

# HOUSING

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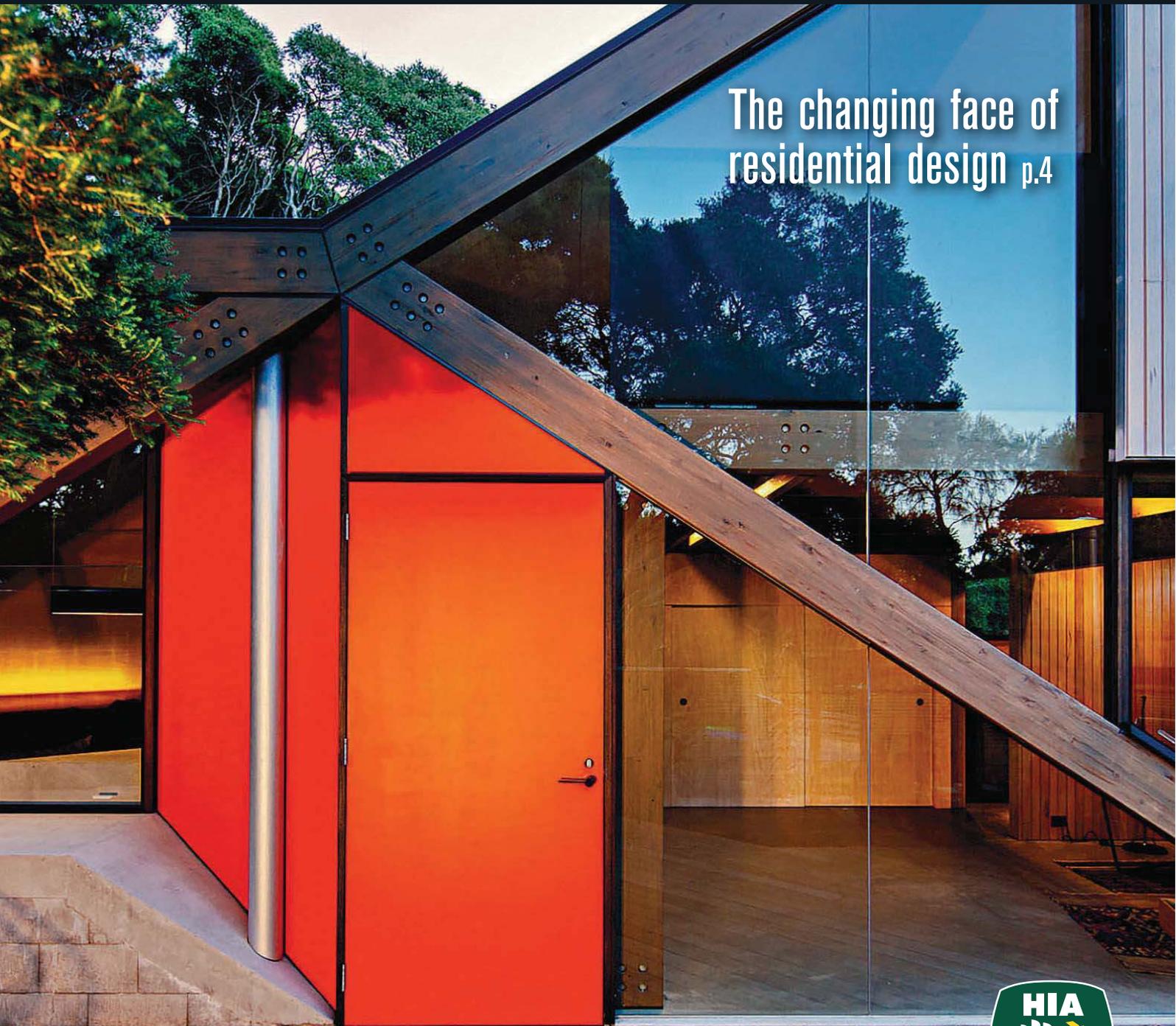


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# mad about architecture

The host of *Grand Designs Australia* advocates good design for a better, more sustainable way of living.

Story: Laura Valic

**A**s a young architect, Peter Maddison was handed an unusual design request from a client; a laconic, emotive concept for a Victorian beachfront property that stretched his creativity to its limits.

‘My client said, ‘I’ve got this block of land overlooking the coast of Phillip Island and I want a house where I can have a tractor seat to sit on, an esky and I can watch the sunset.’ That was his brief and he wouldn’t tell me anything else!’ Peter reveals.

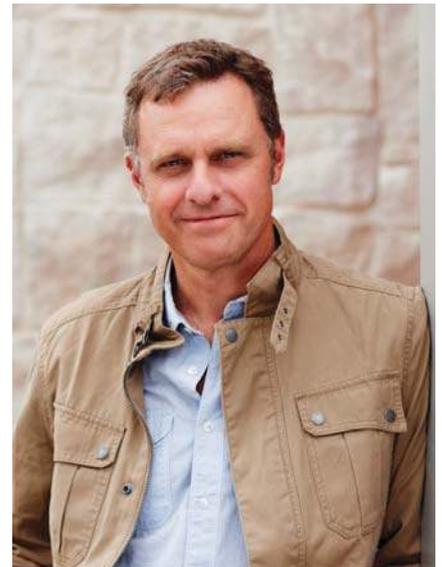
Not an easy task given this was the first free-standing house he designed for his Melbourne-based firm Maddison

Architects. His interpretation of the brief not only won a Royal Australian Institute of Architects award in 1995 but illustrates the principles for good housing he has long since relied on – liveability, sustainability, affordability and amenity.

‘What he was telling me was he wanted a house that was comfortable and it had some connection to the rural setting,’ Peter explains. ‘He wanted amenity in the building, the tangibles that make it enjoyable. So, how does that all translate? Well, I built a lookout, one that was strong enough to withstand the south-westerly [winds] and big changes that come across Bass Strait.

‘It’s a poetic little house to respond to his poetic brief and a good example of giving an architect freedom to build something that’s inspiring.’

Peter is no stranger to inspiring design, or what he describes as the ‘cutting edge’ and the ‘weird and the wonderful’, with a career spanning four decades and, more recently, as the TV



*Peter Maddison is the presenter of Grand Designs Australia and a keynote speaker at the HIA National Conference in May.*

presenter of *Grand Designs Australia*. This enviable role has taken him all over the country to watch ordinary Australians toil on their dream homes, often built with great expectations and unpredictable materials, such as crushed metal, shipping containers or rammed earth.

‘It becomes a bit addictive really,’ he says, revealing he is negotiating an eighth season. ‘I love architecture...it’s such a rush going to these incredible places and meeting people doing amazing things.’

One such destination included Hamilton Island for HIA’s National Conference in May. As a keen observer and purveyor of architecture, in his keynote Peter looked at the changing face of Australian residential housing and what we can plausibly expect to see in the future.

‘Australia is a big place and people are still embracing large housing, but there are other sections of the community who are more enlightened and aware of the impact those big houses make,’ he says. ‘There’s definitely a swing back to architecture which is more organic, tactile and less impactful. And there is also an awareness





### Mad about timber

As ambassador for Planet Ark and Wood Solutions, celebrity architect Peter Maddison says he strongly believes in building sustainably and timber is an important element to achieving this. 'Sustainably-sourced timber is the most responsible material we can build from. It takes no energy to make and it regenerates naturally. That's what we try to build into our projects.'

Peter's firm, Maddison Architects, recently worked on a residential project in bayside Blairgowrie that contains timber in the whole upper portion of the building.

'It's all laminated veneer lumber, all shock drawn and engineered and erected onsite like a jigsaw puzzle,' Peter says of the self-contained extension to an existing 1960s log cabin. 'I can tell you the owners love it, and not just because of the tectonics of the building, but because timber offers a sense of wellbeing by just being around it. Any sustainably-sourced timber that has the FSC standard credential is what you need to look for.'

It's a challenge he has taken on himself and will be continuing for as long as he can: 'I like to contribute to something that's bigger than me and bigger than us, and I've been given a voice so I try to use that voice to really promote a better way of living.' **■**

about size [which is] driven by the affordability issue because many people just can't afford to build big.'

Another effect of housing affordability, he says, is the rise of multi-use buildings, where homeowners both live and work, or relatives contribute to the cost of the property, resulting in multi-generational living. Then there are the social experiments in urban areas, such as Nightingale Housing, which promotes high-quality housing that's ecologically, socially and financially sustainable.

'Think of communal housing in the broader sense where 30 people can get together, buy the land and develop it and cut out the middle men,' Peter explains. '[They aim to] develop a more communal style of living where you have a vegetable garden on the roof, one laundry for the whole apartment block, no cars and only bikes – and all the money saved goes towards the amenities in the building.'

But the experimental architecture seems mostly to be sought-after in fringe settings: 'People are doing really ground-breaking work where they're too scared to do it in the cities. [Some] of my own work and [you can see] on *Grand Designs* that people are building

affordably and breaking barriers in ways that you don't see in the inner urban area.'

So, where does he see Australian housing trends heading?

'Joy is the big driving principle that will take us to the future, the things that we have a connection with and feel good about,' Peter says. 'We'll use technology to our betterment...perhaps [buildings] will be printed and made by machines rather than by hand. We'll be more ecologically sustainable and have developments that are now more micronised and not as impactful on the environment, [such as] smaller or mobile housing.'

From what he is already seeing buildings are becoming fluid due to technology; fewer straight lines and more curved or organic forms. He says over time the cost, availability and the consciousness about meaningful design are going to change housing.

He believes the big challenge for architects, designers and builders today is to build sustainably, with self-identity or a civic presence; to create spaces where people have a sense of connection, not just with family but with their community.