

Architecture **New homes**

Views go straight through the three-tier house to the visual beauty of the ocean beyond.
PICTURE: SHANNON McGRATH

BEACH de RESISTANCE



Above: floor-to-ceiling double-glazed glass enhances the sense of spaciousness while offering unbroken views across the expanse of Loutit Bay.
PICTURE: RICHARD POWERS

For architect Rob Mills the land siting is as important as the house. He opens his seaside retreat to **Sue Peacock**.

IS A BEACH house that is only occupied in the warmest months of the year sustainable?

Not according to Rob Mills. So the Prahran-based architect and interior designer set out to design and build a beach house that could be used year-round; one that could comfortably accommodate groups of up to 20 people.

Ocean House, the three-level, seven-bedroom house on the outskirts of Lorne, is a showpiece for cool-climate coastal properties. It can be heated affordably through winter, has great acoustics as well as great views and occupies 320 square metres.

"Beach houses are insane objects," he says. "Because in coastal areas there is generally no affordable way of heating them, they are ice-chests and they don't get used in the cooler months."

Deriving a rental income from the property was one way of overcoming the problem.

"This was the financial model that allowed me to use higher

quality and more durable materials like concrete to create the thermal mass required to both heat and cool the property," he says. "Being able to afford to build using concrete, rather than timber, was essential."

He installed a geothermal plant, which combined with a heavily insulated roof and double-glazing throughout enables the house to generate much of its own heat, reducing energy consumption significantly. A wood fire in the main living area adds to the comfort factor. In summer, cross ventilation and wide eaves negate the need for air conditioning.

Mills purchased the extremely steep site – it has a 30-degree incline – about eight years ago, after an unsuccessful search for a beach house.

"None of the properties had what I wanted which was to hear the waves crashing, to see the ocean and also to look into the forest. I wanted to distance myself from suburbia, not be looking into the holiday home next door."

He purchased the land cheaply, allowing more to be spent on creating a "wilderness experience".

He admits the topography was a challenge for builder Rob Maggs, concrete specialist Paul Andrews and carpenter Ben Beamish.

"At various times the guys were suspended from scaffolding – a real challenge. I'd say that without their commitment, skill and courage this house wouldn't have been possible."

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Inspired by architect Glenn Murcutt's approach to Australia's rural environment as well as his own fascination with medieval buildings, Mills sought to achieve a contrast between the different areas of the home.

"I wanted a contrast with the open-glazed pavilion and the enclosed bedroom wing," he says.

The bedrooms are accessed via a narrow, spiral concrete stairway, reminiscent of those found in church spires.

The spectacular main bedroom is in the inner ring of a cylindrical tower on the southern end of the house. It is separated from a bath, basin and storage

Above, from left: the beach house maximises views across one of the most stunning stretches of coastline; architect Rob Mills; Ocean House is sculpted from concrete and timber in a subdued natural palette.

PICTURES (IN ORDER): RICHARD POWERS, JASON BUSCH, RITTA SOURANDER

'What I wanted was to hear the waves crashing, to see the ocean.'

ROB MILLS

by a floor-to-ceiling curtain that encircles the whole room, creating a cocoon-like atmosphere.

Close attention has been paid to designing acoustically and visually separate spaces. The smart technology was installed by Urban Intelligence (see breakout, page 8).

"The three different living areas are designed so the kids can break out and the parents can get a bit of relief," he says. "With beach houses, there is often not the funds or room to build spaces big enough to do that – which is the very time you need that separation."

His firm's philosophy is to view the landscape, architecture and interiors as one.

Building materials were selected for their ability to withstanding the harsh

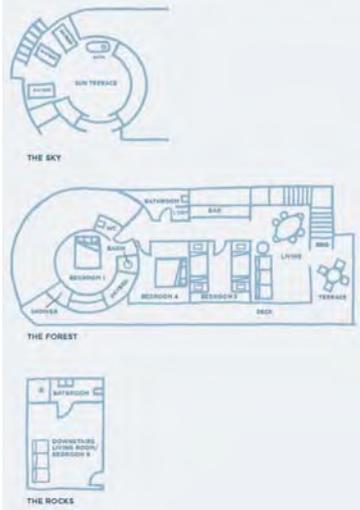
coastal climate and enhance the sense of space on a site constrained by its steep slope. The combination of concrete, masonry, polished timber, stainless steel and glass works well and ensures the house sits well in its bush setting.

Enhancing the sense of space are the angled balustrades on the verandahs and the cantilevered roof on the northern side of the house, where the tall glass windows capture the northern sun through the forest.

"I knew I wanted to look up into the trees so there is a cathedral-like view of the forest which I think is as good, if not better than the ocean view," says Mills. The chalk-rubbed finish on the timber frames reflects the hues of the adjacent

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Top: bunk beds for family accommodation. There are seven bedrooms to cater for large groups.

PICTURE: EARL CARTER

Above: Rob Mills' hand sketched floorplan shows the commanding vista of the pavilion. The main bedroom is at the centre of the cylindrical tower.



From top, clockwise: design details, such as angled balustrades and circular windows, hint at its nautical setting; as elsewhere, this bedroom is an ultra-contemporary take on the classic beach house; the outdoors offers a serene and casual yet luxurious retreat.

PICTURES (IN ORDER): RITTA SOURANDER, EARL CARTER, RICHARD POWERS

A HIGH-TECH VIBE

Urban Intelligence worked closely with Rob Mills to design an automated system that would maximise guest comfort and fit seamlessly with the design of the architect.

Here are some of the home's high-tech features:

- A keyless entry system allows guests to arrive without the worry of having to pick up keys from an agent. It is also secure and records all visitors of the home.
- State-of-the-art AV systems were installed along with LCD television sets to reduce energy consumption without compromising picture quality.
- The SONOS music system provides music throughout the home. The zoned system enables guests in different areas to listen to the music of their choice
- Hydronic floor heating can be controlled by an iPhone and automatically shuts down when no one is at home.
- Ocean House has energy-efficient technology such as motion sensors and LED lighting which uses 40 per cent less energy than regular lighting.
- Hydronic heating, powered by geothermal technology, can be activated remotely to ensure a warm house on arrival.
- Guests are also kept entertained with state-of-the-art equipment including movies and music on demand.

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eucalypts. The predominant colour used throughout is grey.

"Grey is one of the great colours to live with, it is so serene and soothing," says Mills.

"This house is made of grey-coloured materials [such as] concrete; the walls are Italian stucco with a grey oxide in the plaster, which give it a grey hue; the wood is toned down by putting a whitewash through it."

The effect of such a minimal palette is meditative, with the natural environment framed to bring most of the colour and light into the house.

Abstract art from Todd Hunter and furniture from some of Mills' favourite designers including Piero Lissoni, Andrew Lowe, Patricia Urquiloa, De Pdova and Eero Saarinen, complete the picture.

He didn't stop with the house. With the help of a landscape designer, he planted 200 native trees on adjacent land to the rear that had been choked with weeds.

"The most satisfying aspect of the house for me is the balance it achieves in every sense," he says. "There is the balance between beauty and functionality, but also this unique balance between the countryside and the ocean that I have never experienced before. We absolutely love it – and I think that is something that will continue for generations."

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