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- Cameron Rosen



GOING GREEN

Rising to the challenge of being eco-friendly means considering both Australian homeowners' back pockets and Mother Earth.

ENERGY-EFFICIENT homes require clever, meticulous design and careful specification, all of which will create a comfortable building that's also cost-effective to live in. Today, playing a part in sustaining our environment can be incorporated into the home. The challenge is to reduce the demand for energy and water, while at the same time maintaining quality of life. Therefore, the building industry has a substantial role in limiting the nation's environmental footprint.

A current Sydney project involving four families, four architects and a builder in the suburb of Rose Bay is the development of four sustainable, eco-friendly houses that fit these requirements. This project is aptly named 'The Eco-Challenge' – a concept delivered by Cameron Rosen, the owner of Australian Living, a sustainable-building management company. The houses range from 7 to 8 stars for thermal efficiency – equivalent to Association of Building Sustainability Assessors (ABSA).

The Eco-Challenge is Australian Living's first sustainable development. The project aims to apply knowledge of sustainable design to construct a home that, according to Cameron, uses three principles: 'Sustainability is front of mind when designing, together with thermal comfort and material choice'. "The Australian building industry is progressively incorporating sustainable building practices into design and construction," states Cameron. "Australian Living vets sustainable suppliers and works with them in an open and transparent manner."

While suppliers are beginning to provide a sustainable choice for homeowners, generating community involvement can be difficult considering the substantial investment of time and initial up-front costs. "As a part of Australian Living's promotion of the sustainable building

industry, heightening community awareness is a focus," states Cameron. "Consumers appreciate tangible products that they can relate to, which in turn gives them confidence to build sustainably."

Forging community partnerships also requires a strong network of supporters. "The Eco-Challenge has non-monetary support from the University of New South Wales, Ray White Double Bay, Waverley Council, Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA), and Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA)," asserts Cameron. "Suppliers to the project so far have also shown considerable support and praised the work being done by Australian Living."

The question of whether sustaining the environment is worth the cost is often debated by homeowners considering whether to 'go green'. The initiative of building and designing sustainable homes has become a significant focus on a national scale, with the government offering a number of rebates to encourage this environmental premise.

The Australian federal government currently provides the following sustainability rebates:

- The Home Insulation Program provides assistance of up to \$1,200 to install ceiling insulation. The assistance is available to eligible owner-occupiers, landlords and tenants.
- The Australian Government is offering a rebate of \$1,600 to install a solar hot-water system or \$1,000 to install a heat pump hot-water system.
- The Australian Government has devised the Green Loans scheme as a way to tackle climate change. The program aims to assist homeowners in installing energy-efficient and water-saving products around the home, providing ►



Home Sustainability Assessments and interest-free loans of up to \$10,000.

- The government has a rebate scheme for the purchase and installation of a rainwater tank or permanent grey-water treatment system. Homeowners can benefit up to \$500 from this initiative.

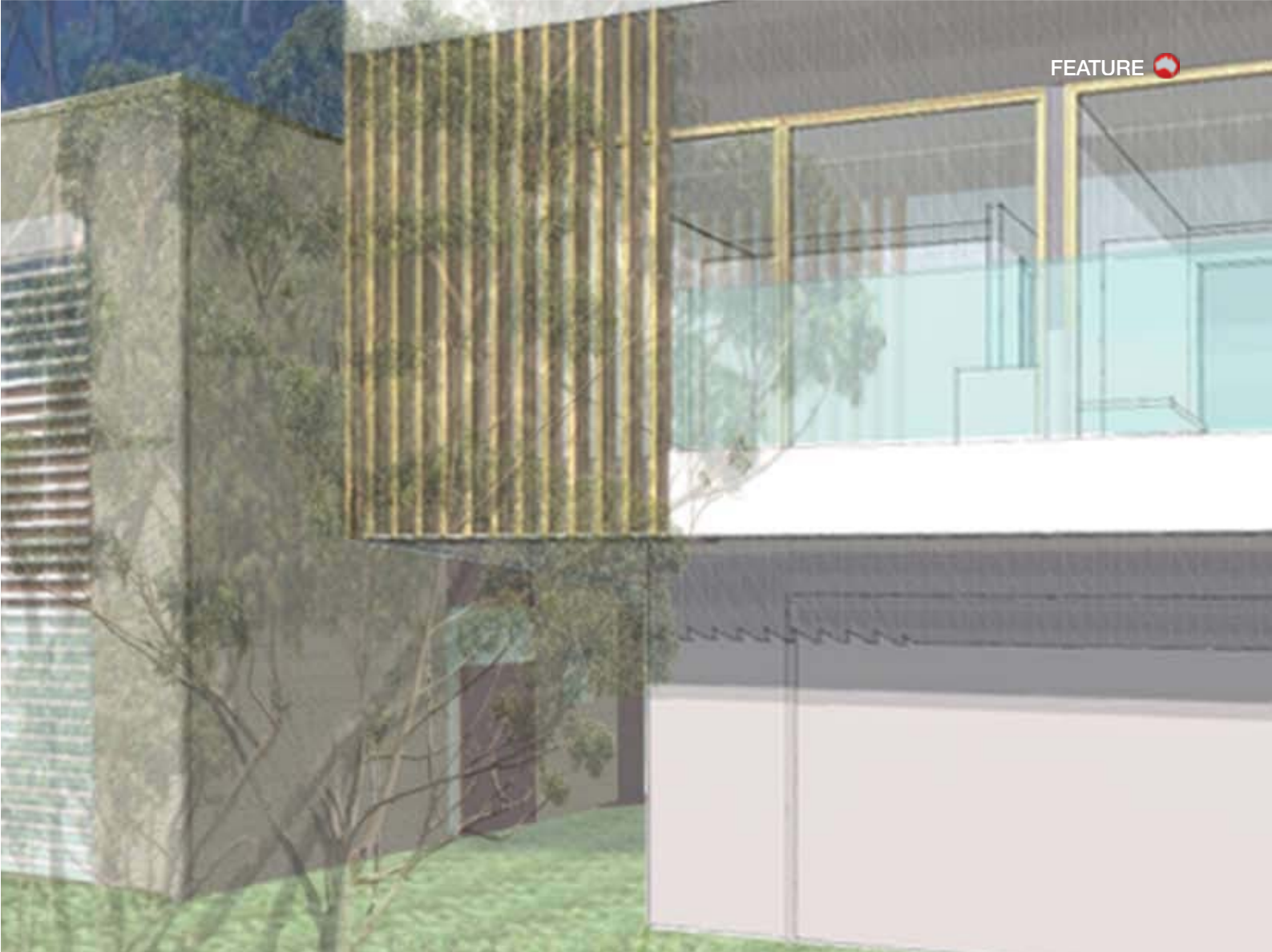
If homeowners cannot be convinced by the range of government rebates, Cameron believes there are a number of other benefits that can be achieved through the design of a sustainable house. More importantly, Australian Living is proving that it can design and construct a sustainable home for the same cost as a traditional home. “Benefits of building sustainably include energy savings; you can control your environment through passive design so you don’t feel too hot or too cold, and have a healthier home,” explains Cameron. “A sustainable home, for the most part, alleviates traditional house sickness such as condensation in the roof and mouldy walls, and reduces the carbon footprint.”

With increased interest in affordable sustainable living, another company with the experience and passion for the environment is Eco System Homes. The company motto – ‘It’s your home, it’s your choice’ – resonates with the community, offering affordable, sustainable living for everyday people. Jeff Hilditch, Managing Director of Eco System Homes, understands the

importance of promoting access to alternative building methods on both a national and global scale. This ideal was realised through researching the best environmentally friendly products and merging them with contemporary architectural designs.

Like Australian Living, Eco System Homes has a strong focus on the community. “Our goal is to build people homes that make them happy to be in,” states Jeff. “We spent years developing our design and building system so we can provide highly designed architectural solutions that make the most of every house site. It is our design system and philosophy that allow us to provide this level of service for much less than a typical architect.” It is by these principles and values that Eco Systems conducts its business.

The company’s strong community focus extends through the idea of neighbourhood interaction incorporated into the building design. Jeff credits Eco System Homes’ architect Mark Buczynski with playing a significant role in revolutionary designs. Mark has just completed designing a new RV active-lifestyle village on the Fraser Coast, a model for the future with a design that integrates front and rear decks. “The reintroduction of the front deck is intended to encourage a sense of community, bringing a social space to the public side of the house,” asserts Jeff. “History has shown that neighbours socialise more when they are using the front yard.”



Garnering a positive neighbourhood response means advertising the environmental achievements throughout the community. Australian Living has billboards at the front of The Eco-Challenge site with advertisements from sustainable suppliers allowing the community to see which companies are involved. Eco System Homes similarly works to promote a positive community response. “We have attended a number of green events and home shows with 2 to 1 interest compared to standard-design homes,” says Jeff. “The website receives over 70 hits a day, with interest in greener homes.” The increased interest can be attributed to Eco System Homes guaranteeing energy-efficiency ratings of between 6 and 8.5 stars, which means the money homeowners save on household power fills their back pockets.

Community appreciation, coupled with a focus on the site and orientation of a home, reflects how Eco System Homes stands apart from industry competitors in its attention to detail and understanding of homeowners’ needs. “We strive for self-sufficiency, so we are up to date on the latest sewage treatment, grey-water, permaculture, and a variety of green-power solutions,” Jeff explains. “The combination of energy-efficient house design, water-efficient fixtures, and intelligently designed green-power solutions – that is the ‘Eco System’ in Eco System Homes.”

Reducing energy consumption over a long period of time and providing quality housing is an ideal that Eco

System achieves on a daily basis. The company’s success means that Eco System Homes has a number of major developments at present. The company has multiple developments underway in the Mission Beach, Bowen, Cooloola and Logan areas, and the aforementioned Fraser Coast.

Understanding environmental concerns continues to be a priority for the building industry. Adapting to environmental changes requires planning and commitment from the companies involved. Australian Living and Eco System Homes are two standout examples of successful initiatives which have taken a strong stance on positive environmental policies. Both companies have succeeded in extending to the community their knowledge and passion for sustainable design, a reflection of the key players involved behind the scenes – the architects and builders.

Going green is not always the most convenient choice, but the excuse of ‘it is just for environmentalists and the wealthy’ is no longer relevant. Making choices to benefit the environment has become less expensive and more easily accessible than ever before. There is a worldwide focus on preservation; and while the community knows how to recycle and reduce waste, it is also something we tend to forget. So, whether homeowners install a rainwater tap, or simply turn off the air conditioning when they leave the home, being environmentally friendly doesn’t mean burning a hole in your back pocket. 