

Building a home, without a skip

Claire and Sean O'Connell talk to Wastebusters about building their home without using a skip and finding creative ways to use leftover material around their new home.



Timber used for extra shelving

Claire and Sean O'Connell wanted to build a new home, but they were consciously aware of the initial effects it may have on the environment. Their dream was to create an off-grid, 150 square metre home, complete with three bedrooms and a breezeway to house a shed at the end for their snooker table, work room and spare bedroom with toilet and laundry. Claire and Sean not only had a vision, but were on a mission to do all of that without a skip. Now, two years on, they tell us how they achieved their goal.

Working together to make a change

The key to their success was getting their builder, Graeme Vallance, on board. The O'Connell's told him about their plans and how they thought they could make it work, explaining that a skip would not be required. His reaction was one of surprise, but he followed their lead and helped them overcome any obstacles along the way.

No skip on site meant the tradespeople left items on the deck that were surplus to requirements, including scrap materials, which Claire spent her evenings sorting through to be either recycled or dumped. Living on site made the process of sorting the materials a more manageable task, Claire said. She said the reason they avoided using a skip was to make it more achievable, knowing a skip would have made it more difficult to sort through items. "You just knew you wouldn't do it."

Without a large rubbish receptacle, it was much easier to recycle, she said. In some cases, if excess product was purchased but not required the



Concrete used to bulk up area near steps

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O'Connells were able to take it back to where they purchased it from, such as Pink Batts.

However, all efforts were made to adopt an economical approach, with the builder ordering only what he thought was required. Claire said other items no longer required, which were whole and clean were offered to Wastebusters or were kept by the O'Connells to be used down the track.

However, not everything was able to be reused or recycled. Claire and Sean, who own Wanaka Signs, were able to place what minimal rubbish they had from the building site in their wheelie bins, which they returned to their business for collection.

Facing challenges

Plastic wrapping was one of the biggest challenges the O'Connells faced. From large amounts that encased the insulation to strapping - plastic was problematic. Having access to two wheelie bins meant they could still dispose of some items, but in a way that they could control how much. The O'Connells estimate they emptied their two wheelie bins about four times. Claire spent her spare time sorting through the items left behind at the end of each day to make sure anything that could be salvaged was rescued and sent through the right channel.

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Cut offs from deck posts used to help place pallets on the floor and iron enclosure to create shelter for wood

Adding that process to the workload of the tradespeople was not an option, she said. “You can't expect the tradespeople to add it to their tasks - I wouldn't anyway.” The O'Connells were fortunate to be able to keep items out of the weather, something that could be a challenge for others going forward. She recommends anyone looking to do something similar should invest in some form of cover to protect items they want to use down the track.

Reflecting on change

For the O'Connells, building their home without a skip was a win-win. “We didn't end up paying for a skip, plus we knew we dumped less stuff than we would have if we had a skip,” Claire said. Not only did they save money, their home has additional extras which were not necessarily in the plans. Among the many items they now have is extra shelving throughout their home using left over wood. They also built a shelter for the wood pile using posts left over from the deck and excess iron from the cladding. Excess concrete poured on site was smashed up and used to bulk up an area where sleeper steps have been placed. Timber left over from the decking has also been put aside to build steps to the hot tub they are putting in. Ultimately, the O'Connells have proved with a bit of foresight and planning, skip loads of rubbish can be saved from landfill. “I was quite determined to do it,” Claire said. “It wasn't that difficult and it was important for us to do. “We were really happy with how it went.”

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