

Want an eco-home? Your ship has come in

DIANA CLEMENT

Who would want to live in a shipping container? The answer is ecologically minded people who value compact living and good design – a la George

Clark's *Amazing Spaces*.

But don't expect them to be cheap, say those involved in the construction of container homes. Brenda Kelly, director of Auckland-based IQ Container Homes says, contrary to popular belief, container homes are not "cheap", although they are of course more affordable than a 250sq m four-bedroom home.

Chris Brauchli of Earthcube says builders who have jumped on the container home idea have struggled to make ends meet.

"Everyone assumes it's a cheaper way to build," he says. "It's not, and I lost quite a bit learning this."

Brauchli says the advantages of container homes are they're transportable, and disaster-resistant. In Christchurch, container homes from Containers & More survived the earthquakes. Container homes are good for situations such as remote beaches where the ability to secure them is important.

Other plus points, says Kelly, include structural integrity, longevity – and that they are great for sloping and difficult sites because they require only simple foundations, at the four corners of the structure.



Before they appeared on and won TV reality show *The Block*, Corban and Alex Walls had made a home at Muriwai using shipping containers. Photo / Michelle Hyslop.

There are many reasons for buying container homes, but a popular one, says Kelly is the eco-angle. IQ's homes have inbuilt rainwater harvesting systems, integrated photovoltaic solar power panels, and double glazed windows and doors.

IQ's show home in Rauhuia Cres, Parau was appraised by the New Zealand Green Building Council as on target for a 7 Homestar rating. A rating of 1 Homestar means it needs significant work, and 10 Homestar indicates international best practice. In plain English it means the home is above the average for warmth,

dryness, ventilation, and water efficiency. A 4 Homestar rating is the equivalent of the current Building Code.

"Though minimising my carbon footprint is a lovely side effect, my main motivation was for a healthy future-proof home with low running costs. I use superior insulation, LED lighting, water and energy efficient appliances, and antibacterial flooring with solar and rainwater harvesting as standard in my designs," says Kelly. "The small footprint, offsite construction and minimal waste and disturbance are a bonus."

Kelly says a 40-foot (12.1m) single bedroom container home with kitchen, living and bathroom costs \$90,000 plus GST. There may be extra charges for long distance or difficult delivery, foundations and site work. Smaller versions right down to the "Hobbit" are available. A 10-foot container usually doesn't require council consent and can be used simply as an extra bedroom or office. Some container homes can be added to at a later date with a new wing, when money is available, or the family expands.

The company also offers 20ft (6m) off-grid container homes. They come fully furnished with appliances and furniture.

● Similar to container homes are prefabricated homes, built in a factory and craned into position. Check out PrefabNZ.com for ideas such as the UniPod, a transportable bathroom or kitchen unit delivered like a giant piece of Lego.