

# CLIFF HANGER

Words Anne Lim / Photography John Gollings

The vision of an architect who surfed here as a child. Alinghi emerges from the salt spray as an artful assembly of marble, timber and concrete.







**T**here is a remote rocky beach a few clicks south of Agnes Water on the mid-Queensland coast that was barely known when architect James Grose used to camp and surf there as a youth. Today, Rocky Point is still hard to reach and little known but Grose, now aged 52, has designed two of the half-dozen beach houses that have turned it into an exclusive holiday enclave.

"It's a beautiful coastline and the fact I used to surf there made me love this project," says Grose, national director of Grose Bradley BVN. "To go to a very special place that hardly anyone knew about for surfing and to end up building houses there is quite extraordinary."

Grose is one of our most prominent architects. In 2006, in partnership with his wife Nicola Bradley, he won the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' Sulman Prize for the Architecture Studios at the University of Newcastle. Two years ago, he built Alinghi, a house that merges into the steep rock face above Honeymoon Bay, halfway between Gladstone and Bundaberg. Its aesthetic may seem similar to the home Grose built at Rocky Point in 1990 but the construction of the second building is entirely different.

Rather than using a forest of posts supporting a platform, Alinghi is anchored to the ground by a rock platform. "The building was designed as though it were an exposed rock shelf," he says.

"We've made a rock platform three-quarters of the way up the sand dune and it mimics or makes an abstract idea of the natural surroundings." The platform, paved with travertine marble and surrounded on two sides by shallow water, has two timber buildings attached, which are designed to evoke driftwood. The materials are of the earth and include stone and Arctic cedar, a timber that develops a patina as it weathers.


Standing on the platform looking out to the open sea reminds me of a spaceship from *Star Wars* as its doors open to reveal the universe beyond. "That's the idea, really," Grose concurs. "You stand on this platform at night and the sky is full of stars, so this becomes a room, the heart of the abstraction of the rock shelf. We're standing on a very sophisticated built space but its context is this fabulous rocky beach."

There is always somewhere to escape from sea breezes in this house as the sides of the two timber "boxes" slide apart to create a variety of internal/external spaces. A covered walkway links the two buildings: one is the private retreat of the owners; the other is available as a holiday rental. Grose says the house is so remote and private, "you could walk around completely naked and no one would see you at all".

When designing it, he asked himself the question: What is the essence of being here on this windswept cliff over this rocky beach in this

subtropical climate? "The answer is a couple of things. One is to seek refuge in its spaces but it is also to celebrate the voluminousness of the landscape. At night it's evidenced by the idea of the platform being open to the sky and the stars, and in the daylight it's this bright sunny space."

Grose created another metaphor for the sea, a double-height living room created out of honey-coloured, hoop pine plywood. "It's like a big container that floated in on the ocean and someone's picked it up and put it here," he says in a flight of poetry. "Upstairs, you look down through the slots in the box into the kitchen. Everywhere you go you're looking at different directions and different views." His inspiration comes from what he calls equatorial architecture and he cites the work of Australian architect Peter Muller in his Amandari resort in Bali and Joern Utzon's house in Spain, which bring together colonial influences and a modern, relaxed lifestyle.

"Alinghi is a building of the landscape; it's not a building *on* the landscape and that's the big shift." The Honeymoon Bay house differs from many he has done, which were made of lightweight steel and glass. "As an architect, you have to constantly question what you're doing and find new ways of making your work vital," Grose says. "Serious, good, timeless architecture isn't made overnight. You have to live and really experience life to make good architecture." 

**On the dock of the bay:** A central platform paved with travertine marble is the perfect spot to enjoy Honeymoon Bay views by day and mesmerising starry skies by night. It also serves to anchor the timber "boxes" to either side. Camouflaged into the cliff-face, the earthy double-height living areas are built with concrete, glass, stone and cedar.