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SURFER'S PARADISE

As dramatic as the landscape that surrounds it, this award-winning beach house was designed to provide a feast for the senses.

WORDS SERENA KIRBY PHOTOGRAPHS ROBERT FRITH



ABOVE LEFT: The owner's self-painted artwork (left of picture) sits well alongside the indigenous painting by Minnie Pwerle from Utopia.
ABOVE RIGHT: The home sits long and low amid the surrounding coastal scrub landscape.

It's fair to say that a well-designed home should reflect the lifestyle of the people who live in it. This bunker-style beach house at Prevelly, near Margaret River on Western Australia's south-west coast, showcases just what can be achieved when building design mirrors a desire to create a surfer's paradise.

Set into sage-coloured scrub and jutting out from a hill, this home overlooks one of the best surf breaks in the world – The Bombie – and its style and form reflects owner Ron Rooze's life long passion for wave-riding.

The house, designed by Sydney-based architect Dale Jones-Evans (a surfer and long-time friend of Ron), took out the 2001 Royal Australian Architects' (WA Chapter) award for best single residence and a commendation in the 2002 BHP awards for its use of metal in architecture. With its unusual design, great functionality and interesting use of materials, it's easy to see why.

While Ron had owned the block for a decade before finally deciding to build, it took only two hours for he and Dale to draw up an outline of the design.

"The view and the fall of the block dictated the design," says Ron. "From there it was just a matter of working out how to configure and fit out the interior to maximise the architectural elements Dale wanted to include."

The layout of the house was kept as much as possible to a single level, with the steep gradient of the hillside providing the elevation needed to capture the

spectacular views. It is built in two sections that meet to form the shape of a crucifix. The home's three bedrooms and two bathrooms and laundry are located along one length of the crucifix in a long concrete block that runs parallel to the landscape at ground level. The open-plan kitchen and living area are in a second rectangular block that forms the cantilevered section protruding towards the Indian Ocean. Clad in sheets of copper and with an expansive viewing deck, this central arm of the house is elevated 3m above the ground on a fine steel frame.

But this home's spatial configuration is just as much about creating sensory experiences as it is about functional design. Entry to the home is via the back of the site and, as you descend to the front door down a row of cascading strip-steps, you encounter a dead zone where the views disappear and the towering concrete walls work to silence the sounds of wind and waves. On the other side of the square, a simple threshold is an area the architect calls "the cave". Here, there are no views but there is a promise of something special as you are faced with a screening wall featuring a long, thin slot window through which you can see light and glimpses of the front room.

Down a few steps and along a right-angled passage you enter the main living space where the climax of your journey through the house is revealed – the panoramic view of the surf break and the Indian Ocean. At the end of the lounge room are wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling glass doors that expose a

homes

Long, low windows provide privacy and natural light for the passageway that leads to the bedrooms and bathroom. Artwork shown was painted by the owner.

Sealed, polished terrazzo runs throughout the hallways and in the bedrooms... the ground-back concrete enhances the solid, cave-like feel of this section.



ABOVE: Ron started collecting indigenous art three years ago and now has an extensive selection. Above the bed is a painting by Tjumbo Tjapanangka, which Ron bought while traveling on the Tanami Track. The long slot windows provide views without compromising privacy.

jaw-dropping outlook. Like a powerful magnet, the spectacular vista draws you to the end of the room and out onto the deck.

This careful and strategic framing of views is seen elsewhere in the house and Dale has framed lesser views of the surrounding ridge and scrub with rectangular windows in side walls. Some are placed at ground level, others are at waist-height, and the windows in the bedrooms are positioned at eye level from the mattress-height so you need only lift your head off the pillow to view the weather and surf conditions.

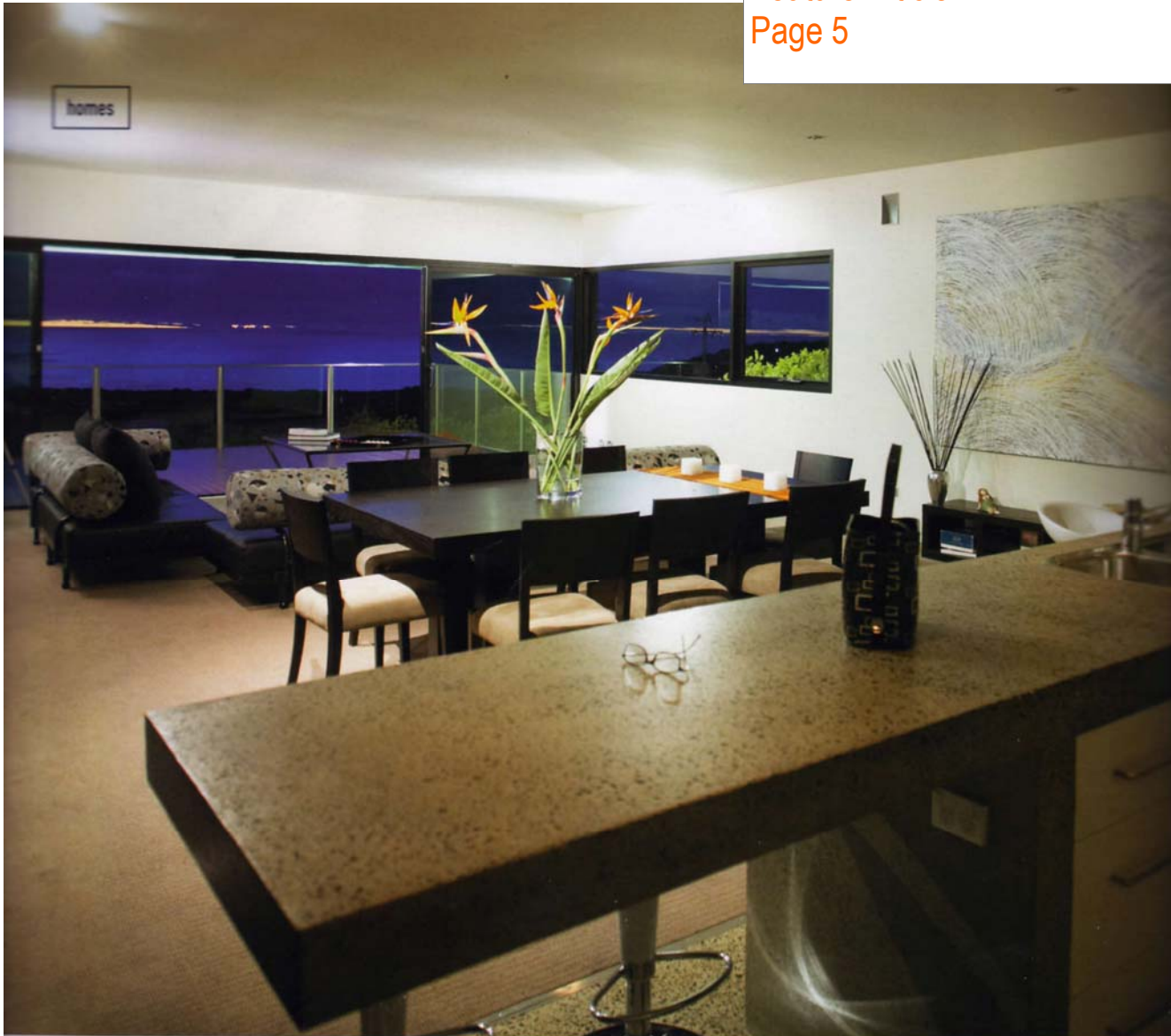
Throughout the home you also gain glimpses of the exterior's copper cladding. The decision to use copper on the elevated section of the home was influenced by many factors. There are structural benefits as it's lightweight and remains rust-free, which is vital when building in a location so close to the sea. It's also becoming increasingly popular as an exterior material for contemporary buildings.

But, more importantly, Ron and the architect chose copper for its visual characteristics as it will weather to a green colour over time and provide a

textural reference to the hues found in the surrounding coastal vegetation. Currently a deep red-brown, the copper is already showing signs of oxidization. Patches of turquoise are starting to drip and spread their way across the walls and across the copper canopy that extends like an awning from the roofline above the deck. With time, as the copper changes colour and the concrete-render on the walls weathers, the home will blend seamlessly into its coastal environment.

"The copper cladding is my favourite element of the house," explains Ron. "I fell in love with the material when I saw it used in church domes and on roofs of Parisian public buildings during an overseas trip." Ron explains. "I know it's not a cheap material to use in a private home but I believe it's worth every cent – it's like a living thing as it's ever-changing. It does surprise me that more people don't use it.

"Its colour changes with light and temperature as well as over time. It takes on a darker appearance when it's hot and is distinctly lighter when it's cold. As the months pass and the oxidisation progresses, the home is growing into the environment. Some people have suggested I speed up the process using a chemical wash but that would take away the natural evolution and the irregularity of the look that is appearing. Also the resulting colour of the oxidisation varies on different walls of the house. The south side is turning blue-green whereas the north walls are a far deeper green."



ABOVE: The panoramic view is a powerful magnet that draws you out to the deck.
LEFT: The living area is elevated 3m above the ground and supported by a steel frame.
OPPOSITE PAGE: Owner Ron Roozen with partner Karen Siddall on the deck where
oxidisation of the copper can be seen in the green markings spreading across the canopy.

WHY IT WORKS

- The interior fittings and finishings were kept simple, minimal and uncluttered so as not to overshadow the importance of the view.
- A sense of scale and proportion is maintained through all elements – from windows and doorways to step and deck size.
- The design works to blend with the environment rather than stand out against it.
- All materials were chosen for durability and suitability to the extreme coastal weather conditions.
- Windows and walls were strategically placed to obscure the views of an accommodation development on a distant dune.

“The view and the fall of the block dictated the design.” *Ron Roozen, owner.*



Contrasting with the copper is the rendered brickwork that's been painted grey, like that of the sand seen between the coastal shrubs around the house.

Aesthetics and practicality of the interior materials were important, so minimal and unflamboyant finishes were chosen. With sandy feet regularly traipsing through the rooms, carpet was definitely off the agenda. Instead light but durable, pale-coloured bamboo floorboards were used in the main living space, while sealed, polished terrazzo runs throughout the hallways and in the bedrooms. The placement of these contrasting materials has an architectural reference, too. The lightness of the bamboo in the front arm of the home complements the lightness of this area's structure, while the ground-back concrete in the rear of the home enhances the solid, cave-like feel of this section.

Polished terrazzo was the material selected to create the kitchen's interesting island bench. And, with its slick design and the extensive engineering ingenuity needed for the construction, this freestanding structure is almost a work of art.

The durable materials and thoughtful, yet seemingly uncomplicated, design create a home that is masculine in appearance and austere in the lifestyle it suggests. It is also a dwelling that will age beautifully and one that will continue to fit and complement its surroundings long after Ron has moved on. ■

*This house is available for hire. See ronroozen.com.au for details.
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