

The beach house, the timber shack, the country cottage – a holiday home, an escape out of the big smoke, comes in all shapes and sizes.

But one thread is common. As we appreciate the true luxury of a getaway, respite, time away and disconnecting from the everyday, the key ingredients of what makes a great holiday home, regardless of location or owner, become similar, and deceptively simple.

Melbourne-based architect Rob Mills says it all starts with great land: “Our mantra is ‘Great land plus great architecture, interiors, and technology give you great living’.

“You’re aiming to find land with privacy, amazing views, great quality of air, preferably a fantastic green landscape that you can walk into and be cool, shaded by trees. Once we’ve got the land, we then discover what our clients want to build – often they’ll be searching for something that’s really unique.”

And Mills certainly knows unique. His firm Robert Mills Architects and Interior Designers creates residential living for what he refers to as the “top 0.01 per cent of Australia’s population” (by wealth) and those projects are luxurious, contemporary, streamlined, minimalist, industrial,

individual. When he built the sculpturally striking Ocean House on the Great Ocean Road in Lorne, in regional Victoria, he was aiming to create a sensory experience, using beautiful materials and fabrics to achieve an effortless, serene place to unwind. “Ultimately, we wanted it to be unadorned and very simple,” he says.

And the best bit? The holiday home is in fact Mills’s own, and is available for rental.

Finished three years ago, Ocean House originally had far more modest ambitions. “It was just going to be a timber shack for us and then it changed to be something much more substantial because the Victorian fires came through, the regulations changed, and I had to go to concrete,” he explains.

“And when I went to concrete it became much, much more expensive to build. Then I thought of renting it out for the first time, and it’s been such a great experience for us.”

Why? “It feels good to be able to share the house, to be honest, believe it or not. And for an architect it means that people have access to your work that they wouldn’t ordinarily have, so it’s good from that point of view also.”

With unassuming exteriors from

the street level, Ocean House is a multi-level glass, timber and concrete pavilion that delights upon entering and with further discovery.

Mills says the purpose of a great holiday home is to be taken into a new world. “You don’t want to reproduce what you live in,” he explains. “You want to go somewhere that gives you a completely different experience, gives you a summer experience and a winter experience. It needs to be both. The mistake most people make with beach houses is they’re freezing in winter; they don’t put proper heating in. Ocean House



BREAK AWAY

EASY LIVING AND A PARED-BACK INTERIOR PALETTE ARE THE INGREDIENTS IN THIS STUNNING BEACH HOUSE, WRITES **KATARINA KROSLAKOVA**.



OPPOSITE:
The view across Loutit Bay; North Lorne beach is outside the front door.
THIS PAGE: Ocean House exploits raw concrete and polished timber.



has hydraulic heating, so it can be freezing outside or raining and you still feel fantastic.”

Mills adds it’s all about easy living. “Well, that concrete floor is impossible to damage, so you live on it in quite a relaxed way because you know it doesn’t matter what you do,” he explains.

Another key ingredient is unity between land, architecture and interiors. Mills says too often competing ideas and egos lead to a finished project that isn’t unified and complete. “We start with the architecture, but the way we dress the interior is all conceived as one thing and each object belongs beside the other or together with the rest. And that gives you a complete environment that makes sense; it’s not split; it’s not schizophrenic.”

Mills used a consolidated approach on the interior, saying the last thing your eyes want to do on holiday is be overwhelmed by detail and objects fighting for attention.

“Essentially, I want your eye to just travel over the space, uninterrupted. If you use a variety of colours or materials you are at risk of creating that staccato effect. But if you have a singular tonal background, your eye just flows.

“Everyone paints everything white,” he continues. “It’s actually a bit of a problem. It’s too hard to live with. So we went grey; I love grey, it’s really rewarding. You won’t believe how calming it is. So with the timber ceiling, we rubbed chalk into it to bring it into the same family as the grey stucco wall colour.”

Ultimately, Mills recalls the best piece of advice he received from his grandfather, who was a professor of law and vice-chancellor of Melbourne University. Mills had to write an essay on why he wanted to be an architect to get into the course. “I asked him, ‘What do you reckon?’ And he said, ‘Architecture is all about designing spaces for people.’ And that’s really guided me because he highlighted that it is actually about the people.

“I’m like a tailor. We’re very particular about the clothes we wear; it’s the same with a building. You can’t design something for a client that they’re not comfortable ‘wearing’. You have to put yourself to one side as an architect. You’ve got a duty to really understand who they are and what they are because they are building their own house.

“I get to build what I want when I do my own projects.” x