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Homes by Design

Sunpower's design triumph

Beauty, sustainability and fire resistance PAGE 20



It's easy being Green



HOMES BY DESIGN INNOVATION



The height of simplicity

Uncomplicated details lead to an innovative design, writes **Jenny Brown.**

IT TOOK the owners three years to find the 15-hectare forested block near Daylesford that fulfilled two essential criteria: it was in the country but near enough to a good cup of coffee. It took John Franklin and Catherine Franklin-Hensler a further 12 months to get planning permission to build a sustainable weekender in the forest because Hepburn Shire is protective of every tree.

When he first walked onto the site, it took Sunpower building designer Andreas Sederof 10 minutes to envisage a four-bedroom house on one-and-a-half floors that curved gently towards the north-eastern view of the dam and creek that marks the frontier to which the 2009 bushfires intruded.

"Bushfire consciousness is very strong for us," Mrs Franklin-Hensler says. Fortunately, Mr Sederof says, "the ultimate

bushfire-resistant house is symbiotic with good sustainable design".

With some 400 environmentally conscious houses in his portfolio, Mr Sederof says the mental picture of how a house might look usually comes very quickly. "After 30 years it's instinctive. And it was obvious that this house was going to bend because the land contours lend themselves to the bent shape." North-east, he adds, "is also the best aspect for harvesting every bit of sun that you can".

The long, thin, curving 242-square-metre house, that was also determined by John Franklin's request for a place of such low maintenance "that it would basically look after itself", is only five metres wide. This allows winter sun to penetrate across the polished concrete aggregate floor that acts as a thermal heat bank. On the upper level, it is one room wide.



ridor, so the winter sun goes right to the back wall." Everything else about the house exemplifies the highest sustainable design values, including optimum insulation and triple-glazed aluminium windows — expensive, Mr Sederof admits, but useful for climate control and wildfire retardation.

The house also has wood fire-boosted hot water heating that circulates throughout, sophisticated rain and grey water harvesting systems and all of the rest of the enviro elements that have been part of Sunpower's vernacular for three decades.

What is very different for Sunpower in this gracefully curling residence with its refined materiality of concrete, unadorned galvanised iron, glass and steel, is the concrete tilt-panel technology that is more commonly used in industrial construction.

"We kept this very simple," Mr Sederof's wife and fellow designer Judy Sederof says of the main room that houses the kitchen, dining and living spaces. "No depth, no cor-

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A sustainable design, bushfire resistance and minimal maintenance were high priorities for the house.

PICTURES: YVONNE QUMI

In this application, it allowed the house to be raised very quickly and to become so tall. The designer says the factory-built panels that were craned into place have internal insulating skins of 75 millimetres of high-density styrene that has been over-plastered and painted white inside. On the north-eastern front, they form another element of bushfire defence. The wall on the less-vulnerable back facade is the silver galvanised iron.

In the context of the forest of tall, grey-toned trees, the tall grey panels are given interest and texture with the almost musical arrangement of elongated windows. Mr Sederof claims the placement was "totally random. We didn't want to make them too big, nor too boring."

Mrs Franklin-Hensler appreciates how lovely it is to have the range of "tall, irregular windows that have been informed by the

trees". Her husband, who works for two-month-long stints in the Middle East, is so entranced by the weekender that will one day become his permanent home he says: "I can't wait to get here because when I get here I just stop."

The designer is pretty chuffed, too, because in this house, Mr Sederof says he's simplified his style "and the best things are simple. Four hundred houses along, you get smarter and you know when to hold back."

"This building is simple, unfussed and elegant and it performs really, really well."

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It's all about growth

Garden shows are big business elsewhere so it might be time for Melbourne's to blossom a little more, writes **Jim Fogarty**.

THIS is the 16th year that the Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show (MIFGS) has been held in the Royal Exhibition Building and the Carlton Gardens. It finished on April 3 and attracted 114,191 enthusiasts.

The show has had its detractors over the years, owing to the closure of the park and debate over damage to the grass and trees. This has put pressure on the event and the show runs a serious risk of running out of steam. No one would disagree that park damage is a fair concern but better research and understanding could prevent Melbourne losing potentially one of its greatest marketing assets.

The world famous Chelsea Flower Show in London is held in the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, a 1685 building steeped in history. In close to 100 years of the Chelsea Flower Show, there has not been any long-term damage to the grounds. Tree protection is managed. Grass recovers in a matter of weeks. The show caps ticket sales at 157,000 and is one of the major events on the London business and social calendar. Although hard to qualify, it is said that the large main avenue show gardens at Chelsea receive up to £9 million worth of global media coverage.

Other countries have taken notice. The biennial Singapore Garden Festival started in 2006 and its third show attracted more than 300,000 visitors. Garden shows are also big business in Malaysia, China, Taiwan and Japan where events can run for months and attract more than a million visitors.

With support and a bit of tweaking MIFGS could become a major event for Melbourne. We have the talent and passion in our gardening



The annual Melbourne event presents a golden opportunity for tourism.

industry to expand the show. Australian designers have successfully exhibited numerous times at the Chelsea Flower Show, the Singapore Garden Festival and shows in Taiwan and Japan.

Increasing the profile of the show would not only benefit tourism, it would be a win for the local economy and the brand of Mel-

bourne as a green, cultured and artistically creative destination. With the future of the Grand Prix uncertain, Melbourne has an opportunity on its doorstep. As a city we have matured but unless we start looking at the bigger picture, the Chelsea Flower Show will always remain the greatest flower show on Earth.

