



Some visitors come to Queensland purely to see its architecture — and Point Lookout is on their itinerary, writes ROBERT RIDDEL.

The Happy Haus pre-fabricated home by Donovan Hill Architecture situated on Lighthouse Hill Point Lookout.



Aquila at Point Lookout, by Riddel Architecture, featured in the GOMA exhibition.

Architecture Island

Recently, when the Queensland Government embarked on a marketing initiative to promote the State's creative industries, Point Lookout was identified as a place with more than its fair share of good architecture.

The Placemakers exhibition at GOMA in 2008 included no less than four Point Lookout houses. Subsequently, several journalists have sought out the place to write the story of what is going on here, because it is so different.

Cultural tourism has expanded to encompass contemporary architecture. While this may have existed in other coastal locations — such as Byron Bay, the northern beaches of Sydney, the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria or Yallingup in Western Australia — it is the relative density of quality buildings at Point Lookout that makes it so satisfying for seekers of good architecture.

The first wave of architects to leave their mark on the Island included Frank Salmon, Hal Davis and Peter Newell, all

who built houses for themselves.

Later Donald Spencer built at least three houses for clients while Brian Shelback, Duncan McPhee, Michael Kennedy, Ian Munro, Robert Collin, Chris Hills and Tim Gymer also built their own homes. More recently Brit Andresen and Peter O'Gorman's Mooloomba house received much attention, published in various international journals.

This house was featured in the GOMA exhibition, as were houses by Arkhefield, Riddel Architecture as well as work by

Jennifer Taylor and Jim Conner. Others to leave an architectural legacy have included Jeremy Salmon, Barry Reuter, Haig Beck, Rob Cottee, Shane Thompson, Brian Donovan and Timothy Hill, John Hockings, Alice Hampson, Troppo, Malcolm Middleton, Geoffrey Pie, Gabriel Poole, Larry Weston, Cathy Bullock and Nigel Brammer.

The Domain resort designed by Donovan Hill broke new ground by using the density of a former caravan park to provide a development of small

and funky cabins in rows separated by the natural landscape.

The close proximity of the camping ground environment has been retained yet the amenity has been greatly improved. The latest development by this innovative firm is the Happy Haus project (see story page 3).

The first houses built on Straddie were mere shacks put up on leases, which were required to be "improved" by the addition of modest buildings within 12 months.

They were built by recreational fishermen in the main and all materials had to be carried from the Amity wharf.

There were only 80 leasehold blocks in the original Point Lookout township and these were converted to freehold about 50 years ago.

While the collection of houses built before and during the Second World War were little more than fibro-clad dwellings the size of a garage, the post war freehold buildings, were somewhat better. By the 1960's, architects were being employed to design more stylish beach houses.

While Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast development grew much more dramatically, Point Lookout tended to keep its modest ways with small buildings.

Part of the reason was its isolation by being less accessible than the more popular coastal regions to the North and South of Brisbane.

An untouched and almost bohemian character became identifiable, as surfing took off in the mid 1960s and the "break" off the Point was celebrated by board riders who scoured the Queensland and North New South Wales coast looking for the best surf.

At this time it was still possible to rent a beach shack for very little and enjoy a handful of wonderful beaches of great variety, and generally drop out.

With increased prosperity from sand mining, a new generation of weekend residents arrived encouraged by the better ferries and roads that mining required. A new batch of houses was built as more allotments were released.

A lot of architects had built their own houses at the Point and when they saw the first signs of change threatening the character of the place they loved there was pressure to control development and a desire to preserve the spirit of the place.

The Development Control Plan of 1996 was a progressive document that did much to keep the place distinctive. Many local architects contributed to the plan's format. Lightweight small buildings among the natural vegetation was the vision, while the

large brick dwellings that by then characterised much of Australia were prohibited, as were gardens with exotic plant species. As the native vegetation was identified, weeds became recognised as a huge issue that has not yet been resolved.

Many of Stradbroke's architecturally interesting houses are available for short-term holiday rental, as are a variety of the older reworked beach shacks that are becoming quite rare.

The National Trust has proposed a listing for the old town of Point Lookout which would be a first for a precinct of its size under the current legislation.

Larger development on the Island has always been controversial, as rarely is the quality of the architecture proposed a match for the standards already set.

Friends of Stradbroke Island (FOSI) and Stradbroke Island Management Organisation (SIMO) have fought for improvements and often have been able to influence the outcome.

Whatever the eventual future for the place, Point Lookout residents remain passionate about its special qualities and will resist those who wish to make it like everywhere else.

Robert Riddel is an architect with a 30-year association with North Stradbroke Island.