

Inside Christchurch's \$1m-plus Superhomes - 'we don't need to worry about our power bill any more'



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Three out of four high-performance "Superhomes" built in Christchurch's Somerfield are off the market, with each estimated to be worth more than \$1 million.

The last of the properties at Ngā Whare Pārara, [135 Somerfield St](#), to be completed is designed to become one of New Zealand's first carbon-negative, zero-energy homes.

The street-front property, known as House A, is expected to be finished within two weeks.

Houses C and D sold before reaching the open market.

House B – the smallest of the four – is still for sale. It [goes to auction on September 17](#).

While the prices remain confidential or a guess, architecture and building platform [ArchiPro](#) places each house within the \$1m to \$2m price range.



The homes have carbon neutral cladding and triple glazing imported from Poland that cost the same as double-glazed aluminium joinery sold locally.

Photo: Peter Meecham / The Press

Jane O'Malley and her husband, Ian Baker, moved into one of the completed homes about a month ago.

They had previously rented a single-glazed house nearby, where they wiped condensation from the windows and aired the rooms every day.

"I've got a bit of arthritis, and that's really benefited from living in a warm, dry home," O'Malley said. "We have an EV and don't need to worry about our power bill anymore."

Architectural designer Bob Burnett plans to use House A as [his practice's](#) office and a "living laboratory", collecting data on its temperature, humidity, air quality, electricity use and solar generation. Construction began last winter.

The aim is to test whether the building performs as expected and demonstrate how low-carbon design could be adopted more widely.

"There's no reason why that couldn't be how all houses are built," Burnett said.

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[Ngā Whare Pārara](#) means "to warm oneself", or "bask in the sun".

From the early design stage, Burnett's practice used [New Zealand software Nezo](#) to calculate the carbon emissions associated with different building materials.

The modelling prompted the designers to reduce their use of two of construction's biggest sources of emissions: concrete and structural steel.

Burnett said the calculations showed House A would be carbon negative, meaning it was expected to offset more carbon than was generated through its construction and operation. The other three homes were modelled as being close to carbon zero.



Bob Burnett is the founder of Bob Burnett Architecture and a trustee of the Superhome Movement Charitable Trust.

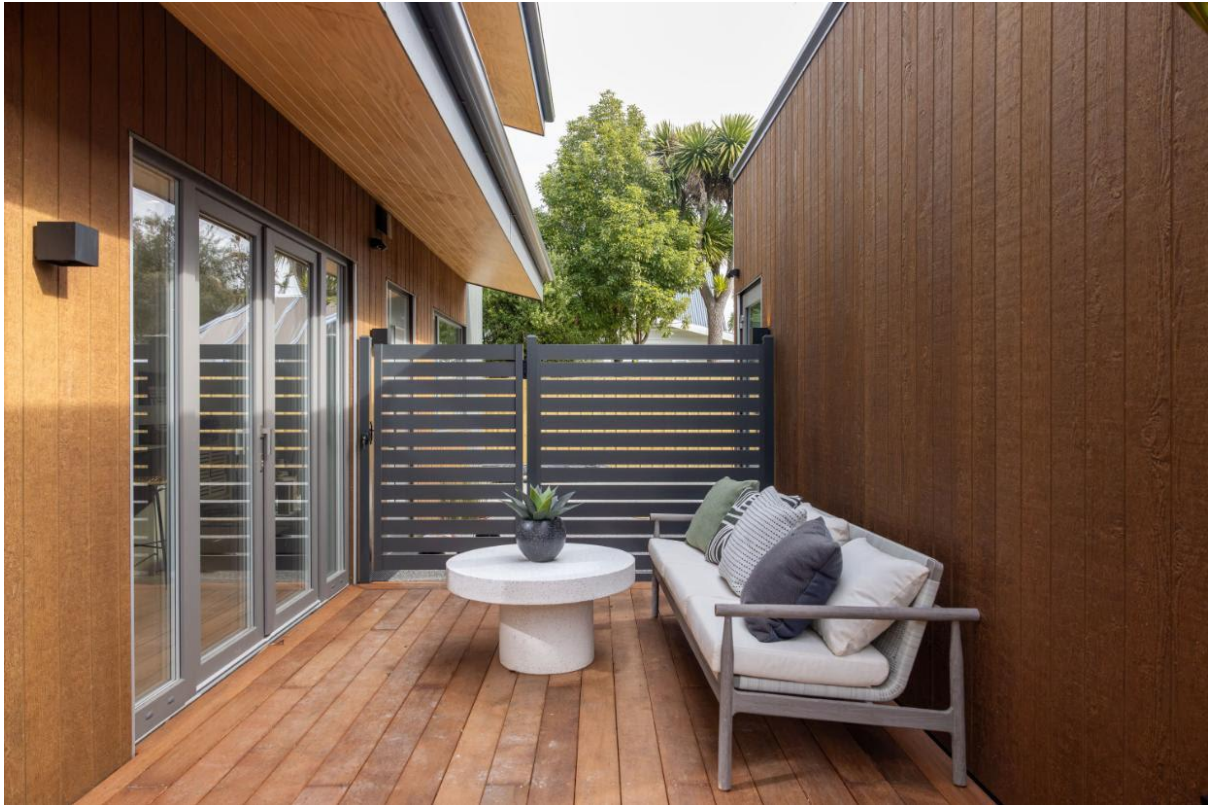
Photo: Peter Meecham / The Press

House A has a timber floor supported by timber piles instead of a conventional concrete slab, while engineered timber framing replaced much of the structural steel.

“The biggest thing was getting rid of the concrete slab and having a timber floor on piles,” Burnett said.

“That’s what pushed us beyond zero.”

Insulated wall panels were assembled in a factory before being installed on site, creating tightly sealed walls with fewer gaps through which heat could escape.



An outdoor area with overhanging eaves to help control heat in the house.

Photo: Peter Meecham / The Press

Every home in the development has solar panels, high ceilings and triple-glazed windows.

Burnett said the triple glazing was imported from Poland, but cost about the same as locally sold aluminium-framed double glazing while providing much better insulation.

He said the features did not necessarily make the homes more expensive or slower to construct than conventional new builds.

“A lot of it is just thinking a little bit differently and more thoughtful design.”



A water tank which collects water from the roof.

Photo: Peter Meecham / The Press

Superhome is a formal certification developed by the [non-profit Superhome Movement Charitable Trust](#), rather than a Building Code category. Homes are assessed at ‘Base,’ ‘Better’ or ‘Best’ level against 10 principles covering areas including design, insulation, and ventilation. Some performance requirements are tested, including a blower-door test for airtightness.

Burnett’s practice designs Superhomes depending on an owner’s needs and budget.

“Ngā Whare Pārara represents the pinnacle, but not everyone needs to aim for ‘best,’” he said.



Christchurch based architectural designer Bob Burnett, pictured in one of the houses in their Ngā Whare Pārara Superhomes project on Somerfield Street.

Photo: Peter Meecham / The Press

The street-front home has the development's most dramatic roof, rising at a 40-degree angle. Its triangular form echoes the gable of the 1906 villa that previously occupied the site, while the four ridgelines together mimic the rise and fall of Christchurch's Port Hills.

Rather than demolish the villa, Burnett and his wife, Japanese architect Shizuka Yasui, moved it to Rangiora before redeveloping the Somerfield section.

The pair had previously lived in the villa, which Burnett described as old and beautiful but "very cold".



One of the bedrooms.

Photo: Peter Meecham / The Press

Inside, the homes have wooden floors and 3.5m ceilings lined with New Zealand pine.

Large triple-glazed sliding doors connect the living areas to kwila hardwood decks while keeping winter chill and street noise outside. There is also underfloor heating.

Burnett has a playful name for the homes' architectural style: "Japiwi" – Japanese design with a distinctly Kiwi character.

It is his own twist on "Japandi", which blends Japanese simplicity and closeness to nature with Scandinavian hygge – a sense of warmth, comfort and wellbeing. The Japanese influence comes from Yasui, who designed the development with him.

For Burnett, however, it is not simply about creating attractive interiors. He wants the homes to be sunny, comfortable throughout the year, inexpensive to operate and built with a much smaller carbon footprint.



135B Somerfield. House B, the development's remaining property for sale, has two bedrooms, two bathrooms, two living areas and a single garage on a 226m² freehold section.

Photo: Supplied

“One of the things I enjoy most about these homes is seeing people’s reactions when they walk through the door – and, more importantly, how the homes make them feel,” he said.

“That’s when we know we’ve really nailed it.”

House B, the development’s remaining property for sale, has two bedrooms, two bathrooms, two living areas and a single garage on a 226m² freehold section.

It has 14 solar panels, a ventilation system that recovers warmth from outgoing air, rainwater collection and wiring ready for an electric-vehicle charger.

Burnett said high-performance homes rarely changed hands because their owners tend to remain in them, leaving little sales history to guide buyers and real estate agents.

“It is hard to put a value on it.”

Video: <https://youtu.be/mTZB23cPttk?si=DierGrCTGpYalqTQ>

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