

Domain HOMES BY DESIGN INNOVATION



New ideas on the block



Tired of a city stuck in a classical comfort zone, one architect is determined to demistify the modern approach, writes **Kerrie O'Brien.**

THE rise of "faux" this and "neo" that in architecture has a lot to answer for and, frankly, not much of it is good. Some might argue the trend, prevalent for some time in Melbourne, is the fault of those who oppose development and remain committed to the heritage idea. However, it's much more complicated than that.

In this city, and especially in the most expensive suburbs, the work of several high-profile architects (who shall remain nameless) in the faux-classic style has given rise to a spate of ordinary, uninspired replicas. These are dotted about much of the city and although some examples are done well, many are poor imitations.

Architect Robert Schulberg, the principal of Schulberg Demkiw, has an theory about why such styles are

so appealing. "Unfortunately, I think people have become more conservative over the years," Schulberg says. "In the 1960s and '70s, architecture was really out there and made a big statement."

What followed, he says, was a resurgence of neoclassical design and a return to more traditional types of housing.

"There's been a misconception that traditional is safe and looks prestigious," Schulberg says. "[People think] it gives a sense of wealth and value, that it imparts a sense of status, whereas contemporary architecture, because it's a bit more avant-garde, doesn't."

He says one of the problems with these derivative designs is that a template is inherited, which means the owners end up with rooms they do not need.

"People can gravitate towards

the older styles because they are familiar with them and they want to err on the side of caution," he says. "But a lot of that stuff has been done badly and ended up as eyesores."

Commitment to and demand for such houses prompted Schulberg into action. Together with building company Moobi, Schulberg Demkiw next week will open two display houses they've built in North Road, Brighton.

Designed with families in mind, the houses — at the front and back of the block — are two storeys with living rooms and communal spaces downstairs and bedrooms upstairs.

Schulberg says the houses are not designed as prototypes — they are very site-specific — but he hopes they will give an idea of what can be achieved. "I wanted to show how you can use more contempo-

rary finishes and elements to create a comfortable home environment ... I have a lot of clients who don't feel comfortable with contemporary architecture. They think that modern means cold and confronting and intimidating."

A big consideration was to create something other than a boxy look, which is why Schulberg used curved facades. In one house the upper level is finished in timber, the second in mosaic tiles. These materials, Schulberg says, make that storey lighter than a traditional render or block colour. "The upstairs cantilevers out and appears to float over downstairs."

The scale of the houses is broken down by these cantilevered facades, so they work well in their surroundings. In what is an eclectic streetscape, there are period houses, '60s houses and more



Curves, timber and mosaics feature in these showcases of contemporary architecture.

contemporary designs nearby. The houses also showcase the work by the builder. Braden Murphy, the managing director of Moobi, says he likes clients to liaise with a builder at the same time as an architect, which helps avoid problems such as cost blowouts and choosing designs that are unaffordable. "We are upfront and open about our costs, our margins, and we can come up with options for the client based around what they want," he says.

Schulberg says Bayside City Council was encouraging about showcasing modern architecture.

He focused on some of the key principles apparent in contemporary houses: open-plan living (although both houses have a second living space as well), a strong relationship between indoors and out and abundant

natural light. Both living rooms are lined by glass looking out to greenery, which includes a heavily planted wall in one case and a courtyard in the other.

The two designs have their differences, Schulberg says, "but as neighbours they needed to harmonise, so there's individuality but similarity as well."

"Whatever you design, you want it to be current and to create something new."

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