

SUNSHINE COAST ARCHITECTURE



Lake Weyba design (left); the Hinterland House (below right); and Lake Weyba. Photos Courtesy Bark Architects and Reiner Blunk

A climate designed to bring out the best

Perfect conditions have allowed Queensland's architects to make the most of the natural environment while improving quality of life, writes **Sue Williams**.

One of Australia's most pleasant climates has been a huge boon to architects doing work on the Sunshine Coast, particularly in the hinterland.

It provides them with the perfect conditions to build homes that maximise outdoor living, says Phillip Daffara, chairman of the Sunshine Coast chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in Queensland.

"The climate is a real asset to good design.

"It means we can improve the quality of life in buildings by allowing them to connect meaningfully to their environment, and create more energy efficient, sustainable homes by looking properly at their orientation and the materials used."

The Hinterland House, between Noosa and Eumundi

When an Australian couple living in London bought a site on a ridge overlooking the Sunshine Coast hinterland next door to Bark Architects' studio, they wandered over to introduce themselves.

As a result, principals Stephen Guthrie and Lindy Atkin ended up designing them a house, and were able to watch it take shape daily.

"That was a real benefit and, as well as maximising views, we were able to maximise the privacy of both buildings," says Guthrie.

The Hinterland House, as it was named, comprises two elevated interconnected steel-framed buildings: one the house itself, the other an art studio across a deck and stairs, to be occupied by the new owners artist Stefan Dunlop



'The double-height living room makes it feel like a warehouse, and as if you are right in the trees – almost like a crow's nest.'

Top to bottom: Hide and Seek; Hinterland House; Hide and Seek. Photos Courtesy Gomango Architects, Bark Architects



and his wife Adrienne Webb. The living areas face over wooded slopes towards the Pacific Ocean in the distance, with high ceilings and a glass wall to maximise southern light.

"The double-height living room makes it feel like a warehouse, and as if you are right in the trees, almost like a crow's nest or observation deck," says Guthrie. "Yet there's an interconnectedness about every space. The steel frame allowed us to keep the view open, with the only Masonite element being the plunge pool."

"The two-metre deep pool is a spectacular feature in itself, which can be jumped into from the bedroom deck, or reached from the living room by a steel ladder."

"One of the most challenging things was that the guys were in London during the design process, so our communication was all by email and internet and phone, rather than face-to-face meetings," says Guthrie.

"But it ended up working out well. They gave us a pretty comprehensive brief, what they liked and how they imagined their lifestyle would be, and our interests matched well."

Hide and Seek Cottages, Lyola Pavilions, Maleny

Hidden away in the rainforest just outside Maleny are two cottages perched high in the trees. "Hide" is nestled into the forest and feels more introspective and reflective, while "Seek" is 11 metres off the ground over a cliff.

Both are the work of Gomango Architects' Liza Neil, as part of a

Sunshine Coast hinterland bed and breakfast operation.

"Both cabins have the same basic plan, but the way they relate to their surroundings is different," says Neil. "It was heaps of fun to do them . . . and people still are daunted and amazed – as are we."

The three buildings began as one rundown rambling 1910 Queenslander on a steep mountainside overlooking the Obi Obi Valley. The new owners asked Neil to design two cabins, on a limited budget, that could function as exclusive boutique accommodation for paying visitors to fund the revegetation of the land.

One likely spot was a small clearing, so Neil designed a cabin around it. The other, she decided to hang off a cliffside and, even more challenging, to make that accessible to people with disabilities.

"The irony is that often people who've hurt themselves in accidents that have involved falling, stay there," she says. "But it's a wonderful way to experience the landscape, and bush."

Because of the bushfire hazard rating of the area, decks weren't permissible, so she built moveable walls and sliding doors that could be peeled back to make the rooms feel like decks.

A system of shutters was also installed to provide fire protection.

"Getting the materials there wasn't so hard, but building them was really scary, particularly the one so high up in the air," says Neil. "We had a great builder with abseiling equipment and a fantastic Bobcat driver who managed to get the poles in place. But it was very confronting for me – I'm afraid of heights."

House at Lake Weyba, inland from Noosa

When Royal Australian Institute of Architects' prestigious gold medal winner Gabriel Poole says it's his "best house ever", you know it's special.

The three pavilions connected by walkways that he and artist wife Elizabeth crafted on the shores of Lake Weyba are a stunning addition to the Australian architecture, but Poole insists it was a happy accident.

"It was a fluke," he says. "But it was very challenging. It took us 12 months to build it because the guys used to get so frustrated with it, they'd walk off for a month or two, and come back later."

"It was frustrating for us too. There'd never been anything done like this before – and we were living in a little shack while it was being built."

The house's first pavilion is designed for outdoor living, under canvas on a veranda, containing a kitchen and dining room, lounge and home office.

The second is the bath house, with a plunge pool, shower, bathroom, laundry and wardrobes for storage.

The third is the bedroom, a smaller and quieter area that is set apart.

A lightweight construction that sits in a setting of natural grasses and gums, the building has suspended plywood floors, a steel framework, stud-framed walls and stretched PVC roofing.

Materials inside include flat iron on the walls of the bath house and adjustable roller doors to cope with different seasons and storms.

