

**BUILDING INNOVATION**

# No place like home

Not every Aussie would choose a conventional brick house with classic white picket fence

WORDS RACHEL SMITH

**A**s the cost of living continues to rise and the housing trend swings away from energy-hungry McMansions, more people are after a home that doesn't cost a fortune to build or maintain and is kinder to the environment.

Whether it's mobile like a boat or a bus, built from recycled components such as a retired train carriage or based on a quirky design, there's no doubt it's home sweet home to these unconventional owners.

## GOING BACK TO THE FUTURE

With smooth curves, fluid lines and spacious interiors, dome homes look like they belong more in outer space than on planet Earth.

Designed to withstand cyclones, fires, earthquakes, hail, extreme temperatures and even termites these futuristic structures also offer exceptional energy-saving

properties with the construction, maintenance and running costs.

Relocatable shells come in diameters ranging from three to 12 metres and can be used alone as an office, studio, kids' play area, guest room or poolside cabana.

To build a home the singular structures are linked together, with costs starting at \$13,800 for a three metre DomePod.

David Harrison is building a Domeshell home on Queensland's Sunshine Coast and says, 'It has a 7.5 star energy rating instead of the standard 5.5, so we're not having to heat or cool it.

'It was more expensive to build than the average house but we'll save on costs down the track.'

To become an owner-builder, check out the seven-day training courses on the Domeshells website ([www.domeshells.com.au](http://www.domeshells.com.au)). >



**SKY HIGH**

## The treehouse



For kids a treehouse is the ultimate escape from the world. But what about adults who dream of residing in the branches?

French treehouse architect Alain Laurens founded his Paris-based studio to indulge his own childhood dream of building little houses in the sky.

Since 1999 Alain has built 220 all over Europe. See them at [www.la-cabane-perchee.com](http://www.la-cabane-perchee.com).



The energy-efficient dome dwelling can be built DIY and is tough enough to withstand fires, quakes, cyclones and termites.



'It's eccentric and lovely,' says Laurie of his rail-bound home.

There are four carriages that Laurie has dreams of setting up as a guest house.

**GOING OFF THE RAILS**

'I put a compass on a map, swung it and it landed on Mt Gambier in South Australia,' says former advertising man Laurie Dacy, who received an inheritance following his father's death and decided to live debt free.

Laurie found his train carriage home online. The property was the former terminus of the Mt Gambier Glencoe train line that stopped operating in 1957.

Previous owners had converted the carriages into a residence so it was set up when he bought it.

'I have four carriages and a cottage. The cottage is my entertainment area and I sleep in a carriage kitted out with a bed, kitchenette, shower and toilet.'

Given how many trainspotters visit, Laurie has dreams of converting the site into tourist accommodation.



On the inside the carriage features all the conveniences of a modern home.



Called *Bumfuzzle* the family home features traditional hand-carved doors and warm teak interiors.



PAT AND OUEST

**SAILING INTO THE SIMPLE LIFE**

High school sweethearts Ali and Pat, both 37, have clocked up eight years at sea or on the road in a VW Kombi.

The couple, with 18-month-old daughter Ouest, live off savings and document their experiences in a blog called [www.bumfuzzle.com](http://www.bumfuzzle.com), named after their 1982, 43 foot Spindrift boat.

'Away from the dock we make our own electricity and drinking water,' says Pat. 'When we're out cruising our eco footprint is only a speck.'

They've sailed around the world and had unforgettable experiences. 'Three weeks away from sight of land with nothing but you and the elements is something everyone should experience once in their lives.'

Although Pat says they won't live on a boat forever they aren't keen to return to the suburbs anytime soon. ➤



Ali says they visit family but are always anxious to get back to life on the water.



The bus had been sitting on a hill for eight years and was in need of care.



Janene says that while the bus can be cosy it's still a work in progress.

### NEXT STOP, HOME

Horse trainer Janene Clemence set up home in a converted bus three years ago when a friend convinced her to move to Mullumbimby, Queensland.

'Someone told me about a guy who had a bus so I went to have a look.'

Built in Birmingham, UK, in 1965, the retired double-decker was in terrible condition. 'But I saw it and thought, welcome home,' she says.

Now based at an equestrian centre, Janene's wheels are plugged into the mains and water is run from the stables. The lower level has the dining space, kitchen and bathroom. Upstairs is an office, living room and bedroom.

When people hear about her home Janene says she gets mixed reactions. 'The guys want to look under the bonnet while half the women don't know if they could live in it.'

### Legalising the dream

Before you invest in something a little different check that it's legal and doesn't come with hidden costs. **DO THE RESEARCH** to make sure it complies with local regulations.

'Councils can make your life difficult. Whether you're spending a little on converting a bus or a lot to build a substantial dwelling it's not pleasant to have your dream taken off you,' says Trudy Robinson who lives in a converted shed-house. **BE PREPARED** because living in an unconventional home can present unexpected challenges.

'You never really get a full night of sleep on a boat because your mind is half awake listening to changes in the weather,' says boat owner Pat.

**CHECK THE RULES** for mobile dwellings.

You may need to install smoke alarms, locate your home a certain distance from the road, or have a certificate from a structural engineer or a compliance plate.

'There may also be limitations on how long you can live there,' says bus dweller Janene.



The Robinson family home is two-thirds shed and one-third residence.

### LIVING IN A GIANT ESKY

Trudy Robinson and her family were urbanites but their desire for a tree-change drew them to a koala corridor half an hour from the Brisbane CBD where they built a shed-house.

Says Trudy, 'We spent a lot on the land so went for a cost-effective home. We clad the residential section in Bondor, the stuff that coolrooms are made of, and live in the world's biggest Esky.'

Roller doors bring the outdoors in while security doors keep bugs out.

Inside has three-quarter height walls and polished yellowtongue particleboard floors upstairs with vinyl flooring and carpet downstairs.

'We don't go without comforts though,' says Trudy. 'My walk-in robe is the size of a regular spare room.' >

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**NO SPACE TO SWING A CAT**

At just 2200mm wide with less than 29 square metres of living space the Check House in Framlingham, Suffolk, is one of Britain's tiniest residences and is almost a tenth the size of the average new Australian home.

Originally part of a steam mill the building was used as a bookmaker's office before being converted into a one-bedroom home and rented out.

Recently on the market with a price tag of almost \$154,000, the agent, Julie Williams of Clarke and Simpson used its history in the selling campaign.

'It's the last remaining Victorian part of the old steam mill,' she says. 'It also has an upside down design with a kitchen and reception room on the first floor, bedroom and shower room on the ground floor.'

**Handyman.net.au** 

Go to Build it and click on Storage Solutions to maximise small spaces.



The layout of the house is reversed, with the kitchen and living area upstairs.



Check House is almost a tenth of the size of a new Australian home.

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