

SPECIAL REPORT

Kit and caboodle

Cutting-edge modular homes combine style, sustainability and function at an accessible price, writes Harvey Grennan.



There's been a quiet revolution in the design of kit homes. No longer are they all cheap Hardi plank boxes or rustic log cabins, although these still exist. The new wave of contemporary, minimalist and flexible designs bears the stamp of some of the nation's most innovative architects. Designs now available range from traditional, Queensland and rustic to sleek and contemporary, turning the game of home ownership on its head.

It's said that the world's first kit home was erected in Australia. The Manning

Pavilion Colonial Cottage for Emigrants was designed and cut in London in the 1830s by H. Manning, a carpenter whose son migrated to Australia and took the pieces with him. The son sold many more such kits at his arrival and pioneered a form of affordable housing that has hereafter familiarised the world.

These days, architects have gone into the business of designing kit homes, and it shows. Queensland's Gabriel Poole was one of the pioneers with his Takeaway, a lightweight, passive solar design with an emphasis on sustainability.

A traditional kit home is built on-site using pre-assembled components. Many of the new generation of kit homes, however, are built off-site and delivered in one piece or several modules. Hence the terms 'prefabricated' and 'modular'.

The new, factory-built designs are not cheap by the usual kit home standards but are an economical alternative to architect-designed, custom-built home. A basic kit home costs about \$450 per square metre without foundations, labour, floor or wall tiles, kitchen, plumbing, electrical and a host of other components

A standard priced house will cost about \$1000 per square metre. A custom-built residential job can be \$1000 a square metre and more.

The smarter modular designs come complete (except for connection to services) at about \$2000 per square metre, more expensive than a perfect home but much cheaper than hiring your own architect. They have operation designs that connect to the natural environment and, being built in a factory, there's better quality control and minimal waste. >



CASE STUDY 1

Happy Haus, Brisbane

Built and fitted out in the factory, modular designs give 'home delivery' a whole new meaning.

Late in 2008 the two happyhaus owners of modular homes are the work of Brisbane architectural firm Donovan Hill and Owen and Volke.

PHOTOGRAPHER: DONOVAN HILL (PICTURED) INTERIORS: GUY AND PAUL (PICTURED) CONSTRUCTION: TWO AND THREE BEDROOM HOMES, ALSO DESIGN FOR OPEN COVERED OUTDOOR LIVING. OFF-PLAN HOMES ARE TRADED WITH THE REMAINING TIMBER STOCK, WHICH IS SOLD PRIVATELY. BYWOOD SLIDING, 18% HUMIDITY CONTROLLED FRAME AND PINKED GOLD FINISH ACCENTED AIRWAYS. THE VENTILATION SYSTEM.

The Whitehouse is, Owen and Volke, is based on the concept of a working wall that contains all services as well as built-in oven. "The unique planning provides a regular space that can be divided to allow for kitchen, living and bathroom

options," says Shan Wyles. Design options include a suburban family home, holiday home and couples retreat.

The exterior are finished in natural weatherboard interiors are lined in warm timber ply contrasted with white fringe above picture rail height, which accentuates the engineering space.

Manufacturing time for happyhaus buildings is weeks. A studio including bed, bathroom, air conditioning and living room costs about \$100,000, plus about \$10,500 for delivery and installation in Brisbane. Delivery can be organised across Australia.

Two more firms, Duxford Dock Architects in Sydney and Melbourne, offer similar kit and factories are currently designing kit homes for the Happy Haus. Go to www.happyhaus.com.au.