

Winning ways: The passive solar-heated award-winning Nelson home was designed by Mark Feilding, of Ecotect.

The double-height open sun space is part of the living and kitchen area, a sun trap and a heat sink for the entire house with opening to the north facing decking.



Making themselves at home



Five years ago the Baden family of six left Germany to live in New Zealand. Jill Wild hears about their journey.



ACHIM and Beate Baden left Germany five years ago with their four children convinced New Zealand would offer the environment they wanted for their family. It was a huge move, leaving behind family and friends to head to a country they had only ever read about.

Since then, the Baden family have settled in nicely. Indeed, so integrated is the family that 15-year-old son Oscar is now a New Zealand representative beach volleyball player. He spent part of this summer competing in Vanuatu with the New Zealand development youth squad.

"I'm so proud of him," Beate says, "I'm so proud that he is representing New Zealand, it's beyond what we could have ever hoped for."

And hopes were what Beate

and husband Achim had when they made the big decision to leave Dusseldorf and everything they had ever known for a new life in New Zealand.

"There was just so much stress, so much tension in Germany. In general, everything is so serious, everything's negative, it's all so rigid, it's not my way of living and definitely not what we wanted for our children. It's not a very child-friendly environment, we almost felt we didn't belong there, we were different," Beate says.

On researching global options and reading about New Zealand they decided it offered the environment they wanted. In 2008 they arrived in Nelson, a family of six, bags and little else. By the end of that year they had bought a

bare piece of land in suburban Nelson and were planning a family home with local architectural designer Mark Feilding.

"Achim had studied architecture so we had some rough ideas and worked with Mark to develop a plan. We wanted two storeys with passive solar, five bedrooms, compact living and energy efficient with good use of space."

For Mark, who has been passionate about designing energy-efficient, ecologically sustainable homes since 1982, the opportunity was welcomed.

"We can't save the world but we can make a difference," he says on his website at

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Badens at home: Beate and son Oscar, 15.



Good mix: The bright and spacious kitchen features plywood cabinetry.



Looking on: Artwork by daughter Milena.



Deck time : Daughters Carla, 9, and Nadja, 14.



Room to roam: The lounge and bedrooms are spacious with views out over Nelson and the surrounding reserve lands.



ecotect.co.nz and the building of the Baden home, he says, proves that much can be done to make construction more cost effective and environmentally friendly.

"We need to use local materials to keep our own people employed. It makes no sense to me to ship all our raw materials offshore for other countries to make into stuff to ship back to us, using up fossil fuels and adding to pollution all along the way at the same time." The Baden house is clad in black Onduline vertical corrugated cladding.

While the material is imported, Mark says it is made from 50 per cent recycled cardboard and is highly cost effective. Windows on the home are

accented by weatherboards and locally produced macrocarpa slat pergolas provide summer shade. Foundations are Polyblock providing a full thermal break at the edges of the exposed concrete slab floor which is also fully insulated. The framing is locally grown and milled douglas fir. It has proved a great family base. Its 230 square metres includes five bedrooms, double garaging, a spacious family, dining and kitchen area and a mezzanine gallery. The double-height open space is part of the living and kitchen area and is a sun trap and heat sink for the entire house. A separate single-height lounge comes off the central double-storey space along with the master

bedroom, which opens to private decking. Off the upper-level gallery are four bedrooms and office space; compact and efficient living achieved to the budget of \$470,000. For Achim and Beate, the passive solar heating achieved in their home is a real bonus. The central heat sink creates year-round warmth from the two-storey exposed, concrete masonry, charcoal-coloured walls. "These walls have multiple purposes; thermal mass, noise control, structure for floors and roofs and finish without any need for paint or linings," Mark says. "Achim is a painting and decorating expert so we did the gib stopping and all the interior painting," Beate says.

"It's a wonderful home, right in Nelson and with an acre [4000sqm] of land there's enough room to have two goats, chooks that lay and still plenty of area for fruit trees, olive trees and we're still planting more." The design and style of the house was recognised in the awarding of a runner-up prize in the Nelson ITM Wild Tomato Building and Architecture Award for the best eco building in 2010, an unexpected accolade for the project team. For the family, in the hills above Nelson, home is the stress-free lifestyle they pictured when they read books about New Zealand and the people are friendlier than they say they could have ever imagined.