form, Chin says.

“The inside spaces required a distinct feel accentuated by the magnificent views.

“It was a complex process of revisiting certain angles and spaces to achieve that intention while still making it work with the exterior.”

The location, function and view of each room were considered

and individually treated to generate a unique experience. For example, the kitchen dining area has floor-to-ceiling glazed sliders that take in panoramic views across a balcony, whereas the lounge is more enfolded, with a window seemingly tearing itself from the floor and ceiling towards the Remarkables mountain range.

A courtyard at the back of the house provides a secluded space that catches some of the northern light and is sheltered from the cold breeze off the lake, one of the less desirable side effects of living above Lake Wakatipu.


“These spatial contrasts – expansive and almost vulnerable versus contained and protective – are designed to initiate different feelings and experiences,” says the architect.

Two interior staircases on either side of the house extend to the outdoors providing a circular flow through the house, which enable smaller groups to occupy one end without feeling overwhelmed by the size of the home.

There is no doubt that the house is large and the project was complex. Approximately 4600m<sup>3</sup> of earth and stone had to be excavated out of the hill, which drops 15m from top to bottom. The excavated stone has been reused as cladding on the lower level of the home and within the landscaping.

Chin credits the RBJ building team with rising to the challenges of this site.

“We knew we wanted something very special but with it came complexity and a level of ‘unknown territory’ for some of the tradespeople. They understood what we were trying to achieve and took on the challenge, telling me afterwards that they had enjoyed the opportunity.”

Despite the complexity of the many shapes and changing forms, this holiday home fits in well with its surroundings, conspicuous yet not out of place. Impressive and dynamic, the copper envelope that unfolds like a picture book gives a hint of the world inside. 

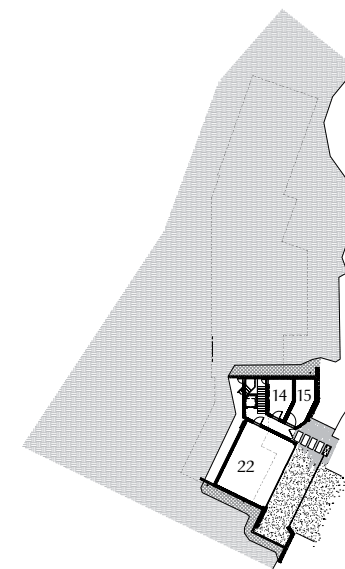
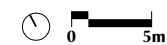


**03** The architect has continued the angular theme indoors, where none of the ceiling or wall planes are the same.

**04** The open-plan living is flanked by outdoor areas offering views or sheltered entertaining.

**05 & 06** Just as the house unfolds down the site, so too do the interior spaces unfold around an ever-shifting axis, creating a sense of anticipation for what will be found around the next corner.

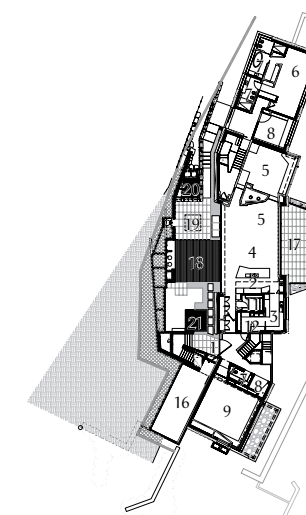
- 1 Entry
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Scullery
- 4 Dining
- 5 Living
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Bathroom/ensuite/WC
- 8 Study
- 9 Media
- 10 Gym
- 11 Wine cellar
- 12 Laundry
- 13 Kitchenette
- 14 Drying room
- 15 Store
- 16 Plant
- 17 Terrace
- 18 Patio
- 19 Courtyard
- 20 Spa
- 21 Pond
- 22 Garage



**Level one floor plan**



**Level two floor plan**



**Level three floor plan**

07 A glimpse of the breathtaking view is proffered through the open front door.



#### Practice

##### Anna-Marie Chin Architects

8 Berkshire Street  
Arrowtown 9302  
03 409 8881  
amchinarchitects.co.nz

#### Practice profile

Our buildings are beautiful, often simple and sit at ease with the land. We enjoy working with clients who are inspired by architecture, and who want to engage in the design process.

#### Project team

Anna-Marie Chin, James Hyndman,  
Cory Clark.

#### Builder

RBJ Builders

#### Consultants

**Engineer:** Lewis Bradford Consulting Engineers

**Quantity surveyor:** Maltbys

**Landscape architect:** LAND Landscape Architects

**Interior, kitchen and bathroom designer:** Anna-Marie Chin Architects

**Kitchen manufacturer:** Coronet Woodware

#### Products

**External walls:** Copper from The Architectural Roofing Company; schist

**Building membranes:** Pro Clima INTELLO; Pro Clima SOLITEX

**Roofing:** Copper from The Architectural Roofing Company

**Louvres:** Aurora opening roof with 200mm Solaris blades from Insol

**Paints and varnishes:** Resene

**Ceiling:** Quarter-sawn white cedar; Gib

**Internal walls:** Quarter-sawn white cedar; Gib

**Flooring:** Quarter-sawn French oak from CTC Timber Floors; Cavalier Bremworth from Flooring Xtra

**Exterior windows and doors:** Eurotech WinDoors

**Window and door hardware:** Chant Hardware

**Blinds and drapes:** Window Treatments (blinds); McKenzie & Willis (curtains)

**Lighting:** ECC

**Heating:** Ground-source heat pump from Central Heating

**Audio visual:** Strawberry Sound

**Fireplace:** Warmington Firebox EG 1500

#### Time schedule

**Design and planning:** 15 months

**Construction:** 27 months

#### Project areas

**Site size:** 2056m<sup>2</sup>

**Building area:** 1100m<sup>2</sup>

## Material Selector

Architect Anna-Marie Chin on why copper was ideal for this house.



#### The copper is a real statement material. Why was it chosen?

The clients wanted something unique yet still familiar to the environment. They also wanted something low maintenance. We went with copper because of its warmth and its ability to impart that quality to the site. It was also because of the ease of use of the material – copper is very malleable.

#### Are there any challenges to using such a significant amount of copper?

While copper doesn't need to be maintained, it is not compatible with many other materials. For example, water run-off from certain materials will not react well with copper; therefore we had to think about other materials to build with. In terms of timber, oak has the least tannins in it so we used this.

#### The copper is low maintenance – does this mean it stays looking the same?

You get a great deal of sun in this location and the copper brings out the warmth and light that stands out against the grey and shadow of the hill. With the changing daily and seasonal light, it takes on different qualities. But it also ages, developing a patina that will age naturally, which will bring new qualities to the house over time.