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living in design

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APRIL – JUNE | 2016

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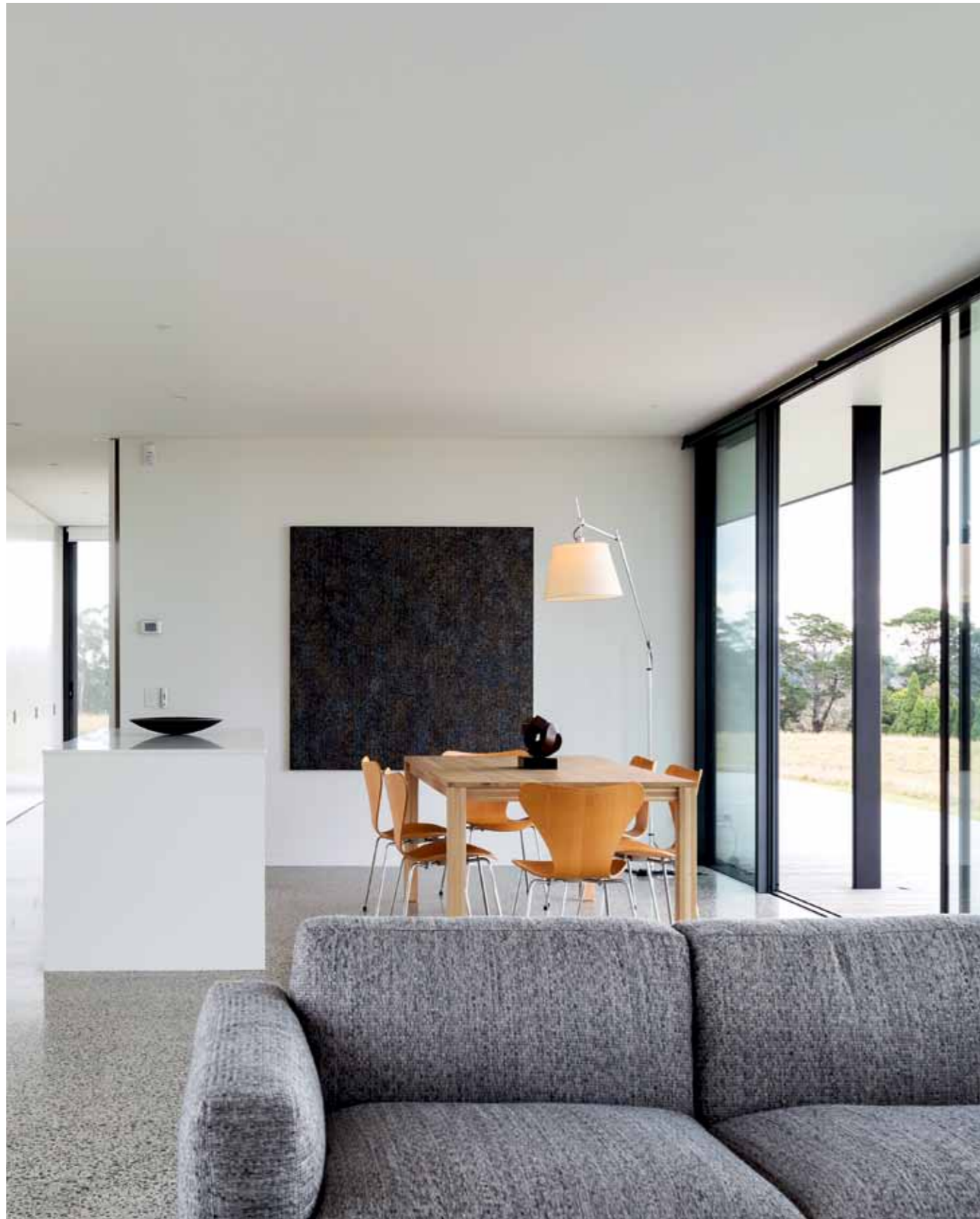
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Mod Con: modular conscious

TEXT NICKY LOBO | PHOTOGRAPHY JUSTIN ALEXANDER

It took **GILLIAN SIMON** and **DARREN KINDRACHUK** the best part of a decade to find the perfect piece of land in the **SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS** of NSW, but once they did, the design and build was relatively easy – thanks to the **INTERMODE** modular design they chose.





It's a well-worn complaint (and a point of contention for many first-time home builders or renovators) that architectural and design projects often 'blow the budget'. Director and founder of Intermode, Nick Carr, says it's to be expected. "Clients are asking for something entirely unique," he says. "Most of their requirements are quite specific, and that drives a need to 'recreate the wheel'. This requires a lot of time and in-depth understanding. Also, you're doing something you've never done before, so there are costs that you just can't foresee".

When hidden or unexpected costs can reach into the thousands, or even tens-of-thousands of dollars, it makes designing and building a home pretty inaccessible. Which means that the majority of Australians are living in homes designed and built by large-scale construction companies who are driven primarily by budget.

This is where Intermode comes in. "The three elements in the construction process are time, quality, and cost, and there used to be the saying that you can't have all three," Nick says. "What the challenge has been, and what drove us with Intermode, was to deal with all three."

The model is modular design with a conventional build. Essentially, what modular design offers is some certainty that the budget and timeframe will be maintained – as the components have been used before and so can be costed correctly and constructed efficiently – along with flexibility and a level of quality.

"It was filling that gap, where people were still demanding the quality of [parent company] Carr Design, but they were also looking for a level of control that perhaps a bespoke design process or construction process can't give them," Nick explains.

While modular in design, the Intermode projects are not pre-fabricated, although some components like walls, trusses, window systems, joinery and decks may be. Each build and site is approached as unique, with the ability to modify and adapt according to needs and wants.

This example, set in the picturesque Southern Highlands of New South Wales, stands as a showcase of the company's capabilities – purposely so, as the resident is Gillian Simon, NSW regional manager at Intermode. She and her husband Darren Kindrachuk, principal architect for Lend Lease, are extremely knowledgeable clients, with over 20 years experience in the international design industry.

"So many architectural, bespoke houses turn into a very expensive exercise for the client," laments Gillian. So they decided to put the Intermode model through its paces in their own home. Their satisfaction with the process, design and adherence to budget and timeframe shows just how successful the model is.

The process is very much like a unique design and build, in that it starts from maximising existing opportunities to make the design more efficient. "We developed the planning with



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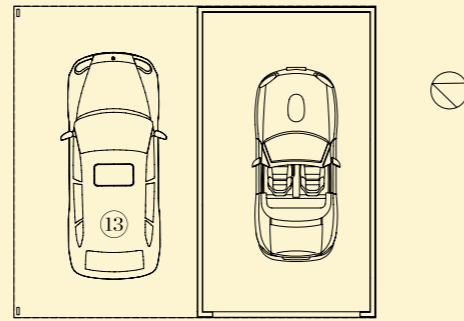
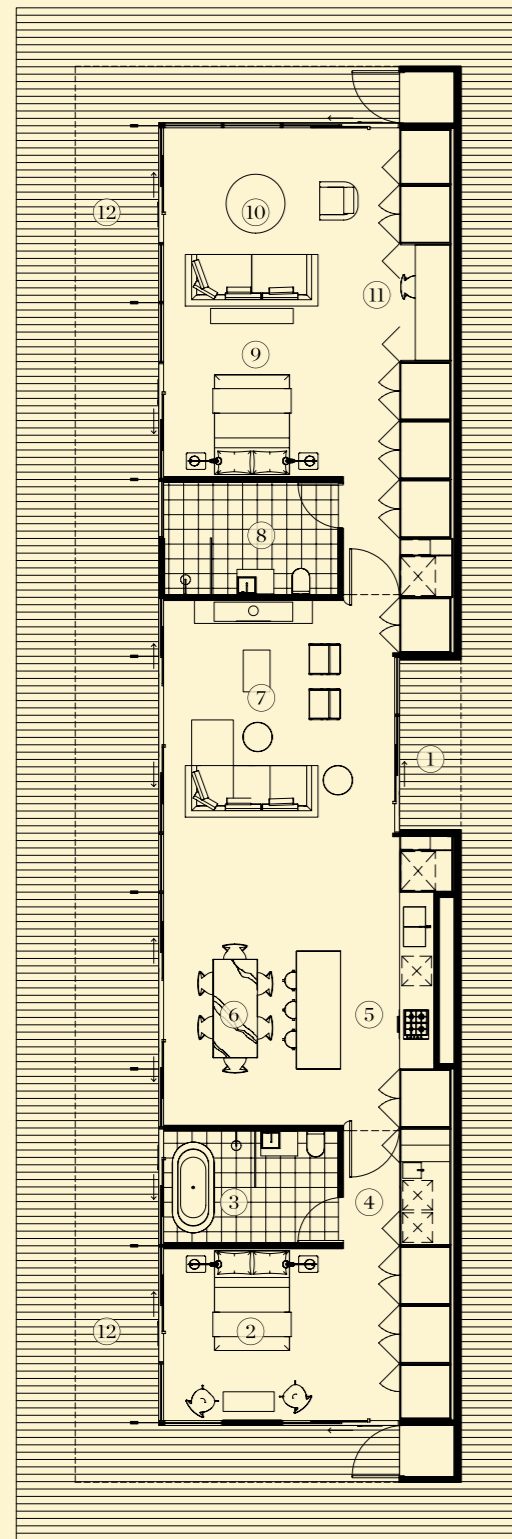
Intermode and positioned the house, the carport and garage in such a way that it was sensitive to the site," Darren explains.

The house at Exeter is north-facing, positioned at the top of the property to enjoy the views, neatly missing the natural gullies that flood in heavy rain. Other site and environmental considerations include the use of fire-appropriate timbers, high wind capabilities and placement of two large water tanks.

The basic Intermode design principle is to build around a 'spine', which in the Exeter home, is in Ecoply Shadowclad on the exterior. As you make your way up the driveway, you are greeted by this spine, which creates a strong black façade along the southern side of the home. A series of 1.2-metre x 1.2-metre 'modules' are placed along this spine facing north, becoming the living, bathing, cooking, eating and resting spaces. Some of these – like the bathroom – comprise two 1.2-metre x 6-metre design modules, while others – like the kitchen, living and dining room – are made up of nine 1.2-metre x 6-metre modules.

This home is split into three main areas – a living area with lounge, kitchen and dining in the middle, bookended by a guest bedroom and bathroom at one end, and the main bedroom, bathroom and sitting room at the other. Floor-to-ceiling glass doors/windows along the northern façade are a transparent counterpoint to the dark and solid southern spine and they, along with the deck, expand the space into the landscape.





- ① ENTRY
- ② GUEST BED
- ③ GUEST BATH
- ④ LAUNDRY
- ⑤ KITCHEN
- ⑥ DINING
- ⑦ LOUNGE
- ⑧ MASTER BATH
- ⑨ MASTER BED
- ⑩ SITTING ROOM
- ⑪ STUDY
- ⑫ DECK
- ⑬ GARAGE

FLOOR PLAN

Internally, the spine grounds the modules and houses abundant storage, the services (gas, underfloor heating) and also study and laundry alcoves, which can be neatly hidden behind doors.

An Intermode project is particularly suited to anyone who has a penchant for clean, modern lines, a minimal aesthetic and acute attention to detail. It's the perfect backdrop for designer furniture, objects and art, like the Clement Meadmore sculpture and the Richard Serra etching, both in the bedroom here.

But it's more than just a canvas for decoration. There's a real sense of spaciousness here, despite the relative compactness of the module sizes. The views certainly help with extending the space outwards, but it's also the finishes and the way it's detailed to take up maximum capacity. Nothing is wasted here – this is efficient design at its finest.

"That's the thing about the detailing with an Intermode project," Darren agrees. "There's nowhere to hide. It's all very, very clean and sophisticated. It's all about the minimalist approach, so many of the issues that come up – you cannot hide with molding or adding

something to the design. The detailing has to account for this".

It looks wonderful in this quasi-rural setting, the black and glass box receding into the landscape and looking out over valleys – but how does the design work in more urban areas, I wonder? There are urban Intermode projects in concept and under construction in both NSW and Victoria, Gillian tells me, and more on the way – thanks to the open days at Exeter that she and Nick host on a regular basis.

And it's actually in the different expressions that the beauty of the Intermode model becomes apparent – it can be adapted to work anywhere. For example, in an urban setting, privacy needs to be more considered, so subtle fencing is introduced. Landscaping becomes an important element in the modulation of private to public space. The flexibility of the modules allows for significant variation – in ceiling height, with the option for features like a butler's pantry, external undercover eating area, mudroom for a country property...the list goes on. Although it's modular, no design is even remotely the same.

One of the other benefits of the modular design is that the circulation space is also part



OPPOSITE | FLOOR PLAN. ABOVE | CLEVER USE OF MIRROR IN THE STUDY ALCOVE GIVES THIS NOOK A SHARE OF THE VIEW AS WELL.

of the bedroom or living area, “So you get a very high efficiency of space because it’s all usable”, Darren says. This also means that the home can easily become accessible. With wide hallways and doorways, sliding doors and recessed detailing around frames, Intermode projects can see clients into retirement and beyond.

When asked why modular housing hasn’t been very popular, Nick Carr suggests there is a negative connotation, due to bad examples from the past. But there may be something else to it – the underlying idea that we need a home as unique as we are; that to have a modular house means a bland house that reflects a bland personality. But in reality, within the discipline of modular design, there is unlimited potential for expression and customisation that subtly encourages a different way of living and experiencing a home, perfectly suited to context and resident.

The unique expression may not be as obvious as a Gaudi building, but (also unlike Gaudi) it will be built in time and on budget. For most of us, that’s a win.

DROP BOX

ARCHITECT Intermode

LANDSCAPE DESIGN Aerea

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER Don Moore & Associates

INTERMODE

(61 3) 9665 2333

intermode.com.au

FURNITURE

LC3 Lounge and chair by Le Corbusier. Barcelona lounge chairs by Mies van der Rohe. PK Series coffee tables by Poul Kjaerholm. 606 Table by Aino Aalto. Series 7 dining chairs by Arne Jacobsen. Toledo chairs by Jorge Pensi. Componibili bedside storage by Anna Castelli. R & C Eames Softpad desk chair in study.

LIGHTING

Architectural lighting by Artemide, Louis Poulsen and Havit. De Lucchi & Fassina Tolomeo standing and bedside table lamps. Tizio desk lamp by Richard Sapper.

FINISHES

Polished concrete Husqvarna Hiperguard Green finish floor. DeFazio Porcelain tiles in Bathroom. Dulux low VOC paint. Joinery doors in 2 Pac paint finish. External decks in Spotted Gum. Shadowclad Ecoply by Carter Holt Harvey external cladding. Exterior paint by Dulux. Roof and metalwork in Lysaght Kliplock Colorbond finish.

FIXED & FITTED

Kitchen appliances by Miele. Franke kitchen sinks and tapware from Abey. Bathroom fixtures from Rogerseller, Reece and Stormtech. Bath by Kaldewei. Haiku ceiling fans by Big Ass Fans. Verosol roller blinds by Southern Blinds & Awnings. Landscape Fireplace by Real Flame. Steel Fire Pit by Robert Plumb. Caesarstone benchtop and splashback. Interpron powder coated, aluminium framed double glazed sliding glass doors. Aneeta double glazed window.

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