

## From the bustle of Melbourne to the beauty of Bingil Bay

Six years ago Steve and Helen Wiltshire sat on the beach at Bingil Bay in North Queensland, each wondering how to persuade the other to go and live there!

The move meant a dramatic change in lifestyle for the family, but one they have never regretted. Instead of a plush house, two cars, the latest in clothes, and a hectic schedule, their existence is now very simple.

They live in a mud-floored, hexagonal house with only two interior walls. Transport is provided by a 12-year-old car and a sailing boat. Clothing consists of sarongs for Helen and shorts and T-shirts for Steve and their pace of life has slowed to a crawl compared with the hurly-burly of Melbourne.

The Wiltshires have what they consider the only essential mod cons: a shower, septic tank and town water.

Helen, 33, has the looks and poise of a fashion model, so their neighbours were amazed to learn that she usually washed in a stream and didn't even possess a mirror.

They have no electricity. Helen uses a kerosene refrigerator and oil lamps. The couple are adamant that they do not want electricity because they feel it would change their lifestyle.

"You tend to acquire things like television sets and hair dryers," said Helen. "We are happy without them."



LEFT: Helen and Steve enjoy a meal in their multi-purpose dining/guest/cum lounge-room. Steve left as many walls as possible open when he built the house, creating the feeling of living in the forest. ABOVE: Ben and Mandy help their parents fish for dinner. BELOW: Helen Wiltshire hard at work on one of her paintings.

BELOW LEFT: A suspension bridge, built by Steve, spans a gully in front of their house. BELOW FAR LEFT: The Wiltshires' home is both compact and practical. The ladder leads to the sleeping area and the floor in the main section is made of clay. Photos: Peter Ford.

## A family in search of the simple life

In fact Helen does not even have an iron and describes her housework as "minimal." Because of this she says it is important to have an interest.

Helen has developed her talent for painting, which has since become a useful money-earner for the family. Her brilliantly coloured pictures scored an instant success at her first exhibition held in Sydney earlier this year. She sold four paintings and returned north with several commissions.

At work in the main room of the house Helen has only to look up to see her subjects, the plants and birds of the rain forest.

The other source of income for the family is Steve's nursery business. He grows lychee plants and sells them to orchards in southern Queensland and in New South Wales.

"I don't want the business to get too

big so we end up in the same situation we left down south," said Steve. "I will concentrate on quality rather than quantity."

The family can live on \$30 a week but usually spend more — up to \$70. "That allows us to have luxuries such as cigarettes, wine and meat," explained Helen. "It also covers entertaining."

The couple grow vegetables and Steve, a skilled mechanic, sometimes does odd jobs for neighbours in exchange for their surplus produce.

Much of the family's food comes from the sea. "Fish, oysters, crabs and crayfish are all plentiful," said Steve. "There is nothing quite as tasty as fresh seafood you have caught yourself."

This simple lifestyle is particularly popular with the children, Ben, aged nine, and Mandy, eight.

— CLAIR JOLLIFFE

