

Changing their tune

A pair of musicians put all their faith in expert advice, writes **Jennifer Veerhuis**

Wollongong newlyweds Jess and Fotis had been looking a year for a house without success. So they bravely put their trust in three experts — builder Marshal Keen, interior designer Shaynna Blaze and buyer's agent Rich Harvey from Channel 9's new show *Buying Blind*.

In the show, couples hand over their money to three experts who purchase and renovate a property for them — but the couple doesn't get to see the home until it's all done.

Marshal, a Bondi-based construction company owner, says the three experts checked out a five-bedroom house, which was more than 40 years old, in Kanahooka, before purchase. While there were some issues, they saw potential.

"I was fond of this house as soon as I saw it," Marshal says. "The view got me the most — it was absolutely unbelievable. It was a really solid brick house and it was big, which was what the couple said they wanted."

Brief encounters

Marshal says the first-home buyers had given the experts a map of areas where they were happy to live along with a brief.

They wanted a house they could grow into and, if it was on a hill, they wanted it to be on the upper side of the street. They also wanted a garage and entertainment area.

"The biggest thing they wanted was a studio music room," Marshal says.

"Fotis is a musician and Jess is a singer, so they wanted that dedicated space for his musical instruments and a little cave so he could play his music."

Marshal says they had just three weeks to complete the work and the budget was fairly

Before & after

BEFORE

A house on a sloping block with an internal layout lacking functionality

AFTER

A home with a functional layout and spaces to suit the owners' interests in entertaining and music



tight so the experts had to identify which parts of the house to concentrate on.

Going with the flow

The kitchen wasn't old and so a spruce-up rather than a major overhaul was in order. Some new cabinets were added, along with a granite benchtop. A dumb waiter was installed between the garage and the kitchen to make getting the groceries upstairs easier.

While the house initially had five bedrooms, the removal of one allowed for a new walk-in robe and ensuite. Marshal says one of the biggest problems was that the front door opened directly on to a staircase.



Marshal Keen, interior designer Shaynna Blaze and buyer's agent Rich Harvey prioritised what to keep and what to leave to make the most of the house within the budget.

"There was a really awkward entryway which was one of the reasons the house hadn't sold initially," Marshal says.

To overcome this, they moved the front door to one side, so that it opened into the large living space at the front of the house.

While this immediately improved the flow, accessing the backyard was also an issue, because the only way to get outside was through the laundry. So a window near the kitchen was replaced with a new door, creating an instant link to the backyard.

Outside, a new deck was added and since they were not able to get council permission, they made it a modular, removable deck.

Making room for music

For Fotis in particular, having a music room was really important and so one downstairs bedroom was converted for him.

Other improvements included a new floating floor in the living area and kitchen, and new carpets in the bedrooms upstairs.

Marshal says it was wonderful to see the couple's reaction to their new house.

"They were absolutely over the moon," he says. "Their response to their new home was really touching."

See *Buying Blind* airs on Tuesdays at 7.30pm on Channel 9

Pictures Graeme Taylor