

Home is heaven and earth



John and Yoka Donatan outside their five-star duplex in the center of Cochet Peds.

Photo: PETER HACKETT

Photo: CHRIS HANNA



Yoka in the spacious kitchen.

From PETER HACKETT

COCHET PEDS: Home people might say that John and Yoka Donatan have made a state hill out of a mountain.

What looks like more than a barren hill from the outside is in fact their dream home. The 13,000-sq-ft house covers a sprawling 30-acre estate.

It contains about 50,000 bricks — the equivalent of three three-bedroom suburban homes. It has four double bedrooms, two full-size bathrooms, four balconies, a billiard room, wine cellar and spa.

There's 200 square meters of carpet — it takes Yoka four hours to vacuum the house — and 200 ft of electric cable.

But what makes the house truly remarkable is that it is entirely underground — about 11 ft below ground level.

And to construct his dream house, John Donatan says he mortgaged about \$200,000. It has taken three years to build and John and Yoka are moving in this week.

John, an expat miner for 20 years, designed and built the house, which is in the center of Cochet Peds. He says it was a logistical nightmare, especially the plumbing.

But he and Yoka are delighted with what is now the largest duplex in the land. "It's quite unbelievable," said John, 35, who was

raised in Auckland and has lived in Cochet Peds for 25 years. "I never dreamt that it would turn out like this."

John estimates he has spent around \$200,000 on the underground house. But there were some unexpected bonuses along the way — starting excavation and construction John inherited around \$200,000 in cash.

Opal worth around \$40,000 came out of the quarry alone.

The house has eight ventilation shafts and a 100-litre solar hot water system.

Energy is not a problem.

The temperature remains in the comfortable mid-20s all year — even when the outside temperature drops to 0°C in summer and drops to freezing point in winter.

"You don't need air-conditioning or heating," said Yoka, who helped design the house. "You save a lot on energy costs."

Yoka, who was raised in Adelaide, says she loves the underground. "I never want to think it would be claustrophobic, but I've never felt that."

John used mining equipment, including a tunneling machine, to build the house.

The bricks were used to support and secure walls. The layout includes a formal lounge, study, dining room, kitchen, breakfast room, "sunroom", laundry and study.

Photo: CHRIS HANNA