

steel beacon

Building this dramatically cantilevered and award-winning home presented numerous challenges – including 45 tonnes of steel portal framing. Annie Reid reports.

When Dean Atkinson first laid eyes on the Beaumaris property, he was mesmerised by the block.

High up on a hill and just seven houses from the beach, the sloping site commanded sweeping 270-degree bay views from the Mornington Peninsula across to Geelong.

‘It also had an 80-foot southern mahogany tree that is a beacon to fishermen on the bay,’ Dean says.

It was the ideal site for his dream home in the Melbourne bayside suburb. In addition, it would provide him and his business partner, David Pontifex, the opportunity to showcase the innovative craftsmanship for which their

business, Atkinson Pontifex, has become synonymous.

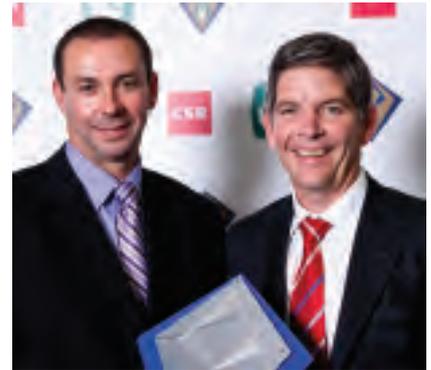
‘Beaumaris is regarded as a playground for adventurous architects. We didn’t want to build a normal house, and felt that the block deserved something different,’ Dean says.

His brief as the owner/builder was straightforward. It had to be two-storey with a focus on upstairs living, and it had to exploit the natural bay views.

As luck would have it, the house came on to the market in 2005. Dean didn’t think twice; he snapped it up and removed the derelict beach house that had existed on the site since the 1950s. But it wasn’t an easy project. It took one year to design and two years to build.

Atkinson Pontifex engaged architect Peter Maddison of Maddison Architects, interior designer Fiona Austin of Austin Design Associates, and landscaper Mark Browning of cycas landscape design.

‘Normally you orientate houses to the north to get the sun, but with the views of the bay facing south, we had to think carefully about how to utilise both.



Above: Dean Atkinson from Atkinson Pontifex (left) being presented with his home of the year award by Rob Sindel, CEO, CSR Building Products.

Everything was turned on its head,’ Dean says.

The solution was to place upstairs highlight windows to source the northern light, and as much glass as possible along the southern aspects of the house to capture the bay views. Equally as challenging was the engineering involved to achieve the multiple cantilevering effects. ‘It took six months of engineering and three engineers just to get the modelling right,’ David says.

Everything came together at the end of May at the HIA-CSR 2010 Australian Housing Awards on the Gold Coast. Atkinson Pontifex was announced the winner of the coveted Australian Home of the Year Award, as well as the Custom Built Home of the Year Award for the Beaumaris house.

‘I was ecstatic. To be judged by your peers and such a well-respected industry body with high standards means so much to us,’ Dean says.

From the street, the house appears as two long, floating elements connected by a central glass spine. Drawing on 1960s architecture, one side comprises sawn cut face bricks, while the other is dramatically cantilevered over the front and rear of the block, clad in French-imported VM Zinc. The house is





From sandpit to success

Atkinson Pontifex is no stranger to HIA awards either. The company received six awards, of which five were winners, across three different projects in the HIA-CSR 2009 Victorian Housing Awards, including the Home of the Year and Custom Built Home of the Year for the Beaumaris house.

It was also part of another award-winning team, representing Australia and winning a prestigious gold medal at the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show, recently held in England.

David spent three weeks in London building the garden with the team, led by Fleming's Nurseries. 'It's even more special because we are one of the only building companies to be asked more than once by Fleming's, who compete every year,' David says.

They are fine achievements for two friends who met as toddlers at McKinnon Kindergarten, in Melbourne's south-east.

'We were both playing in the sandpit. Who would have thought that would grow into a friendship and award-winning business for the next 25 years?' Dean laughs.

gamble 15–20 years ago when we were putting our business plan together,' David says.

As their house shines in Beaumaris' architectural playground, it's clear that their gamble has paid off in more ways than one. **H**

supported by 45 tonnes of steel portal frame – most houses only use about two to three – and a whopping 4.5km of spotted gum decking.

'This is a carpenter's own home. It was a real labour of love,' Dean says.

There are five bedrooms, a study, three bathrooms and two powder rooms, plus a downstairs theatre room, basement garage and elevator connecting each of the three levels. For living, an open plan casual zone and Miele kitchen faces the bay, with numerous decks, outdoor kitchen and a lap pool with linear jets, and two windows that face the street.

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What truly defines this house is not its construction, but David and Dean's dedication. Both are committed to building imaginative houses that stand the test of time, and the Beaumaris house showcases their central philosophy superbly.

Instead of using carpet on the floors, sisal carpets were attached to the sloping upstairs ceiling for acoustic properties. Hydronic heating was installed under the

timber floors, which had never been tried before, and the sawn cut brickwork was used extensively internally and externally. A fine example of carpentry is the timber herringbone noggins upon entry.

'The pool is another example. It has a new geothermal and solar system, and at the time was only the second pool in Melbourne to use this technology,' Dean says.

'That's what this project is about,' he says. 'Everything and every product was questioned and challenged. We all build houses because that's the way the industry and country does it but this is all about looking outside the square.'

The judges agreed, and Dean and David say that they are already feeling the impact of being the 'best of the best'.

'It's fantastic because now we don't feel we have to prove ourselves. We have reached a place where we don't have to sell our business to prospective clients,' David says.

After completing their carpentry apprenticeships and gaining their building licences, Dean and David built houses all over Melbourne before deciding to establish Atkinson Pontifex in 1985.

'We decided to stay in bayside. We felt there was always going to be enough local work and demand from people who appreciate a really high standard and high product – and that was a huge

in focus



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9: Winner of HIA Home of the Year Dean Atkinson from Atkinson Pontifex. 10: Tanya Plibersek, Federal Housing Minister, delivers the Dossetor address. 11: Soul Mystique entertaining HIA members. 12: HIA Australian Project Home of the Year winner Ash Moseley Homes with Tim Richards, general manager of Stramit Building Products. **13-15** Members enjoy a presentation by Westpac chief economist Bill Evans at the 2010 HIA Industry Outlook Breakfast held at Gold Coast Convention Centre Friday 21 May 2010.