

Out of the *box*

A beachfront home calls for expansive glass and verandah living. Or does it? **WOLVERIDGE ARCHITECTS** challenges the norms with a house that's very much focussed on the interior.

TEXT ANNIE REID | PHOTOGRAPHY DEREK SWALWELL





A wicker screen anchors the home's natural theme, complemented by Spotted Gum timber stairs.

Life in Torquay is a relaxed affair. The home of Victoria's legendary Bells Beach attracts generations of sun-seekers, who love the open water and pay daily homage to its rolling surf. Here, the prized real estate is on The Esplanade, a long, windy promenade offering large, balconied houses separated from the beach itself by a wide strip of grassland and paths.

So when architect Jerry Wolveridge, director of Wolveridge Architects, was presented with an atypical block by his clients, Scott and Becca Henderson, he decided to challenge traditions of coastal design and the built form.

Located off The Esplanade in a small line of houses, the block faces coastal sand dunes to the south, and The Sands Resort and golf course to the north. The clients wanted views of both, but not the east and west vistas of their neighbour's properties. While the block lacks beach views, it makes up for this in proximity, unlike most Torquay properties, whose owners have to drive to the water. "The greatest attraction for us was that we could throw a couple of towels in a bag, walk outside and it takes two minutes to get to that beautiful beach," Becca says.

The design framework was the client's brief. They wanted enough accommodation for family

and friends to stay over, a touch of luxury, low maintenance, a pool, sundeck and privacy.

The house is set back from its allotment and expressed as a series of five robust containers that neatly stack on top of each other. Most noticeably, it is completely encased by Western Cedar wood battens. From the street, the curious, box-like form presents as something of a mystery. The front door appears to be hidden, there are seemingly few windows and little opportunity to take in the views. "There's no real clear notion about how it works or conforms to typical residential design," Wolveridge says.

The boxes are also exactly the same in dimension: "How are we going to articulate them to create a sense of delicacy, control and fine detail?" he asks. The timber battens go some way aesthetically in responding to this, but it is the connections and spaces between the containers that are most critical.

Large concrete panels affixed to each end of the containers add protection, with the most visible panel at the front cantilevered over the container below it. The most complex aspect of the entire project is this cantilevered element, which also entails the most weight and engineering. The result is a complex structural frame that appears seemingly simple. "But



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BECCA | RESIDENT

“I can tell you it wasn’t,” Wolveridge says with a laugh. The front door is set in between two containers on either side, and these exude a strong scent of Cedar. “The Cedar battens will silver and grey off as time goes on. They have a lightness to offset the concrete and also act as a filter for the occupants,” Wolveridge says.

Once inside, the key design brief was for two main living areas: a large, summer room at the back, and a small, winter room at the front. The front living area is moody and low key, with an open fireplace and concrete panel expressed internally. The battens can be opened up for extra light, and the subdued space is best reserved as a retreat for the colder months.

In a strong departure from typical open-plan design, the kitchen is its own space rather than part of a living zone. Tucked neatly behind a wicker-encased stair, its long, marble island bench is flanked by sleek cabinetry and concrete benches, finished with mellow tones and a little shimmer that bounces around the natural light. At one end it faces battens that can be opened to filter the light, and at the other is a small, outdoor barbecue area with views into the back room. “I think it’s sensational how the kitchen has evolved into this separate space,” Wolveridge says.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT | THE HENDERSONS' ENSUITE IS THE MOST OPULENT ROOM IN THE HOUSE; CONCRETE FLOORS AND CRISP WALLS SET OFF THE COUPLE'S VARIOUS ECLECTIC PIECES; THE GUEST BATHROOMS FOCUS ON NATURAL LIGHT AND FLOOR-TO-CEILING FEATURE TILING; A WICKER BALUSTRADE ADDS TEXTURE AND THE STAIRCASE IS PRACTICAL, WITH UNDERNEATH STORAGE. ABOVE | UPSTAIRS, THREE BEDROOMS PEEL OFF THE HALLWAY, WHICH FEATURES A COMMISSIONED PAINTING BY ROWENA MARTINICH.



Becca agrees. “When we had people here all through summer it flowed and just worked beautifully,” she says.

At the rear, the summer room is the largest space in the house. For lounging and dining, this vast, 13-metre-long room is fresh, open and bright; it features the polished concrete floors used throughout the ground level, and has lush views over the golf course. At one end, a large, white sliding screen conceals shelving and a wall-hung television. Beneath this, chunky logs of wood frame a Jetmaster fireplace for added warmth. At the other end, a large painting of a bull, by the owners’ friend Dave Bowers, overlooks the eight-seater dining room table.

Connecting the entire space are full-width, full-height stacker doors, which slide all the way back to reveal a covered terrace. This partially shields the lap pool, and there’s space outside for relaxing on the sun deck and lawns. Errant golf balls landing in the swimming pool are not uncommon, but Wolveridge lowered the rear boundary and built up a protective lawn mound to heighten privacy.

Smack bang in the centre of the house, the staircase is the true core of the building. Its wicker screen anchors the home’s natural theme, complemented by Spotted Gum

timber stairs. There’s another piece of local art decorating the hallway upstairs; a bright, neon painting by Rowena Martinich, which the Hendersons commissioned especially for the space. “Rather than just buying a piece because you like it, getting to know the person behind it is great fun too,” Becca says.

The floor plan here is also non-traditional. Both bedrooms contain their own ensuite bathrooms. “We built it for us and for our friends and family. If we have lots of guests down for weekends, they have their own bathrooms, which is perfect,” Becca says.

The main bedroom has walk-in robes and an ensuite bathroom that sits within its own container. With a full-width, concrete dual vanity, limestone tiling and built-in bath, the ensuite is the most opulent room in the house, while the bedroom’s strong, structural timber ledge precedes floor-to-ceiling windows facing the sand dunes. Downstairs, a study enables both clients to work, while other touches include fitting the garage with a laundry, masses of seamless storage, and a handy powder room.

Standing once again in the foyer, it’s the small details that add delicacy to the house’s robust design and allow the building to come alive. There are no windows facing east or



west, but rather skylights and strategically placed windows that celebrate the light and space rather than enclose it. This enables the occupants to feel safe and allows for good times at any time of the year. “While it appears somewhat austere, this building really does feel like a home,” Wolveridge says. “And that’s a really important consideration.”

It’s not difficult to understand why a community that enshrines living outdoors may take umbrage to the design of this house, but that’s because most people haven’t stepped inside. And whether the subsequent use of timber battens on nearby houses is flattery or coincidence, there’s no doubt the house has been the subject of much discussion since its completion in 2012.

For the Hendersons, this radically designed building is simply their place to call home.

DROP BOX

ARCHITECT *Wolveridge Architects*
 PROJECT TEAM *Jerry Wolveridge, Sina Petzold, Tjeerd van der Vliet, Courtney Gibbs*
 BUILDER AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGER *John Walker Master Builders*
 STRUCTURAL/CIVIL ENGINEER *Don Moore & Associates*
 LANDSCAPE CONSULTANT *Heather Vincent Landscapes*
 COST CONSULTANT *VPL Builders Services*
 BUILDING SURVEYOR *Nepean Building Permits*

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ARTWORK
 Painting in hallway by Rowena Martinich. Photography at entrance by Peter McChonie. “The Bull” painting in living room by David Bowers. Tree of Life sculpture, anonymous.

FURNITURE
 Milo modular lounge, Jordan. B&B Italia marble coffee table. Recycled hardwood table, Mark Tuckey. Jack chair with loose linen cover, Jordan. Leather rug, S&R Gifts & Homewares. Timber stools, Freedom. Accademia Vela outdoor chairs designed by Studio Hannes Wettsetin, Space Furniture. Knoll 1966 outdoor dining table designed by Richard Schultz, Space Furniture. Timber ladder to library unit, Häfele.

LIGHTING
 Flos Easy Kap washers and downlights, Euro luce. Pendant lights, wall lights and external lights by builder.

FINISHES
 Spotted Gum decking and flooring, Timber Zoo, with various stains. Cutek. Concrete floor with special finish, Alternative Surfaces. Carpet

by Don Currie Carpets and Victoria Carpets. Geisha limestone and Soul Neve floor tiles to ensuites, Classic Ceramics. Limestone wall tile to ensuite, Perini Tiles, LAM Progetto Blend Nero wall tile to ensuite shower, Plastral, and Hectagon mosaic tiles, Classic Ceramics. Wicker wall, Cambervell Cane. Cosmos mirror to kitchen splashback, Outline. Various laminates, Laminex. Various paints, Dulux. Elba/ Luminosa marble to bench top, Artedomus.

FIXED & FITTED
 Glide-up garage door, Airport Doors. Various fittings, Häfele. Pull-out drawers to robes, Wilson & Bradley. Horizon fireplace, Jetmaster. Metal mesh fireplace curtain, Screens & Fireplaces Australia. WC, basin tap, bath, shower, and bathroom accessories, Rogerseller. Concrete benchtops and basins, Boyd Alternatives. Aqua Dux shower channel, Reece. Exhaust fan, Fantech. Cooktop, oven, dishwasher and rangehood, Miele. Refrigerator, Fisher & Paykel. Electrolux integrated barbecue, Elite Appliances. Door furniture, Designer Doorware. Slimline switches, Clipsal. Slimline grill, Holyoake.