

ESCAPE

BEACH HOUSES

The classic beach house is as intrinsic to the Australian summer as zinc cream, mosquito's, mangoes and cricket. Here are 6 of the best...

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The humble beach house is etched in our childhood memories and still makes its siren call to city dwellers in need of light, fresh air and ocean.

Alinghi, Queensland

Exclusive is the word that comes to mind about Alinghi.

First, it's located within the six-houses-only Rocky Point Estate — five hectares of untouched bushland about six kilometres south of Agnes Water in Queensland. Then there's the private beach at Honeymoon Bay, which can only be accessed by the estate's residents; similarly to the saltwater pool, mod grass tennis court and entertainment pavilion. Then there's the house itself, an architectural wonder designed by James Grose, which aims to have as little impact on the environment as possible.

It's basically a house of two halves: a two-storey, four-bedroom main residence and a master bedroom pavilion, separated by a large terrace. It sleeps 12–14.

Austinmer Beach House, New South Wales

Austinmer is one of those coastal treasures that still flies under the radar. In the shadow of the Illawarra Escarpment, 20 minutes' drive north of Wollongong, it has a divine Norfolk pine-fringed beach and a cool caff doing a roaring trade in gelatos.

In the midst of all that is the Scandinavian-inspired Austinmer Beach House, with an award-winning curved design offering views of the sea. Downstairs, the open-plan communal living, dining and kitchen areas lead to a terrace and 25-metre lap pool; the four bedrooms and two bathrooms are upstairs.

There's also a loggia that has another entertaining space and courtyard. The interiors are subtle and understated with exposed brick and oodles of timber. When you get tired of staring at the big blue, there is always the home theatre to retreat to. It sleeps 8.

Ocean House, Victoria

It's great when an architect gets to design his own house; it often means experimentation, derring-do and risks. If you need evidence, look no further than Rob Mills's stunning Ocean House on the outskirts of Lorne on Victoria's Great Ocean Road.

On a steep site surrounded by native bushland, the three-tier, six-bedroom house is a paean to understatedness, featuring raw concrete, stucco walls and polished timber, with ultra-cool furnishings by designers such as Patricia Urquiola and Eero Saarinen. But don't let all that stylishness put you off: father-of-two Mills has designed the house to be family friendly, with three separate living areas and acoustically sealed middle and lower floors.

So while you drink in the views of Loutit Bay in the open-air bath on the rooftop deck, the kids can create havoc playing pretend sailors with the oversized porthole windows. It sleeps 20.

The Roozen Residence, Western Australia

Plenty has been written about this timber, concrete and glass house in the Margaret River beach-side hamlet of Prevelly, about 3.5 hours south of Perth. "You don't get oceanside retreats more beautiful", "Brings a cinematic sensibility to an overwhelmingly beautiful site", "A modern interpretation of a luxurious fortress of solitude." Need we go on?

Just a little perhaps.

Three king-size bedrooms (all with Indian Ocean views), expansive decks with sun beds, a Harmon Kardon sound system, beautifully fitted-out kitchen with Nespresso machine and sweeping lawns are the basics. Then there are the extras: a grocery service, in-house masseuse, babysitting and an on-call chef among them. The beach is five minutes' walk away,

along with White Elephant Beach Café, serving great food and coffee. It sleeps 6.

Bedarra Island Villa, Queensland

If you're looking to get away from the crowds, the Bedarra Island Villa on the Great Barrier Reef just might be the slice of tropical island paradise you've been seeking. With no public access to the island and very few residents, you'll feel like the last person on earth at the secluded villa that sits on a private estate by the water's edge.

The property features interiors by Melbourne architect Robert Davidov, open-plan living and dining areas with heavenly views out to sea and two queen-size bedrooms. It can also host an extra four guests in the separate 'Studio' space, which was built by artist Noel Wood.

The Studio has been updated since Wood lived there but you'll still find some original bamboo furniture items handmade by the artist. Visitors can wile away the hours strolling along the island's white-sand beaches or get a little more active by making use of the villa's kayaks and snorkelling gear. It sleeps 8.

Avalon Coastal Retreat, Tasmania

It might be located just off the Tasman Highway on Tasmania's east coast, but there's a pervasive sense of isolation at the Avalon Coastal Retreat. Perched on a headland overlooking the pristine waters of Great Oyster Bay, the house is an object lesson in minimalism.

The work of Hobart-based architect Craig Rosevear, the property won an RAIA Residential Award (TAS) in 2005. It's hard to tell where the house ends and nature starts courtesy of the massive walls of glass that surround the living area. You can spend large chunks of time just sitting inside those four walls staring into the distance with the Bose sound system in full flight and the fire crackling, should it get a little chilly.

Alternatively, you could paddle at the secluded beach (boogie boards and towels are provided), drive to nearby Freycinet or Swansea, or cook up a gourmet meal in the slick kitchen. It sleeps 6.

Words by Deborah Cooke - Published in Voyeur December 2014