



## Designing a new vision for tropical Australia

Australia's tropical north should look beyond the traditional for its architectural and interior design inspiration, **MARIANNE DYASON** argues.

Growth in Darwin's residential home market and in private development is providing an opportunity for the NT capital to explore new architectural models that reflect a contemporary tropical aesthetic. And one Top End practitioner championing a more appropriate design aesthetic for the north is CDU Lecturer in Architecture and Interior Design Marianne Dyason.

"Darwin prides itself on its uniqueness and diversity, and this has not generally been reflected in new housing developments and designs. This is an opportunity to discover a contemporary 'Darwin' aesthetic that acknowledges the realities of living in a tropical environment without sacrificing comfort. It should also move beyond aesthetics to include appropriate models that address increased construction costs, and climate and lifestyle considerations for small blocks sizes," Ms Dyason said.

Consumers were central in the move to a new design aesthetic for the Australian tropics, and benefits would flow from individual living quarters into the community as a whole.

"We should be reassessing what exists, as well as drawing inspiration from elsewhere. There are some excellent examples in Darwin, including the classic elevated, rectangular dwellings and post-cyclone houses that have been renovated by architects and designers to include large roof overhangs, limited solid walls, banks of louvres and living spaces underneath that open out on to the garden. These are more appropriate for our tropics," she said.

"We should look at these homes as prototypes, especially in terms of the lived experience; the way that individuals have adapted existing homes to suit lifestyle and climate. No where else in Australia can you live under the house all year round. That helps to set us apart."

Tropical living should include transition spaces, intermediary zones whose functions could change according to the time of day and time of year. These are defined (bedroom/ bathrooms) and non-defined spaces (living dining/ study) that allow for greater flexibility and an opportunity to experience the changes in the environment.

"Rather than direct light flooding into our homes, we should play with the light to create pattern and have varying degrees of shade, shadow and light that allow for transitions between inside and out. It shouldn't be about what separates the outside from inside, but rather what covers them. Rooms should be treated as if they were outdoors, at once continuous and contained."

A north Australia design response should include contemporary materials such as stainless steel, precast concrete, rubber flooring, bamboo, with less reliance on mini orb, timber and other materials that require time-consuming maintenance.

Other features included moveable fly screens, areas that could be shut off, wide eaves, a combination of heavy and light weight construction, breezeways, sliding walls, and a minimalist aesthetic for the dusty conditions during the dry season. Block work, too, could be used as a cooling element provided it did not receive direct sun.

Ms Dyason said older suburbs, where houses were more open, tended to foster interaction between residents and contributed to a greater sense of community. Increased medium density, small block sizes with inappropriate housing, and lack of public amenities encouraged residents to remain indoors for privacy and comfort.

She urged the NT Government to initiate a search for Darwin tropical design by launching a design competition. No doubt, Ms Dyason's Bachelor of Design students would be among the first entrants.

#### TEXT

Robyn McDougall

#### IMAGE

Julianne Osborne

#### CAPTION

Marianne Dyason recently completed the interior design at Darwin's Mantra Pandanas Hotel.

#### ANTENNAE

Marianne Dyason is a Lecturer in Architecture and Interior Design with the School of Creative Arts and Humanities. She lives in a C19 house, renovated to suit tropical Australia.

