



architecture 

New modular army

More than a kit home, the Happy Haus can be expanded, reduced or even moved thanks to its flexible nature

If you haven't heard of Happy Haus yet, you soon will. The brainchild of young gun property developer Toby Lewis, Happy Haus is a niche Brisbane-based business turning prefab into pretty fabulous. Since officially launching in early May, the company has already had more enquiries than it can handle, and from as far away as Dubai. Good PR helps, but if you don't have a point of difference there's not much point.

Happy Haus is attracting attention because it's changing the notion that prefabricated means "kit", commonly perceived as shoddy. But mind the use of terminology please – semantics hides a world of difference.

Toby is careful to point out that prefab is not the same as pre-made, which is what Toby likes to call his architecturally-designed modular homes.

"Typically, prefab or kit homes provide little more than the shell. With our [pre-made] houses, all you need is a fridge and furniture. The rest is finished and quality assured before it leaves the factory."

Pre-made, prefab ... whatever. Where does the architecture come in? He's not an architect but Toby appreciates innovative home design and was able to garner the support of well-known architectural firm Donovan Hill, which designed the prototype featured here. (Other architectural firms are collaborating on different designs.) Happy Haus was also able to get Hutchinson Builders on side to manufacture the homes in a custom-made factory just outside the city.

This Happy Haus example, nestled on a hilltop block on North Stradbroke Island, includes two of the three ranges in the Donovan Hill DHAN range: a Base, with a two-bedroom Expander pod. The Base is as the name suggests – it's the major pod that includes the service (kitchen, bathroom and laundry) and living areas, while an Expander adds on one, two or three bedrooms. Toby points out that the living room can double as a sleeping space. It's all about the flexibility.

"Happy Haus is a versatile product," Toby says. "Our modules

can be configured to suit different sites and family sizes. The use of the modules is not limited to the standard family home. In fact, there has been strong interest from small businesses and home renovators simply wanting extra space or something a little different."

The third range in the DHAN series is the Shed, which would become a covered outdoor area such as car parking, a deck or, as Toby says, an artist's studio – an idea he heard after one prospective client had looked at the pods for use as a creative space. When you look at the pods in situ, you can imagine any number of other scenarios in which a Happy Haus might fit.

And while this design looks simple, the end product involves complex considerations: construction in a matter of weeks, transportation from factory to site without extra on-site finishing, the use of lightweight yet durable materials.

"Without compromising design and space, Donovan Hill has created the range to a specific scale that enables delivery via truck and crane, saving time and money," Toby says. "Their designs are exciting but remain practical ... and that's important when designing a liveable and loveable home."

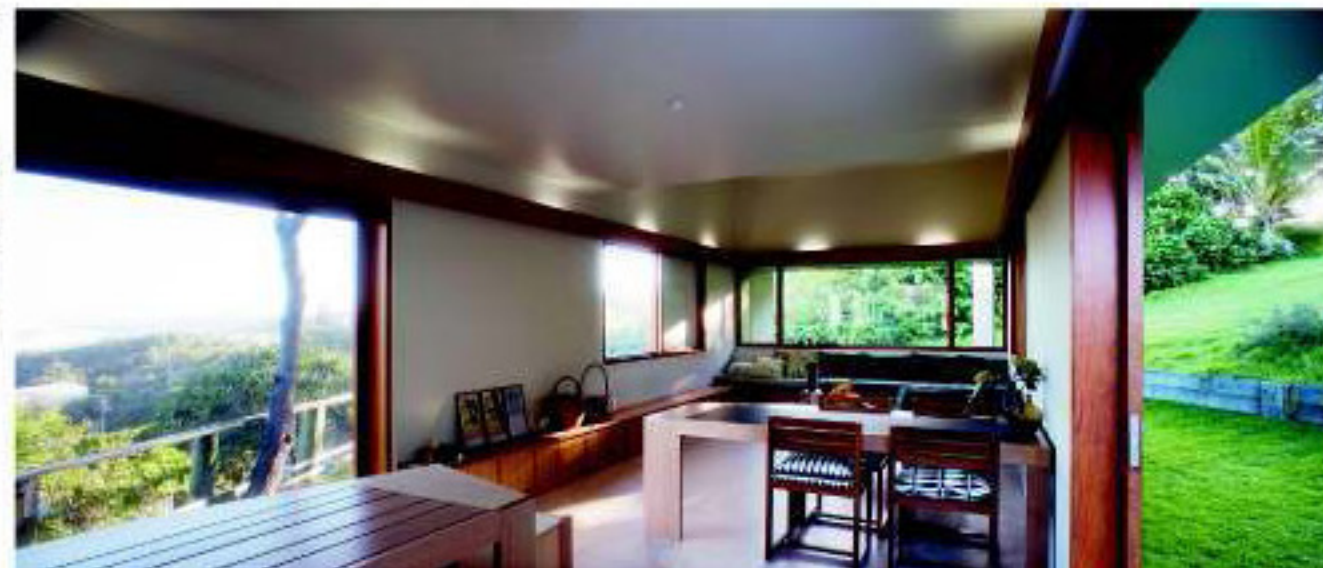
In its design statement, Donovan Hill says that its buildings respond to sustainability, affordability and transportability. The pods have off-white interiors, timber window and door frames, and timber pelmets used for lighting or hanging art or curtains. Plywood exteriors suit Australian environmental conditions.

When you can downsize or upsize your house without a major refurbishment, or move your entire home to another block (or interstate), the Happy Haus makes for a happy end.

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JUST ADD VIEWS ... large timber-framed windows and doors and a neutral colour scheme make the most of the spectacular outlook of this Happy Haus on a hill on North Stradbroke Island.

Photographs // Jon Linkine