



The Batchelor Pad project comes in at just \$170,000.



PETER FLETCHER

PETER FLETCHER OF THE ARCHITECTS STUDIO, DARWIN, HAS WON MULTIPLE AWARDS FOR HIS LOW-BUDGET DESIGN OF A HOME IN BATCHELOR, TWO HOURS FROM DARWIN AT THE GATEWAY TO LITCHFIELD NATIONAL PARK. INTEGRATED INTO ITS TROPICAL SETTING, THE RESIDENCE, KNOWN AS THE BATCHELOR PAD, HAS SET NEW STANDARDS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING. HE SPEAKS TO KELLIE HARPLEY.

What were the major challenges on The Batchelor Pad project?

Being able to create a very special home for our clients in our challenging environment, for a budget of just \$170,000. We introduced quite a new way of putting buildings together, at least in the context of the residential market. We effectively applied industrial building techniques.

What are the fundamental aspects of its design?

For cost reasons we abandoned traditional timber framing methods. We went back to the cladding, or skin, of the building and how far we could stretch the support system while meeting the NT's cyclone wind requirements.

We optimised the spanning capacity of our cladding materials while minimising the amount of structure and, consequently, the cost. The cladding is single-skin with large parts of the frame exposed internally.

There is no glass in the building but when you look at it, it's very transparent. I used polycarbonate, which is beginning to be used in industrial buildings. It is a lot less expensive than glass, you can create a window at no more cost than if you continued the steel cladding.

More than 60 per cent of the walls are polycarbonate and most of those walls are openable so it's effectively an open pavilion in a garden setting.

The polycarbonate comes in tinted variations with heat reflective properties. By using that in areas that get exposure to sunlight we have achieved good energy ratings.

There is no joinery in the building. In the kitchen we used flat-pack steel cupboards designed for industrial workshops. They are simple, pressed metal cupboards, very sturdy and painted bright red so they provide colour and atmosphere. The kitchen cost just under \$2000.

How does the building incorporate its environment?

The owners wanted to integrate the garden into the building and vice versa, that's why we went for a high level of transparency.

Even the bathroom walls open up to the garden. There is lots of shade from the trees and an extensive roof that overhangs well beyond the walls. Even though you are getting all this lovely natural light, the walls and interior are almost always in the shade.

Ninety per cent of the time the owners leave the polycarbonate areas open. The house is not air conditioned; even at the hottest times they can open the house up and get beautiful breezes.

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