

TAMING of the

VIEW

HOW DO YOU CAPTURE A VIEW WITHOUT BECOMING EXPOSED TO THE EXTREME WEATHER THAT COMES WITH IT? EMERGING ARCHITECT ROB KENNON FORGES A SIMPLE AND ELEGANT RESOLUTION TO THIS DILEMMA





There are cows grazing behind the Sugar Gum House and the Southern Ocean crashing before it. Waves are thundering in from Bass Strait while Apollo Bay's infamous 'Howlin' Winds' are living up to their notoriety. Here, on a working farm at the apex of the Otway ranges and the Great Ocean Road, a pair of interwoven pavilions hits the architectural touchstones of all that is simple and good.

Architect Rob Kennon has surely arrived. Previously working under award-winning Australian architects Jackson Clements Burrows, Kennon has given form to his own vision in the shape of a steel, glass and sugar gum shiplap design measuring in at just 210sqm.

The house is at once spectacular and humble, innovative and down-home. It is built on the same site as the original weatherboard shack and is just as simple, but much more cultivated. "We didn't want to make a big statement. It's not form-driven or sculptural," Kennon says. The modular and repetitious steel structure doesn't just sit quietly in the coastal landscape; it seemingly floats above it. He continues: "The repetition makes the house feel calmer. There's pattern in nature. It's not freeform."

This is a house that gets to the heart of sustainability. With the south-aspect water view accompanied by icy Antarctic winds, Kennon had to play off passive solar design against the very magic of the site. He explains: "The property is windy, there's incessant rain in winter and it gets very hot in summer. The objective was to provide shelter but also to establish a relationship with the outdoors."



ABOVE LEFT: Understated hoop pine cabinetry in the kitchen is paired with a concrete benchtop to create an elegant, functional kitchen space. **RIGHT:** Precedence is given to the stunning views from the living area. "The windows are the interior," says Rob Kennon.

Kennon broke the plan into two structures – one for sleeping, the other a communal living space – to allow northern sunlight to penetrate into the furthest depths. Each pavilion features a sloped roof that opens up, like jaws, to the north, where the 1400mm eaves provide shade in summer and let in the winter sun. The sloped roof crops the ocean to the south to minimise exposure, while still capturing the view. Meanwhile, double-glazing counteracts the chill coming in from the ocean. Kennon also offset the deck beside the living space, instead of in front of it, so it would not hinder the view down to the sandy beach.

Indeed, it is earth-given magnificence that lures the clients into their cars to brave the two-and-a-half hour drive most weekends. Where the ocean is ‘in-your-face’ beautiful, the bedrooms take on the calmness of the countryside. Kennon explains: “The hills are equally as important as the ocean. There’s more detail in the hills; you can see the cows, the sheep and watch as the sun goes over the hills.”

With views to thrill, the interiors are simple and honest. The sugar gum tongue-and-groove flooring is true to the language of the exterior and the kitchen is comprised of in situ concrete and simple, solid hoop pine ply cabinetry. Eames moulded plywood dining chairs, Alvar Aalto Stool and Jordan sofas fill the space with everything the clients need and little more. As Kennon says: “The windows are the interiors. We didn’t want to compete with that.”

Beyond the views, this is a house that truly engages its environment. The cladding, decking and flooring are all sourced from a family-run timber mill in Talbot and

BELOW: Different elevations show how the lines of the house complement the surrounding scenery. **RIGHT:** The house is nestled among the rolling hills of Apollo Bay, with dramatic views of the sea below.



Architect statement

The Sugar Gum House sits on the edge of Bass Strait’s rugged coastline, at the base of the rolling hills which connect the Otway Ranges to the beaches. The property operates as a sheep and cattle farm and extends back to the fringe of the Otway forests.

The brief for the project was to replace the small weatherboard shack that had served the current owners so happily for 34 years, and had been home to a family with six children before that. The design of the new house was to enhance the daily experience of this unique site, perched metres from thundering waves, overlooking white sandy beaches to the south, and lush green hillsides scattered with cattle and sheep to the north. In addition, the design had to protect the house from the wind and relentless winter rain, but at the same time keep the house cool, all summer long. The house also did not want to overpower the landscape, nor disrupt the steep natural beauty and contours of the land.

The house has an outward focus that gives the owners a strong connection to the constantly changing seascape and landscape. Days can be whittled away cooking and entertaining at the house, all the while being able to remain enchanted by the massive power of the waves, so close by. The new house is still the great refuge after a hard day’s farming, but in a very different, and more spectacular way.

ROB KENNON





PROJECT DETAILS
ARCHITECT: Rob Kennon Architects
BUILDER: Brendan Murnane
CONSULTING ENGINEERS: Yttrup
DESIGN AND DOCUMENTATION: 12 months
CONSTRUCTION: 12 months
FLOOR AREA: 210m²
BATHROOM: Rogerseller fittings
FLOORING: Sugar gum from Talbot Timbers
KITCHEN: Concrete bench by Rusto Concreting, limed hoop pine plywood joinery, 13mm villaboard walls, chrome finish Café square mixer from Rogerseller
LIGHTING: Low energy T5 fluorescents uplights
ROOF: Woodland Grey Colourbond Custom Orb
WALLS: Sugar gum shiplap external cladding, timber framed plasterboard internal walls



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Deep eaves provide valuable shade in summer, while not being so obtrusive as to block the winter light; The house consists of two buildings, one for bedrooms and one for living areas; The sugar gum floors come from a timber mill in Victoria's Western District; The kitchen and dining area.

the sugar gum comes from a sustainably managed plantation in nearby Majorca, which uses a solar-powered kiln in the drying process to reduce the embodied energy associated with timber supply.

Kennon engaged a local builder, Brendan Murnane, and his carpenter, David Howell, to build the house. These jacks-of-all-trades crafted the joinery, laid the tiling and built the floor by hand in a shed and on site, where most city builders would have used heavy machinery.

Despite the sophisticated forms and idyllic setting, the result is a home that keeps with the spirit of the land. As Kennon explains: "The house is on a working farm. It's about spending large amounts of time in a beautiful place and connection with the rural lifestyle."

The owners spend their time at the property



working on the land and cooking. "There's a lot of walking around in mud, mending fences; it's not a chardonnay lifestyle." Then, at night, as the roar of the wood fire plays harmony to the crashing waves, the home takes on an atmosphere of utter relaxation. It may not be luxury but it is certainly awe-inspiring. M

