



Grand Designs

It is hardly surprising that such a stunning location as Hamilton Island has provided the inspiration for some of the most spectacular structures in the country. Sensitive to the environment, embracing and harmonising with the elements, these buildings compliment their surroundings and bring their own contribution to this island paradise.

STORY ROBERT MCMILLAN PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREA FRANCOLINI,
RENATO D'ETTORRE ARCHITECTS

For a student of architecture or even an enthusiastic admirer, an afternoon spent driving or walking around Hamilton Island is time well spent. If only from a 'wishful thinking' perspective, the island boasts some of the most spectacular buildings in Australia and indeed, many would have to rate on a world ranking, such are their extraordinary designs, set against a backdrop that never fails to inspire.

Of its 740 hectare land mass, more than 70 percent of Hamilton Island is maintained in its natural state, and the ideology when it comes to development and building on the Whitsunday island is that structures must be sympathetic to their surroundings to maintain an all-important balance and harmony. No jarring structures allowed.

Indeed, outstanding architecture has become a feature of Hamilton Island, as both private homes and holiday retreats, as well as the newest world class facilities like Qualia and the iconic Hamilton Island Yacht Club are testament to the importance the Oatley family place on striking architectural design that compliments rather than competes with the surrounding environment.

Although the designs can differ enormously from home to home, Hamilton Island has its own distinctive style. The work of master architect, Chris Beckingham (the man behind many of the glorious private homes, as well as Qualia and the Hamilton Island Golf Club clubhouse), is instantly recognisable through

his use of local materials, the combination of stone and wood together creating a feeling of solidity and oneness with the environment.

Keeping it simple and uncluttered and letting the landscape tell the story was the basis of his design philosophy and the approach he used when asked to design Qualia.

This was exactly the quality Bob Oatley was after in the unique resort property, and a design ethos he was so impressed with, he had Chris Beckingham design his own home on Hamilton Island.

It's difficult to actually pinpoint the style, but Beckingham is happy with that:

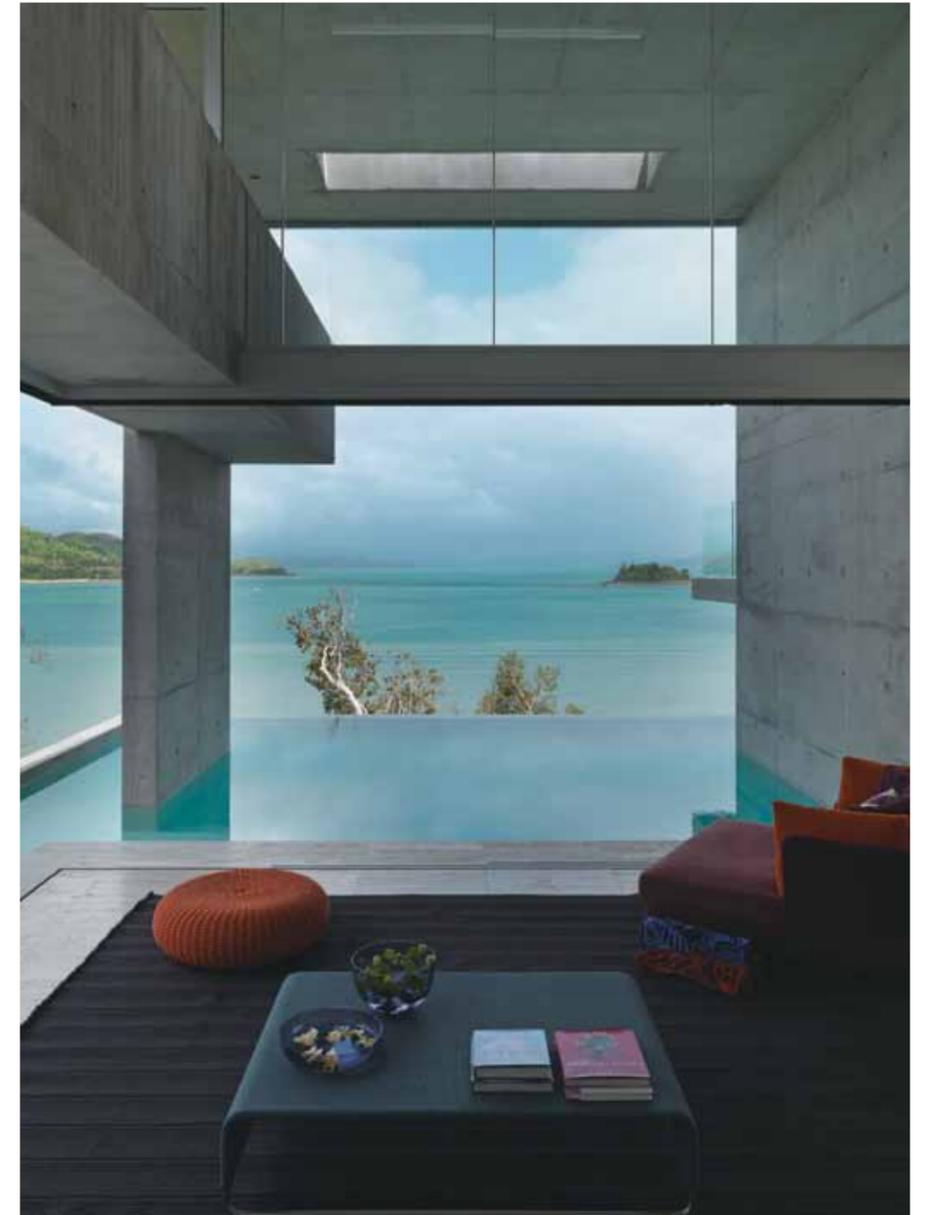
"If it's hard to describe the architecture, that's good," he says. "That means that the building

and design don't dominate or detract from the views and the location."

The striking entrance to the Long Pavilion at Qualia is a perfect case in point, the eye is drawn through the room and straight out to view of the Coral Sea behind – the building elements effectively framing the picture. That is just the 'wow factor' Bob Oatley was after, yet the design is a study in simplicity.

Other simple elements from as far away as New Guinea were also employed to great effect. Bob Oatley spent many years working in New Guinea in his earlier days, and both he and Beckingham share a fondness for the place and its architecture.

The open design of the New Guinea Club



(Preceding page) Azuris takes full advantage of the climate. (Clockwise from top) The entrance to qualia's Long Pavillion never fails to impress. Solis brings the outside in. Solis is an inspiring property at home with its surroundings. qualia's warm natural materials marry with the landscape.

in Rabaul, played a part, given that in spite of having no air conditioning it was the coolest building in New Guinea.

"The open design, allowing the cross flow of air ... that was incorporated into the design," Bob Oatley recalls.

The result is a very special place that never fails to leave an impression on anyone visiting the property. Bob and the Oatley family are on record as saying they couldn't be happier with the final building, and even the very quietly-spoken Beckingham admits it is "... the culmination of his career."

Taking a completely different approach, yet still creating a masterpiece that seems perfectly in sync with its surroundings, is the

stunning property Solis. Sydney architect Renato D'Ettorre was commissioned to create a dwelling that would make the most of the breathtaking vistas and tropical climate. The result is a smooth, modern design that remains sympathetic to its surroundings – impressive in its execution, and yet not dominating or competing with its surroundings in any way.

"For a site like that, you really don't need too much of a detailed brief," says Renato D'Ettorre of the Solis genesis.

"It's really about responding to the environment, to the climate and to the topography," he says. "The site always has to rule, and guide you to what the house or the architecture should be."

Certainly, the topography of the site played a significant role in the final design, with a slope in the order of 30 to 40 degrees, the unavoidable under cross space was utilised for two of the three bedrooms, as well as for the plant room.

"With a sloping site you always get under cross spaces," says D'Ettorre "and you either expose them and have the property on stilts, or you make use of them."

"We decided to use them and place two of the bedrooms there."

This positioning in fact puts them right under the stunning swimming pool, which not only serves a structural role according to Renato, but has the dual role of providing additional insulation to these rooms – not to mention the

superb views.

A combination of concrete and block work, with extensive use of glass, Solis seems to morph from the surrounding landscape, a less formal finish used on the concrete for a more textured result and much softer feel.

"The colour and the material relates to the surrounding setting, and it (concrete) is robust and has the thermal properties to keep the house cool in summer and warm in winter."

This choice of material also facilitated another key design element, that of the building being 'transparent'. Being able to open up to the island climate and become one with the outdoors was an important consideration, and the result is a dwelling that you can actually see

through from any angle.

"We eliminated all periphery walls," says D'Ettorre. "Only certain walls are there and these are for structural reasons and obviously for a certain level of privacy."

Aside from capturing the outlook from all living spaces, this approach allows for maximum airflow in the tropical climate and from an aesthetic perspective, means that minimal concrete was required in the upper levels of the building, giving it a 'lighter' feel.

The result, from any angle is stunning – a perfect 'platform' from which to enjoy the breathtaking views.

Not surprisingly, Solis has collected a raft of awards, from the Robin Dods Award for

residential architecture, to House of the Year (Central Queensland region) from the Australian Institute of Architects.

Indeed, another of Renato D'Ettorre's designs in the same area of the island, Azuris, is nominated for a number of designs this year. This three bedroom dwelling incorporates projecting roofs' creating gentle transitions between the elements and the interior. Once again sympathetic to the climate and surrounds, the walls and devices used for shade are easily opened to bring the outside in, as well as improving airflow and reducing the need for air conditioning or artificial lighting.



A unique design that seems to morph from the shoreline and anchor the marina. The iconic Hamilton Island Yacht Club leaves a lasting impression.



Hamilton Island's iconic Yacht Club represents a completely different style of structure, but one that still celebrates its surrounds. Architect Walter Barda's flowing design anchors the whole marina precinct, drawing inspiration from the sea and sailing, with the building seeming to emerge from the water's edge.

"I sensed an opportunity that the yacht club project should celebrate and enhance its site," remembers Barda of his first visit to the location perched on the edge of Dent Passage.

"I remember Bob Oatley's enthusiasm for 'sails and water' as a starting point for the imagination."

Bringing together all of the elements that make the island so special and mark it as a unique location, Barda describes his ultimate interpretation as:

"... a celebration of tropical, marine life and boat form and the drama of yachts taking on the natural forces of wind and water," says Barda of the design which has become one of the most distinctive and celebrated buildings in the region.

Realising such an ambitious design was no mean feat; conditions peculiar to the area were a major consideration in the construction process, such as the five metre daily tides and the condition of the ground at the site.

Yet, despite practical challenges, the building with its sail-like roof 'opening up' and presiding over the marina has become a reality.

The unique composition manages to make a bold statement, yet sits with the surrounding land and sea scape. The daring elements, unusual angles and shapes employed, first capture the eye and then guide it around the structure.

The nautical inspirations are obvious, yet other facets are more organic and draw on the sea and its moving changing shape.

"The imagery of the building provokes many analogies, yet the ambitious perspectives of the building will keep us guessing as to what it all means, but hopefully strike a chord of emotion about this beautiful place," says Barda.

The natural beauty of this island and region are a given, and designs like these have used these existing elements and 'natural architecture' in their own grand designs. ■

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