

Living for tomorrow



Recycled hardwood floors and trim enhance the charm and liveability of living spaces



Corrugated curved roofing is a feature inside and out



On the Gold Coast, you can't stop progress (but you can shape it)

By Danielle Dunsmore

It's a curious fact that the Gold Coast is home to some of Australia's most innovative developments, as well as some of its most excessive.

The strip's "knock it down and build something new" mentality has led to a unenviable suburban sprawl. Older suburbs that once boasted quaint Queenslanders now have rows of featureless brick duplexes and apartments.

But drive just a little south and inland of the glitter of Surfers Paradise and you come across a patch of land that aims to set the international benchmark for sustainable living – the Ecovillage at Currumbin.

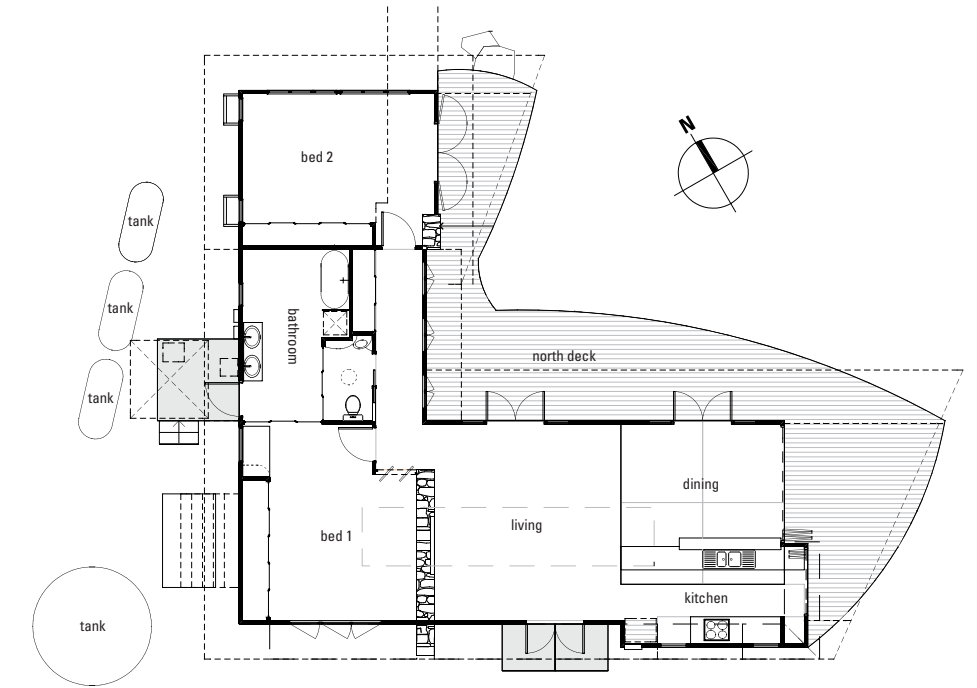
Recently awarded the World's Best Environmental Development in the 2008 International Real Estate Federation's "Prix D'Excellence" Awards in Amsterdam, this lofty aim has become reality.

Sanctuary spent a few hours with the brains behind this innovative project – husband and wife team Chris Walton and Kerry Shepherd – respectively the project's Managing Director and Marketing Manager.

The couple, along with their nine-year-old son Fin, built and live in one of the estate's first buildings, the aptly named "Living Laboratory", voted HIA's 2008 Greensmart National Building of the Year.

“I know people who live in the suburbs and don't see a neighbour for months on end. Here, most Sundays, you end up on someone's veranda enjoying conversation and a glass of wine”

The grid-connected solar panels blend unobtrusively with the lines of the roof, and can provide most of the home's energy needs



This spunky little home is just over 100 square metres inside, with another 74 square metres for outdoor living, but its modest dimensions belie its grand aspirations. It's a fascinating house that manages to be wonderfully liveable while maintaining an ant-sized footprint.

"When we talk to people designing their homes we ask them to think carefully about how much space they need," Kerry explains, "as opposed to how much space they want." The theory being that household space you don't use is a waste of energy (to build, light, clean, heat and cool), materials and money.

Hence the un-Gold Coast-like introduction of one-

bedroom allotments. One-bedders were something the Gold Coast city council was trying to phase out years ago, but Kerry points out the obvious: "A single mature woman could very comfortably live in a home with one bedroom plus a study for visitors. She doesn't need a four bedroom house to heat and light!

"So Chris went to council," says Kerry, "and we put forward the reasoning behind what we were thinking as part of the estate planning, and most people end up agreeing with us."

In other ways, too, the ecovillage is not remotely like your average estate. There are no homes lining a street, for a start. Houses are placed in clusters

backing onto a communal parkland – not unlike old fashioned London terrace homes that back onto a private park shared by residents. Fences can be built at the side and front but not at the back, giving social interaction between neighbours.

"This idea is to promote community and security. I know people who live in the suburbs and don't see a neighbour for months on end. Here, most Sundays, you end up on someone's veranda enjoying conversation and a glass of wine."

The Living Lab, where the couple live, is essentially a display house, something, perhaps surprisingly, Kerry says she loves. And although it's on the market (the couple have another block in the

ecovillage) – Kerry is not sure she wants to leave.

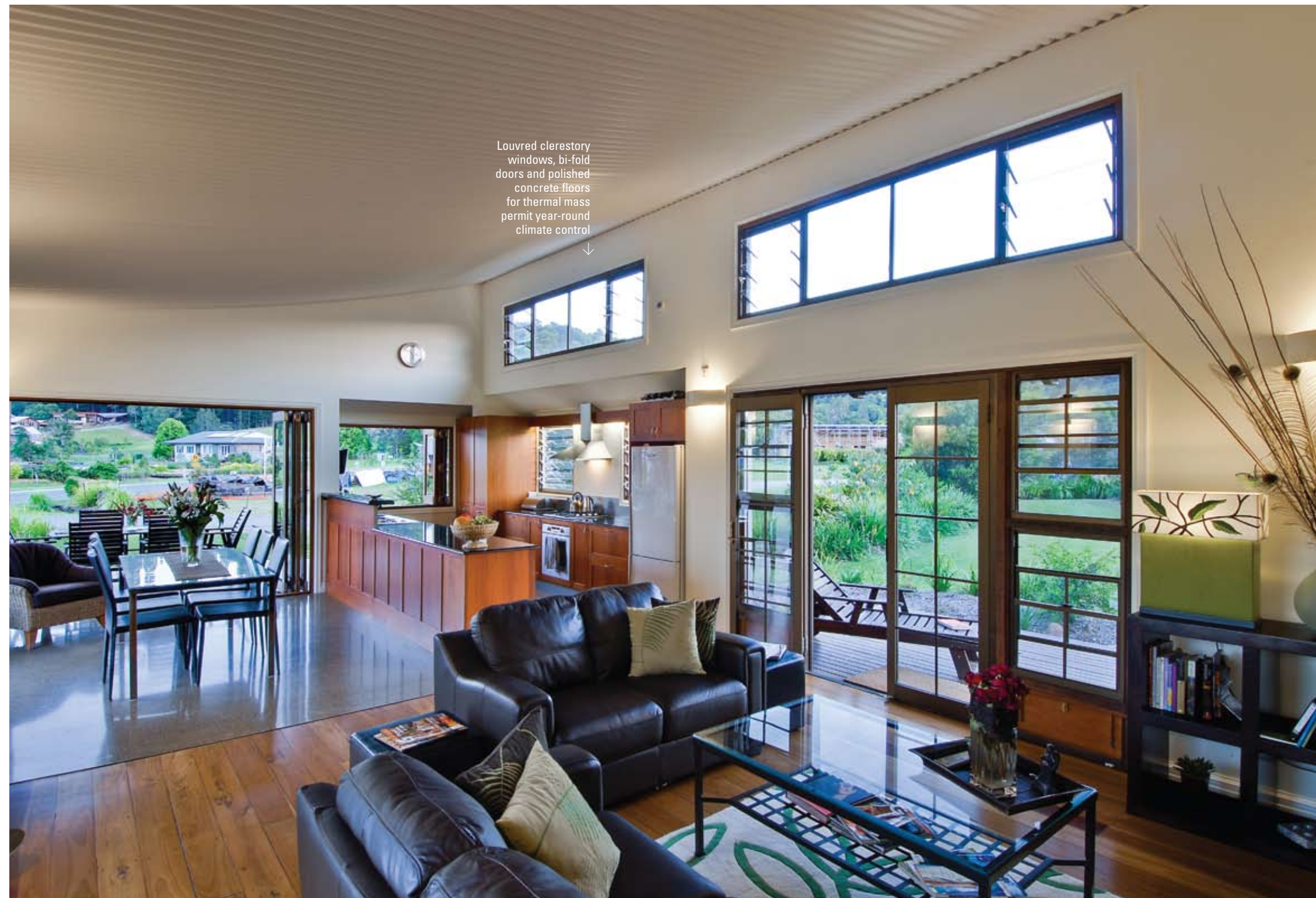
"I love it here. I love the neighbours, and this home's efficient size really is so easy to live in. There aren't many projects where the developer wants to live in the estate but it's the reason we created the ecovillage, as somewhere to live for ourselves," she says.

The home contains 70 per cent recycled materials, such as the New Guinean rosewood timber and granite kitchen rescued from a Sanctuary Cove home, and windows and old timber floor boards salvaged from old Queenslanders in Southport. ▀

The distinctive bathroom floor slab is low-maintenance and warmed in winter by solar-connected hydronic heating

“When we talk to people designing their homes we ask them to think carefully about how much space they need, as opposed to how much space they want”

Beautiful “organic” walls include locally quarried rock, and clay and straw render over bamboo lath



Louvred clerestory windows, bi-fold doors and polished concrete floors for thermal mass permit year-round climate control

Combined with this are innovative technologies and materials, including a urine-separating toilet (as in number ones go down one outlet and number twos go down another), VOC-free paints, bamboo walls, and an amazing, and by all accounts slightly addictive, computerised energy-management gizmo developed by the ecovillage called EcoVision.

“It’s the first thing I look at when I walk in,” Kerry confesses. The tiny screen in the kitchen gives data on internal and external temperature, water and electricity usage, solar power generated, water tanks levels, carbon output and more. “This house is the subject of a number of university studies into whether sustainability impacts on lifestyle, so all that

information, combined with similar data from the other homes, is hugely valuable – as well as monitoring our household usage on a day to day level.”

The pair was busy when we met them, poised to launch the project’s final hilltop stage, and considering the next phase of their career – consulting on eco projects and lobbying governments for policy change.

“We both wouldn’t do a project ourselves again,” says Kerry, “but what we have learnt puts us in a valuable position to help others with similar ideas. The number of developers we have tour here is astounding – as well as the number of private homeowners wanting to see how it is done.

Selling is one priority, but really spreading the eco ethos and showing people that yes, you can get hold of a granite and timber recycled kitchen, and yes, you can live without air-conditioning, and yes, you can build a green home economically – that’s what we are all about.”

And they have the background to prove it. Chris and Kerry have spent over 15 years studying eco living. The couple even spent their honeymoon on an eco village study tour.

“One of the many places we stayed at was Village Homes in California,” explains Chris, “and this community really showed such leadership for our project to draw on. Even though originally built

in the 70s, it’s proved to be successful and most importantly has longevity.

“People laugh, but I see our home still being here in 500 years time. It happens in Europe – but we have this knock-it-down mentality here that is not always a good thing.”

Not if Surfers Paradise is anything to go by. But perhaps the Ecovillage at Currumbin is a sign the tide on the Gold Coast is finally turning. ☑

- Designer:** Will Collins Design www.willcollinsdesign.com.au
Builder: Treby Constructions
Location: Currumbin, QLD
Photographer: Rix Ryan Photography
- Features:**
- 1.5kW BP grid-connected solar system
 - 23,000L Bluescope water tank
 - 25,000L underslab Humes Water Cells for water storage and thermal mass
 - Garden, toilet flush and laundry from the Ecovillage estate recycled waste water treatment plant (Class A+ standard)
 - External walls – James Hardie Scyon, Boral EcoPLY and locally quarried rock
 - Protherm R3 Reflecta-cell wall insulation
 - Ritek R3 roof insulation
 - Internal walls – Boral EcoPLY, locally quarried rock, Rockcote bamboo ‘living’ wall
- Ritek curved roofing
 - Recycled hardwood flooring and decking
 - Recycled concrete mix polished concrete
 - Recycled windows and doors
 - Hydronic heating tubes to bathroom slab and rock walls, powered by PV panels
 - Conergy solar water heating with gas backup
 - Redwater Water Guardian installed to kitchen sink and shower
 - Rockcote no-VOC paints
 - Mega non-toxic wood finish
 - Landscaping with native flora