

PERSONAL BEST

Architect Robert Mills unleashed all his creative expression in the design of his own beach house in Victoria.

PHOTOGRAPHS EARL CARTER WORDS CARLI PHILIPS



GREAT OCEAN ROAD HOME

THIS PAGE The natural palette in the kitchen/living area includes the polished concrete floor and benchtops and Australian hardwood cabinetry and ceiling, which has been rubbed with chalk. Vicarbe 'Last Minute' bar stools and black Objekto 'Paulistano' chair, all from Hub. Artwork is *Morning Mist (Lion Island)* by Todd Hunter from Scott Livesey Galleries. OPPOSITE PAGE KnollStudio 'Tulip' table and chairs by Eero Saarinen. 'Gubi' pendant light from Cult.



THIS PAGE Living Divani 'Extrason' sofa from Space sits on a 'léon' rug by Ivano Redaelli from Hub. Boffi ceiling fans from Aquaform. OPPOSITE PAGE The house nestles into its hillside site and makes the most of the ocean views.



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WITH ITS LOCATION."

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For an architect, designing his own home is a double-edged sword, providing both pressure and pleasure. On one hand, it's the ultimate self-portrait, an attempt at encapsulating his philosophy. On the other, without the constraints of clients, it can serve as a laboratory for uninhibited creative freedom. Such was the conundrum facing Melbourne architect Robert Mills who recently completed his family's dream seven-bedroom 'Ocean House' in a secluded northern corner of Lorne on Victoria's Great Ocean Road.

Having spent holidays nearby all his life and renting a house down the street for 20 years, Robert's latest project gave him the opportunity to pass on his love of the area to his own family – partner Lucinda, and children Eliza and Phoebe.

"I have wanted to enclose a room with curtains for years but my clients quite rightly looked at me as if I was mad," he says. "This was my chance to go for it and experiment," he adds, referring to the circular main bedroom and ensuite that he divided with natural-dyed linen curtains. With a freestanding Molteni&C 'Clip' bed by Patricia Urquiola in the centre, the effect is akin to being in a tent or Mongolian yurt. "The curtain encloses the room, cocooning it from the world beyond. It's a quiet, unique experience," says Robert. The bed is surrounded by an outer 'ring' that houses the shower, bath and stone basin, and the curtain serves to conceal these elements and filter the morning light.

When Robert bought the land six years ago his intention was to build a timber shack, yet various factors such as planning codes and local topography saw concrete win out for its durability, timelessness and favourable thermal mass. 'Improvising' with both materials, Rob selected timber for the upstairs pavilion and concrete for the base.

The site's unique hillside topography proved both challenging and inspiring for the architect who was adamant that the house be "as close as possible to the raw elements of nature to get the forest experience as well as the ocean view". This was achieved by backing the property into a secluded woodland slope, thereby securing unbroken vistas across Loutit Bay and a south-west view of Lorne's pier.

"For everything I build, it's crucial that the house is in harmony with its location," Rob says. "Houses must have a relationship with their surroundings otherwise there will be a disconnect."



A SERENE MOOD WAS ACHIEVED
BY MINIMISING THE SPECTRUM OF
COLOURS AND MATERIALS USED,
"AVOIDING A STACCATO EFFECT".

THIS PAGE 'Flow' chairs by MDF Italia from Hub.
'Marley' dining table was custom made in
blackbutt by Lowe Furniture. 'Gubi' pendant light
from Cult. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT B&B Italia daybeds from Space on the deck.
White shag rug from Hali. Blue and green vases on
table from Dinosaur Designs, and When Objects
Work 'Pebble' vases by Kate Hume from Hub.
Bunk beds were custom made by D&C Design.



The serene mood in this house was achieved by minimising the spectrum of colours and materials used, “avoiding a staccato effect”. Materials were selected on the basis of durability and sophistication of palette: Australian hardwood with chalk-rubbed grain, polished concrete floors, and cement render with natural grey oxide for the external walls. Stucco was used on the cylinder walls housing the main bedrooms to create a velvet-like texture.

Entry to the home is past a circular porthole to the upper level. For Rob it was an “aesthetic decision to make direct reference to a boat”, but the maritime-inspired design also serves to visually enlarge the sense of space.

These nautical features are especially prominent when the house is viewed from the back. The balustrades on the terrace angle out like the hull of a ship. Continuing the theme, two bedrooms are furnished with double sets of custom-made bunk berths.

Rob wanted it to function as a classic beach house, a gathering place for family and friends and a comfortable retreat. Three different living rooms are acoustically separated from one another, including a self-contained ‘hobby room’ on the ground floor outfitted with De Padova’s multifunctional ‘Tattomi’ chairs that can be converted into a chaise or bed by changing the angles of the frame.

The four bedrooms on the mid-level share a sitting room, furnished with an informal Jardan sofa, Eero Saarinen ‘Tulip’ table and chairs by KnollStudio with an overhanging ‘Gubi’ pendant light. The largest communal area is on the upper level, with an open-plan dining and living area opening onto wrap-around terraces featuring the same scale, materials and colours as the internal living spaces. As well as fostering aesthetic fluidity, this also “captures space that is normally lost”, says Rob.

Artwork on this level is small but powerful, with abstract canvases *Deluge* and *Morning Mist* by Todd Hunter contrasting with the natural, whitewashed timber.

Says Robert, “The palette used in the Ocean House is very calming and in keeping with my belief that a home should be a refuge.”

Ocean House is available to rent. For more go to oceanhouse.com.au or robmills.com.au.



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THIS PAGE Molteni&C ‘Clip’ bed from Hub. Boffi fan from Aquaform. AJ table light from Cult. Single pendant light from Koskela. Curtains custom made by D&C Design. OPPOSITE PAGE De Padova bed from De De Ca. Stansborough blanket from Hub. Rug from Hali.

SPEED READ

Melbourne architect Rob Mills had a golden opportunity to experiment when he designed his own beach house in Lorne. + He wanted the house to be as close to the raw elements of nature as possible, so chose Australian hardwood and polished concrete for the building materials. + The secluded site is on a hillside and offers spectacular views to the coastline. + Nautical references abound in the house with the balustrades on the terrace resembling the hull of a ship, and bunk berths arranged in two of the bedrooms. + Rob has always wanted to enclose a room with curtains and had his chance here, designing a circular master bedroom which is separated from the ensuite by natural-dyed linen curtains. + Furnishings include iconic pieces such as Saarinen ‘Tulip’ tables and chairs set against the neutral palette.