



Shack love

A new wave design turns the tide for the traditional beachside abode

There are beach houses with the obligatory seaside-themed interior decoration, and then there's a beach house that doesn't try, a place built purely for the love of living near the ocean. This house at Casuarina, in northern New South Wales, is unmistakably the latter.

Admittedly, the surfboard-shaped garden beds give away a lot about what drove the design brief, but it's one thing to drop in surfing analogies and another to create a home that is comfortable and practical for someone who actually surfs.

Shawn Godwin, architect behind the design of the three-bedroom, three-bathroom home, says "it's a contemporary form of the quintessential beach shack".

We're not talking about a fibro garage to sleep in after a day on the waves though; this is a place to enjoy everything about the coast – that particular feel of the sunlight and sea breezes, the weathered beauty of the she-oak and dune vegetation and the sound of the surf and cicadas.

Shawn says that "to be able to open the whole house to the elements" was an important part of the design, but the owner gave Shawn another major stipulation in the brief: a secure, and easily accessible area in which to keep his collection of surfboards. Shawn responded to the request by including an atrium at the entry with space to vertically stand five surfboards.

The serviceable nature of this area extends further with the use of heavy timber doors that slide away to reveal access to the garage on one side and the laundry on the other. For such a slender hallway, Shawn has successfully combined form and function to exploit space.

"The sliding doors can be fully opened and docked into recesses, which gives the owner a full range of movement to all aspects of the house, including the garage," Shawn says.



WAVE MAKER ... a standout design dictated by the owner's love of surfing and his collection of boards. Photographs // Christopher Frederick Jones

"Once all doors are opened, there can be someone coming home with groceries passing someone in a sand-filled wetsuit hosing it out in the entry."

Sliding doors and atrium heights are elements continued throughout the two-storey home. This affords plenty of storage space and lofty ceilings.

There is a void in the dining area on the ground floor, cutting out half the floor upstairs, which means that the dining area below can be seen from the main bedroom.

Between this room and the two bedrooms at the western end runs a hallway, with a built-in desk to one side, looking down through the void over the surfboards at the entry.

The voids create the sense that there is much more height to the 400sq m house than two storeys. Building a third level was permissible, but Shawn felt he had good reason to refrain from the temptation.

"Many of the surrounding dwellings take advantage of an allowable third level in the form of an observation deck, which can be a maximum of 35sq m, but I felt this was unnecessary and a waste of money, let alone creating an ill-proportioned house in relation to height and width."

Shawn also went against the norm with the use of an exterior overhang on the second level to protect the level below.

"The overhanging went completely against the design guidelines (of the architectural review committee) as it opposes the preference for what I call the "wedding cake form" where the higher you go, the more the structure steps in," he explains.

"This, in theory, isn't a bad approach as far as protecting the private, open spaces of adjoining lots, however, in Queensland and northern New South Wales it does nothing for how the sun reaches internal spaces and creates many unwanted and expensive roof forms."

In another bold move, Shawn used black for the exterior – a radical departure from the pale colours of neighbouring homes. As with his belief that a sensibly programmed house can change the "supposed" desired form to one that functions a great deal better, Shawn sees the black and stained plywood as more suited to the landscape.

"In the harsh environment, which needed careful attention to the materiality, a raw form was produced that will age gracefully like a piece of driftwood."

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