



AUSTRALIA'S LACK of affordable housing has become a big issue over the past few decades, but increasing efforts are being made to address it. The challenge is to create affordable places to live, while avoiding the social problems.

According to Rhonan O'Brien, managing director at **Mode Design's** Brisbane office, designers can play a vital role in alleviating this problem. Mode has worked with the Brisbane Housing Company (BHC) on 12 projects over six years, and has another five in the pipeline.

O'Brien says the firm is trying to design buildings that respond to their sub-tropical climate and surrounding built environment, while providing comfortable and safe spaces for residents.

"We use this same vision when designing for the Brisbane Housing Company, in addition to fostering positive communities," he says.

"We aim to create spaces that people want to live in, and a lot of BHC tenants spend a greater percentage of their day in these units, so getting the essentials right is critical.

"With BHC, we must ask ourselves, is this solution the best value for money? Is it robust enough? What are the maintenance issues and how does it add to the project?"

With the constant focus on creating an inviting place for people to live at an affordable price, O'Brien says the firm has discovered it is often the smallest features that can have the greatest impact on the liveability of a building.

"One small innovation we are quite proud of is a timber gate entry located off the main circulation to the apartments at Ramsgate Residences (part of the award winning Kelvin Grove Urban Village).

"The system has two doors, one a typical solid door and the other is a simple, slatted timber door that provides a security barrier while allowing cool breezes to pass through, which is essential in our sub-tropical climate.

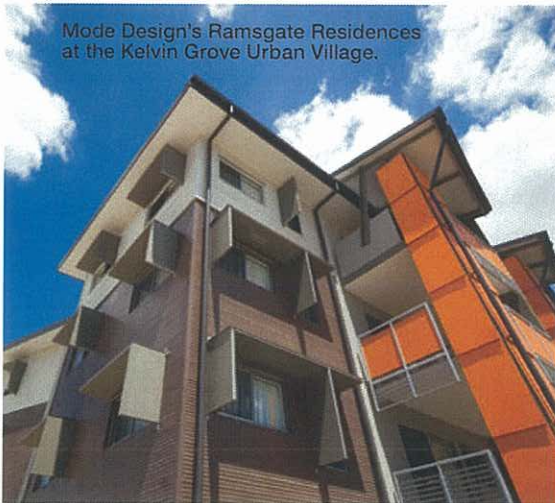
"The space between the doors can also be used by residents to store bicycles or other things that they might not want to have in their apartments. Each time I visit Ramsgate I am pleasantly surprised by how successfully this system works."

The firm has also found that the communal and outdoor spaces, for either socialising or relaxation, are an essential element to the overall success of affordable housing buildings.

One of the great aspects of his job, O'Brien adds, is seeing the positive affects a building can have within the community.

"Each project I have worked on is unique in its own way and finding the ideal solution for the specific site, client and climate is very rewarding.

"It also helps to work with great staff, clients and builders who are all passionate about improving our built environment."



Mode Design's Ramsgate Residences at the Kelvin Grove Urban Village.



RHONAN O'BRIEN

NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATION, THE BRISBANE HOUSING COMPANY (BHC), PROVIDES 'APPROPRIATE, SECURE AND AFFORDABLE' RENTAL ACCOMMODATION FOR LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS. **MODE DESIGN** HAS WORKED WITH BHC FOR SIX YEARS TO CREATE AFFORDABLE HOUSING THAT IS A PLEASURE TO LIVE IN. **KELLIE HARPLEY** SPEAKS TO MODE'S RHONAN O'BRIEN