



Homes by Design



Modular minimalism

Intermode puts aesthetics
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Model approach finds favour

This Emerald house goes beyond the square, writes **Jacinta Le Plastrier.**

NICK Carr, director of the high-end modular housing company Intermode came to his role with an unusual yet perfect cache of skills.

As the son of esteemed Melbourne interior designer Sue Carr, of the Carr Design Group, he recalls childhood hours spent in the office, absorbing the imprint of her penchant for clean-lined architectural design in the luxury bracket.

Yet Nick Carr chose to study in the areas of science and economics, followed by an early career in property development.

When he returned to the family fold, he brought a "more economical perspective" and construction experience. Combining that with the design predilection of the Carr group, Carr came up with what he felt was a product sorely needed in the Australian market: a modular home solution that offered clients

elegant, top-end design principles at a predictable cost and within a predictable time frame.

"We provide an alternative for those people looking for intelligent design and people looking for an aesthetic association with architecture but without the high cost and the long lead times associated with that process," he says. "It's easy and quick, yet it's flexible."

Since Intermode launched in 2008, with several years of research and development behind it, it has gathered recognition in design awards and media coverage, with one of its latest projects now being filmed for the *Grand Designs Australia* television program.

The project featured here, in Emerald, beyond the Dandenongs, has been shortlisted for an award by one of Australia's main interiors magazines.

The Intermode model has been



created on a grid of 1.2-square-metre modules. These modules are customised for each house so, Carr says, each house is unique, as configurations are chosen to suit individual owners' needs and briefs.

The houses tend to be five modules wide, about six square metres, he says, with clients playing with the way the length is configured.

In the case of the Emerald project, there is a main bedroom with en suite bathroom and wardrobes at one end of the house, left of the entry hall.

To the right is the kitchen, living and dining area — generally created as one space in the Intermode model but varying in size — and then two bedrooms, another bathroom and an office with meeting area at the other end.

Another design device Intermode uses is a "spine wall" along one side of the hall. This conceals

storage and utilities — in the case of the Emerald house, this includes a 1.2-metre-deep, European-style laundry.

Construction usually takes 20 weeks, following initial phases of client consultation, with a design and price produced within three to four weeks — where the model is configured to suit that project's wants and council and planning processes.

One of the advantages of the model, Carr says, is that while council processes can't be shortened, the designs do take into account planning codes so there are not the hold-ups or variations that can be required by more adventurous architectural plans.

The external finish is in Shadowclad Ecoply with a dark stain and the decking is recycled tallowwood. Emerald's internal finishes include laminate in the kit-



The Emerald house incorporates (from far left) wide decks; a slick kitchen; views from the bath; a verdant setting. PICTURES: MICHAEL WEARNE



chen and other joinery, benches of CaesarStone and Victorian ash floors with a dark stain.

As the company's number of projects has grown, other options have become available because of client demands, Carr says. Instead of laminate, two-pack finishes can be used.

Another way in which Inter-mode projects are different is related to their site. In the case of the Emerald house, the land was steep and required extensive engineering to cut and fill it to flatten it, Carr says.

This was also done to orient the house to enjoy the magnificent views, 180 degrees towards the Warburton Ranges.

Hard landscaping, such as the deck and retaining walls, are contained within the Inter-mode scope but not soft landscaping such as plants, Carr says.

The price range for Inter-mode modular houses is \$800-\$2000 (sometimes up to \$2200) a square metre, for single levels. Inter-mode also has a number of two-level houses under way.

Despite all the meticulous planning and preparation, Carr admits that the design and building processes will always have their unseen qualities.

"Our job is to remove all the obstacles and uncertainties," he says.

"[But] every building site is capable of challenges. It's the process you have to deal with it which is what makes it different for the client."

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