



spotlight

Green scene Concrete blocks create thermal mass in this house by Mackenzie Pronk Architects in the southern highlands.

Small footprints

No longer just a concept embraced by a few, sustainable home design has gone mainstream, writes **JODIE THOMSON**.

It's hard not to be environmentally aware these days. With the growing alarm over global warming, the need to live more sustainably is being reinforced at every turn, whether it's new laws about light globes or hefty rebates for solar hot water heaters.

As a result, the popularity of sustainably designed homes using eco-friendly materials and energy-smart designs is booming. Once the preserve of dedicated environmentalists, it's now commonplace, as people are hungry for new ways to reduce their carbon footprint on the planet.

Proof of eco-design's popularity is a major exhibit that debuts this year at the Decoration + Design Sydney trade fair, on this week at the Sydney Exhibition Centre. The exhibit, Sustainable Style, features six room settings created by six different architects and designers. Each is made with at least 75 per cent sustainable products and highlights a different message about eco-design.

For most architects, sustainable design simply equals good design. "It's the basic ingredient for what we do," says Hannah Tribe, of Tribe Studio, whose exhibit is a gently curved Ecobox made from sustainable ply and plantation

timbers. "We put rooms where the sun is, we control the amount of heat ... that's fundamental to what we do."

She feels the wider population now has a good understanding of basic concepts such as passive solar design and thermal mass.

For Jan O'Connor and Tone Wheeler, who run award-winning architectural practice Enviroana Studio, the new shift in eco-design is the need to live with less space. "There's now a third wave and it goes beyond water, electricity and materials," O'Connor says. "It's about density and the benefits of low-rise, high-density housing."

High-density cities such as New York, with its abundance of apartment living, are a good example. "In such a small footprint there's a lot of people and a large amount of services," she says. "Compare that with somewhere like country Victoria, where there are very few services and so much transportation needed."

O'Connor and Wheeler's exhibit, called Micro Maisonette, is an apartment design that illustrates how good design can pack a lot of function into a compact space. Double-duty furniture and efficient layout maximise the usable space in the room.

"A kitchen these days doesn't have to be big," she says.

"If you need a table, you can pull one out. There are storage units that pull out to become stools and have room inside for cushions or a stepladder. It's about reducing the space down to a minimum."

They had generation Y residents in mind when designing the room, with their particular way of living and working. "These kids work and it's all about technology for them," O'Connor says. "They don't have a TV and a computer, they have one [device]. Or a phone and a camera, they have one. So their space needs to fit those requirements."

Also increasingly important to people now is the need for sustainable materials in their homes. Heidi Pronk and Neil Mackenzie, of Mackenzie Pronk Architects, created their exhibit, Nest, to be as carbon neutral as possible. The courtyard design has a mix of re-used and recyclable materials, along with new saplings to capture the carbon. Each visitor is given a card containing a seed they can take home and plant.

"The base of the Japanese garden is made from crushed concrete that's waste from building sites," Pronk says. "The timber is all recycled oregon."

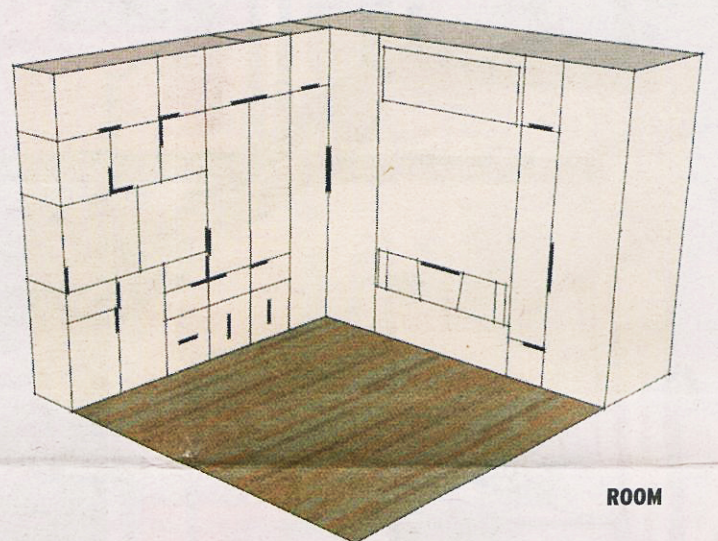
The idea is to show people what can be achieved with a little lateral thinking. "It just requires a shift in how you source materials. You have to search out the places that supply things to you."

When it comes to sustainable design, there has been a wider understanding, but there is still a long way to go. In particular, people need to look to the longer term when planning their homes. "You need to design for longevity," Pronk says. "It's no use making anything at all if it doesn't suit your future needs or goes out of fashion."

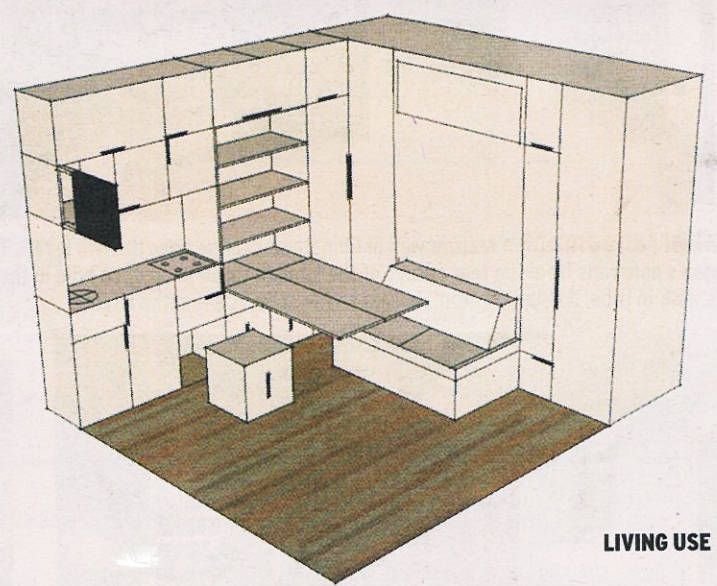
And there needs to be even more understanding that super-sized spaces aren't the only way to live.

"The idea of a house having five bathrooms, so no one has to share, should change," she says. "There's no social ability to share now. Perhaps we should consider spaces to be good quality spaces."

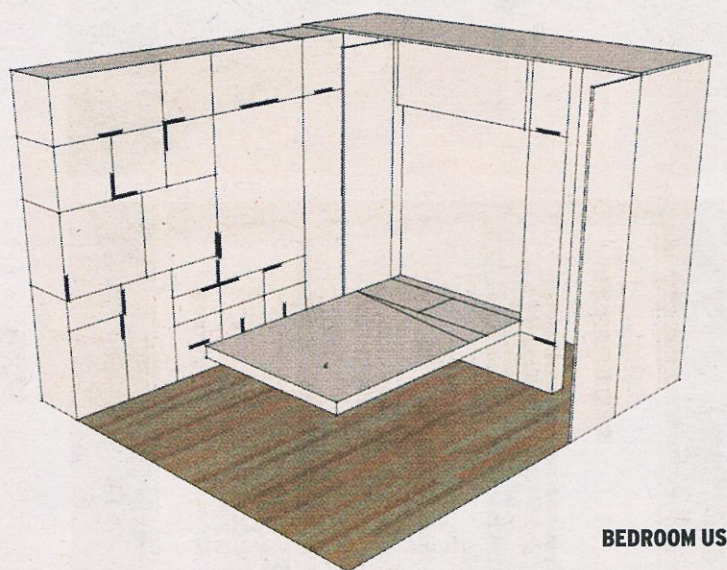
Sustainable Style exhibition, part of Decoration + Design Sydney, Sydney Exhibition Centre, February 6-8. See www.decoratordesign.com.au.



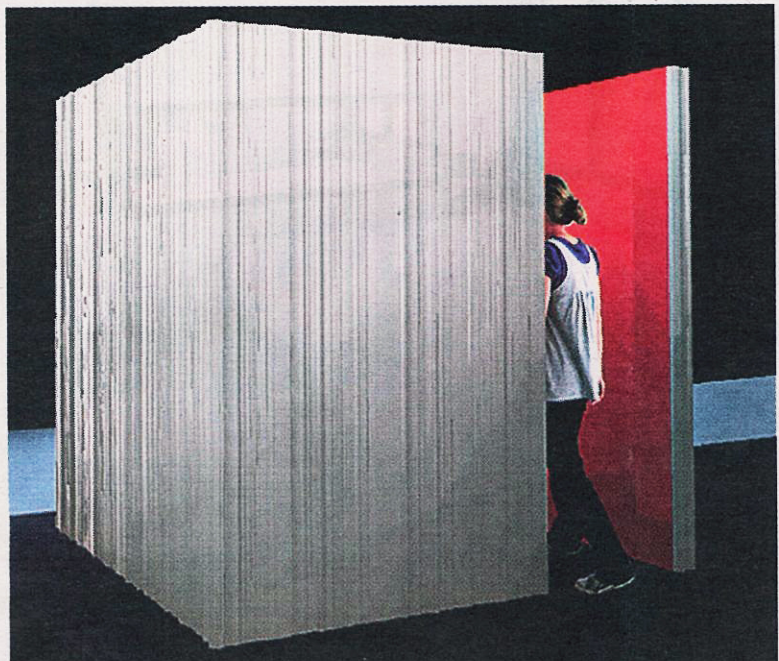
ROOM



LIVING USE



BEDROOM USE



Control the heat Tribe Studio's Ecobox uses plantation timbers.

Apartment living These sketches of Enviroana Studio's Micro Maisonette demonstrate multi-use design for small spaces.