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australian style

a blog about Australian light homes and the people who create them.



Sue White

Sue White's writing is regularly published in some of Australia's leading newspapers and magazines, including the Sydney Morning Herald, ABC's online environment portal www.abc.net.au/environment, Green Living, and green lifestyle publication, G Magazine. She is one of the contributors to Australian Style. www.suewhite.com.au

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Combining practical with luxury is easier than you'd imagine.

When given a brief requesting 'practical luxury', architect Anna Harrison barely batted an eye. "Why build an ugly house when you can build a beautiful one for the same budget? It [still] starts with the fundamentals of good design, [then it's about] using materials in unusual ways," she says.

Tasked with designing a three bedroom (plus office) home for a young family, complete with large entertaining areas and a pool Harrison's final design incorporates a rectangular shape cut out of the northern side of the home. "It's a fly-screened deck that's proved very usable and practical. It's where they entertain and the kids play – they have their art easels set up there," she says.

Light solutions

Harrison also took advantage of a steep block by putting the laundry, office and a guest suite underneath the main house and used lightweight construction to cope with the

15m rise from front to back. "On a 700+ square metre block [that fall] is quite significant," she says.

The lightweight materials also helped Harrison achieve the luxury look she wanted by creating design features on front of house and a side wall. "I used a product called Makrolon, [which] from the outside looks like glass, but it's a hardy plastic product. We framed it with hardwood timbers to create walls that let light through; at night they glow. [It]... cost a fraction of glass," she says.

Smart green

Harrison also worked hard to make sure the house met the client's sustainability objectives. She oriented living to the north and running the house east to west, ensuring "the air conditioning rarely needs to be switched on"; and had heavy insulation installed.

"It feels like the air con is on in summer, and provides a bit of soundproofing, even in lightweight walls", she says. Harrison also designed overhangs so windows can stay open on rainy days. "People often overlook this on a small block, as they push the walls out towards the boundary. It affects the usability in the home," she says.

Material luxury

To meet the 'luxurious' aspect of the brief, Harrison focused her energy on materials.

"That's your largest spend. We went with high-end appliances in the kitchen, as they get used a lot, but the walls on the back of the kitchen were a nicely-coloured laminate in some places, and marble in others. It's aesthetically pleasing but kept costs down," she says.

Closets adjoining the main ensuite were constructed out of laminate, and built without doors so there was budget to use on a fancy light in

lounge room instead.

Decisions like this may be the key to a successful 'practical luxury' build. When the two worlds collide, it can be worth splurging. "We chose high-end taps as they are moving components. If they leak it's a pain," she says.



FACTS

Designer:

[Anna Harrison](#)

Photographer:

Czesia Markiewicz (czesiam@hotmail.com)

Words

Sue White

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