

# Keener and greener

Once considered hippie chic, sustainable design is now a mainstay of Australian architecture, writes **Becky Barker**.

INTERIOR colour trends change with the seasons but the future of Australian building remains firmly green, according to some of Sydney's leading architects.

Unlike a decade or so ago, most builders and designers are naturally incorporating eco-smart principles and products into their creations, architect and the presenter of *Grand Designs Australia*, Peter Maddison, says. "It is a given, you know, 'What have you done here that's considerate of the world we live in?' And it is now embedded in every project," he says. Man-made materials were regularly used in the 1980s and 1990s but renovators and house-builders are turning to warmer materials such as timber and recycled products that complement the earth-friendly mantra.

"I think there is a very strong movement back to real materials, tactile materials that connect to our generations or connect to our DNA... water, stone, sunlight," Maddison says. "There is an innate desire to have that fresh air, touch natural materials."

Making environmentally sound choices has become easier since the introduction of eco-labelling by non-profit groups such as Good Environmental Choice Australia, which launched in 2001. This group helps people choose products and services that are better for the environment and implements standards and tools against which they can be certified. In addition, the Master Builders Association has launched initiatives such as Green

Living, which offers training in sustainable construction.

These changes, with government measures such as phasing out incandescent light bulbs and the push for a carbon tax, have propelled a truckload of new energy-saving products onto the market. "I think it's a very exciting time with the inventiveness that people have - I'm doing straw bale houses, I'm doing rammed earth, I am doing timber, which is sourced locally and carefully and being used precisely," Maddison says of his latest projects. Other innovative new building ideas involve invisible technology such as light-sensitive and fire-resistant glass and solar panels built into the roof fabric. An architect with Dunn + Hillam, Jonathan Temple, says sustainable building products are more readily available but some are still too expensive. He particularly likes the latest structural insulation panels. "We recently built a house in Alice Springs with SIPs that do the job of wall structure and insulation - removing the need for additional products," says Temple, who presents one of his projects in the *Grand Designs Australia Live* "Our Houses" section.

The slim, lightweight panels are now being made from biodegradable materials derived from soybeans and corn. Maddison, a carbon tax supporter, says such measures are essential to protect the planet in the long run.

"There needs to be responsibility," he says. "We need to be answerable [for] what we are doing."

Built to last... an eco-smart beach house designed by Peter Maddison.  
Photo: Rhiannon Slater

