

# IN THE RAW

Exposed concrete and a monochromatic palette lend a relaxed feel to a beach house on the Mornington Peninsula.

PHOTOGRAPHS EARL CARTER WORDS CARLI PHILIPS



THIS PAGE At the top of the stairs is an early 19th-century 'Fern Figure' from Scott Livesey Galleries. Eno 'Maya' vases on landing. OPPOSITE PAGE A vintage 'Carrona' chair by Jon Gensen from Shapiro Auctioneers sits in front of a custom-made cabinet with concrete top. Painting is *Untitled* by George Tjungurrayi. Vases from Hub and Dinosaur Designs.

"A BEACH HOUSE IS A PLACE THAT CAN OFFER ALL THE SOPHISTICATION AND CONVENIENCE OF MODERN LIFE BUT IS CLOAKED IN CASUAL DRESS."

THESE PAGES Living Divani 'Extrasoft' sofa and 'Menhir' coffee table in the living room. Painting (left) is by Makinti Napanangka and (right) by George Tjungurrayi. 'A Good Slit Drum' early-20th century sculpture (far left), and Lynne Edey 'Head' sculpture (right) are both from Scott Livesey Galleries. Candeles Mum Milano outsize candles on floor.

Modernist architect and award-winning interior designer Robert Mills has handed over the key to a new seaside weekender he recently created for a Melbourne couple and their four young children. In doing so, he unlocked the secret to what makes a successful holiday home.

"A beach house is a place that can offer all the sophistication and convenience of modern life but is cloaked in casual dress," says Robert. "It has all the gadgets and electronics that inner-city houses have, but is dressed in a comfortable way that makes the people who don't own it feel as if they belong."

The owners – a lawyer and ex-property consultant – were familiar with Robert's work as they previously lived in a house in Melbourne that had been designed by him.

Located in Sorrento, on the tip of Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, the house is set inland with views across the hinterland. The brief was for a relaxed yet durable dwelling that could host expanding numbers of family and friends. "This house is very much that," says Robert. "It has two of everything: two living rooms; enough bedrooms for two families; plus acoustic separation between where the kids play and the adults can enjoy a glass of wine."

All five bedrooms occupy the first floor while the ground level accounts for the overflow, with custom-made daybeds. The voluminous space is the largest living area Robert has ever designed, yet it possesses a calm intimacy enhanced by the use of relaxed furniture such as Living Divani's 'Extrasoft' sofa and 'Fatboy' beanbags from Hub. The open-plan kitchen and living is casually divided by a dining table from local wood specialists Lowe Furniture, with chairs by Italian brand Molteni&C.

What the house does best though, is to create a seamless flow between indoors and out. Glazed sliding walls open onto a north-facing terrace where there's a swimming pool, towering fireplace and alfresco dining area that's drenched in sun during summer. The same scale, materials and colours used inside have been duplicated outside, so that when the doors are open, these two areas expand to become one fluid, generous entertaining zone.

The client insisted on "concrete, concrete, concrete" to ensure the house survives well into the next 50 years, and that "everything be solid, weatherproof and able to last the test of time". The raw, unclad walls were left exposed to serve as the home's muted backdrop. It was Robert's admiration of Sydney-based landscape designer Annie Wilkes – who favours grey in her work – that inspired the monochromatic colour palette of honed basalt floors, pale ash ceilings and dove grey carpet in the bedrooms.

The restrained interior gives a sense of serenity and composure, "creating solidarity and simplicity. It's a peaceful experience ... nothing stands out, nothing jars within the space." This unadorned environment serves as the perfect background for antique sculptures, and vivid works by Aboriginal artists.

A feeling of understated luxury was achieved, in part, by using wood to complement the concrete. Imperfections were left in the surfaces; oak floorboards were hand hewn and given a patina for texture, while natural flaws remain in the concrete benchtops.

"I strongly believe that the interior makes a home – the texture and colour of the objects, the furniture and the artwork complete the story," says Robert. No wonder the owners now spend more time here than at their city residence. ■

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## SORRENTO HOME

THIS PAGE Deer throw on sofa. A splash of colour in the room comes from the artwork by George Tjungurrayi on the kitchen bench.  
Living Divani 'Extrasoft' sofa and 'Menhir' coffee table. Hair hide rug from Hub. OPPOSITE PAGE White stools are from Parterre. Copper coin sculpture on dining table is from Hub.





**SPEED READ**

A Melbourne couple commissioned architect Robert Mills to design a relaxed, informal weekend home on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. + The house is generously sized to allow for many visitors and offers copious bedrooms, and several living areas for children and adults. + Raw concrete walls feature both inside and out with a monochrome palette of basalt floors, ash ceilings and grey carpet. + The restrained interior promotes a serene mood.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP B&B Italia 'Springtime' daybeds beside the pool. Texture is an important element in the home. Rattan baskets from Hub sit on a concrete bench in the outdoor area. OPPOSITE PAGE Gandia Blasco 'Flat' outdoor sofas from Parterre in front of the fireplace.