

# KINGFISHER HOUSE

STORY AND PICS: TOBIAS VOLBERT MAILDM

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## A RECIPE FOR ADAPTABLE, FLEXIBLE, SUSTAINABLE LIVING

When I first visited Australia in 2007 with my partner Hilke from Germany, we fell in love with the landscape, the weather, and the people. We are now proud Australian citizens and building our first Australian home in north Brisbane. This is the story of Kingfisher House.

Integration with the surrounding bush landscape and subtropical breezes was paramount to the design and the brief was clear-cut; minimise the footprint, maximise the landscape, mitigate future energy costs, and generate a flexible, adaptable home for a growing young family.

Brett McKenzie of Sustainable Pty Ltd took on the design brief and unique site conditions with his Recipe Housing approach. Modular and adaptable, Recipe Housing takes the ingredients of a site, such as site slope and orientation, to create homes that live and breathe with the site.

**ABOVE**  
Front view of Kingfisher House under construction.

**RIGHT**  
Close up of pod.



## Design Resolutions

Kingfisher House sits on an oblong shaped 1,100m<sup>2</sup> north-east facing block with a 400m<sup>2</sup> nature corridor along the rear boundary. In addition to the block shape constraints the site is sloping to the east. Brett McKenzie utilised these unique block parameters by building the pods to step down with the natural slope, only cutting into the slope for the bedroom pods. High ceiling pitches unify the building design and maximise air flow through the space.

Pods for living areas and connecting

breezeways are light filled and have views to the dry-creek bed and planting surrounding the building. The kitchen and main living pod has a large outdoor deck wrapping around to create an integrated indoor-outdoor entertainment space and to capture the breeze from the gully below. Sliding doorways connect spaces between pods and to the outdoors, and provide flexibility within each space that can adapt as our family grows.

## Landscape

With over one third of the land a protected nature corridor, I embraced this as a landscape feature of Kingfisher House and worked together with friend and AILD member, Andrew Munro, to design a landscape that works with the house and its environment. The selection of plants are based on colour contrast, feature vistas, different microclimates, and maintenance requirements.

To help with good establishment of the plants, all planting and turf areas will be supplemented with 300mm of sand/Terracottem soil conditioner mix, and an irrigation system will be integrated throughout with the garden design.

Within the hard landscape, the top retainer will act as a feature wall that will showcase a combination of 150-year-old fencing posts and pitched bushrock complimented by olives trees and herbs to create a European courtyard feel. The main retaining wall under the house is constructed from Helidon sandstone (Scotbar Pty Ltd – Rock Trade Industries) and the cut stone is to blend with the sandstone staircase that connects to floating timber decks leading to the house.

The site will be graded to direct overland water flow initially through garden beds

### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT

Sandstone wall under the house; AILD member tour by Brett McKenzie with Michael Angus (Jerrycanfilms) recording the session as part of his documentary on the construction of Kingfisher House; Water tanks and solar panels viewed from the rear of the property.

(protected from scouring by large river rock) and eventually into a pond in between the house pods. The pond will be lined with native riparian grasses and tropical foliage planting such as alocasia, asplenium, caladium and bromeliads. Planting along the footpath will define the boundary without the need for formal fencing, and low hedges such as *Westringia fruticosa* 'Jervis Gem', *Acmena smithii* 'Allyn Magic', and *Melaleuca linariifolia* 'Claret Tops' will allow interaction with neighbours. We hope to engage the surrounding community with designated breaks in the hedging to allow access to a communal area with seating for chats and a community library.

## Sustainability

In addition to passive heating and cooling, Kingfisher House has been purposely designed for sustainable living over a 25 year lifecycle, with the design considering changes to climate over that period. Builder Brett McKenzie referenced Solar North (10.8 degrees west of compass north) in positioning the premises for optimal →



solar generation, with three of the rooves pitched to further maximise solar power generation. A total of 24 solar panels (Sunelec Pty Ltd) will be monitored for a 12 to 18 month period before the selection of a battery will be made.

In addition to the long-term, sustainable energy production, the building of Kingfisher House has also been completed with the highest “green” standards in mind. The modular design of Recipe Housing reduces site waste and construction build times. Recycled or ecologically sourced materials contribute to reducing the build’s ecological footprint as well as provide character, such as bamboo flooring and recycled timber beams in the 5m high ceilings. Even the four water tanks to be used for the irrigation system, toilets and washing machine are second hand.



### Knowledge Transfer

Kingfisher House has already hosted two industry tours, one being for AILD members on 22 February 2017 while the house was still under construction. The focus of this was to demonstrate firsthand the sustainability and architectural achievements. **LO**

### FINAL PRODUCTION

Due for completion in May, we should be settling into Kingfisher House in June 2017. The landscaping will be implemented and developed over the coming twelve months. For more information visit [www.kingfisherhouse.com](http://www.kingfisherhouse.com) online.

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