

Sanctuary

MODERN GREEN HOMES

ISSUE
70

VOLUME BUILD
SPECIAL

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lush backyard retreat; diving into natural swimming pools and more

Isabel & Elsie

A pair of homes
designed to nurture

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HOUSE PROFILE
Hobart, TAS

WORDS
Anna Cumming

PHOTOGRAPHY
Adam Gibson

A way forward

In Hobart, a pair of affordable, replicable and nurturing homes are a prototype for sustainable social housing.

AT A GLANCE

- *Two small-scale 7.4-Star homes on a subdivided block*
- *Designed to support women and children recovering from family violence*
- *Beauty, calm and security front and centre*



Above left Hobart Women's Shelter CEO Janet Saunders, centre, with architects Christopher Clinton and Emily Taylor, just three of the large team of stakeholders, experts, consultants and suppliers that were part of the groundbreaking project. **Above right and facing page** "Beauty is the point of difference. It's not a word that should be taken lightly; we were constantly trying to make the homes beautiful," says Emily of the design, material and colour choices. **Right** The daybed, complete with reading light, storage and a curtain, is a clever design feature that functions as a cubby, reading nook, safe space and even as a spare bed for a guest.





In a suburb on the outskirts of Hobart, two newly built little houses nestle quietly into their site, their unassuming nature entirely deliberate and yet belying their significance. This pair of homes, named Isabel and Elsie after two of the charitable foundations that contributed to their creation, were designed and built for the Hobart Women's Shelter (HWS) to provide accommodation for women and their children who have experienced family violence.

Functioning as something of a proof of concept, the homes were designed to be affordable and easily replicable, using modular elements, prefabrication and standard materials. Passive solar design was important for comfort and to keep occupants' bills low, and trauma-informed design was also incorporated throughout to accommodate the needs of the women and children who will live here.

"This project was a huge step for us," says Janet Saunders, CEO of HWS. "We're not a community housing provider, or a developer!" She explains that the shelter provides short-term crisis

accommodation for women experiencing family violence and/or homelessness – family violence is a leading cause of homelessness – but that especially since Covid, people were staying longer and longer at the shelter because of a lack of long-term housing options. "Requests for assistance skyrocketed too, and we found we were turning away more and more people: up to nine out of ten," says Janet. "Even identifying the people in most need was difficult." With the shelter not designed for long-term living, Janet and her staff were also getting concerned about the women they *were* able to help. "We thought, there's got to be a better way of providing housing for people that focuses on their wellbeing and recovery; maybe we can build something."

Against this backdrop, the Isabel and Elsie project was born when a bunch of talented people all interested in tackling Tassie's housing crisis came together. During lockdown, architects Emily Taylor (of Core Collective Architects) and Christopher Clinton saw how bad

housing affordability was getting and started working on a small and replicable ancillary dwelling for use as social housing. "We wanted to understand what the barriers were to high quality architecture in social housing," says Emily, "and we decided we shouldn't be waiting for the government to act."

On a bushwalk, Emily connected with Cate Sumner, a human rights lawyer, who was focused on women's rights and family violence and had identified housing as a key issue. "Cate hooked everyone up, and was a powerhouse in getting funding for the project," Emily says. The team started out looking for existing houses to buy and retrofit, but quickly understood that purpose-built homes would be needed. "We began digging into issues around trauma, and realised how important it would be for the homes to offer a true sense of security, to be child- and pet-friendly, to be accessible for prams and so on, and to have low maintenance and running costs," says Christopher.

With funding from the Isabel Sims Foundation to help design a prototype house and from the Elsie Flood Foundation to cover most of the build, the project was underway. The Women's Shelter purchased a 679-square-metre block by the water using donations collected over a decade, and Christopher and Emily designed a pair of L-shaped homes with entry porches, sunny decks and private north-facing gardens. At just 76 square metres each, the houses are diminutive but offer two bedrooms, a good-sized bathroom/laundry, a kitchen and living space with a generous cathedral ceiling, and a neat daybed that can serve as guest accommodation. "Keeping the size down was important for material efficiency and affordability," says Emily. "We also designed them so that future homes could be built as prefab volumetric modules and delivered to site ready to go."

These first two houses were built by not-for-profit St Joseph Affordable Homes, and Emily and Christopher report that it was both challenging and rewarding to work with a volume builder. They started with St Joseph's standard specification for materials and fixtures when designing



the homes. “If there wasn’t a good reason to change their usual practice, we left it,” says Christopher.

Design and material decisions took into account cost, durability and build efficiency, with an unwavering focus on the needs of the future residents and their recovery from family violence. “We concentrated on creating a sense of prospect and refuge, and making the homes feel nurturing,” says Christopher. The houses face the side driveway rather than the street, and the welcoming entry porches – transition spaces from public to private areas – are gated for kids’ safety. Window placement is carefully considered so that the interior can’t be casually observed. Inside, there are sight lines from

the living space to the bathroom and to the deck and garden, to help alleviate mums’ and kids’ anxiety. Even colours and shapes have been selected to soothe: “Biophilic design principles like rounded corners, soft edges and organic shapes are relevant to trauma-informed design, too,” explains Emily. Colour expert Sonia van de Haar of Lymesmith Polychromy developed the colour palette, helped by trauma-informed design expert Samantha Donnelly and her design guidelines for women’s shelters.

Designed and orientated for optimum passive solar performance, the homes include plenty of insulation, thermally broken double-glazed windows, cross ventilation, induction cooktops and solar PV systems with battery storage. Each

rates a respectable 7.4 Stars for energy efficiency, and they are expected to be net zero for annual operational energy, generating as much as they use. The resulting minimal energy costs are hugely beneficial to the residents, for whom utility bill stress can be a big deal.

Completed in February 2024, Isabel and Elsie have welcomed their first residents, and Janet reports that they have settled in happily. While the homes are intended as longer-term transitional housing while the families wait for social housing or sort something else out, Janet emphasises that there is no time limit, and thus no stressful pressure. “I don’t think I could ever leave this house, but I want to let someone else have the opportunity!”,



one resident said to her.

Welcome though they are in the housing mix, Janet is aware that the two houses are a drop in the ocean. “They are not going to fix the whole issue, but they’ve been great as a proof of concept and as an advocacy piece for us,” she says. “They showcase the importance of trauma-informed design and of quality homes with low maintenance requirements, that people can afford to live in and take pride in.”

HWS is now aiming to build 25 of these homes over the next few years, starting with ten on a large piece of land they’ve been gifted by a local council – and Emily and Christopher are back on board for the design. **S**

Facing page Solid core front doors were used for privacy and security. These were then ‘dressed up’ and have beautiful, tactile door handles crafted by Christopher. **Above** Each house has a private, north-facing garden for that important connection to the outdoors that is often missing in crisis accommodation.



CONTRIBUTORS

The Isabel and Elsie project would not have been possible without the support of a large number of businesses and consultants who together contributed over \$115,000 worth of pro bono and/or discounted services and products.

CLIENT COLLABORATOR

Cate Sumner, Law & Development Partners

COLOUR SPECIALIST

Lymesmith Polychromy

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

SBLA Landscape Architecture & Urban Design

BUILDING SURVEYOR

Lee Tyers Building Surveyors

TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN ADVISOR

Samantha Donnelly, University of Technology Sydney

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Gandy & Roberts Consulting Engineers

QUANTITY SURVEYOR

Exsto Management & Slattery

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT

Enviro Dynamics

PLANNING CONSULTANT

Danielle Gray, Gray Planning

TRAFFIC ENGINEER

Howarth Fisher & Associates

ENERGY CONSULTANT

Red Sustainability

LIGHTING CONSULTANT

Southern Lighting & Distribution

LAND SURVEYOR

Veris

POWER CONSULTING

Entura

LEGAL

Tierney Law

SIGNAGE GRAPHIC DESIGN

Futago

STYLIST

Home + Style Hobart

PHOTOGRAPHY

Adam Gibson Photographer
Nina Hamilton Photography

DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY

Stu Gibson

VIDEOGRAPHY

Cameron Green Videography

OTHER IN-KIND SUPPORTERS

Brighton Council
Rotary Club of Sandy Bay

INDUSTRY SUPPORTERS

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LEGEND

- ① Entry
- ② Bedroom
- ③ Living
- ④ Kitchen
- ⑤ Dining
- ⑥ Bathroom
- ⑦ Laundry
- ⑧ Day bed
- ⑨ Porch
- ⑩ Deck
- ⑪ Carport
- ⑫ Private garden
- ⑬ Water tank

SPECIFICATIONS

DESIGNER

Christopher Clinton Architect
with Core Collective Architects

BUILDER

St Joseph Affordable Homes

PROJECT TYPE

New build

LOCATION

Hobart, TAS
(Muwinina Country)

COST

\$1 million
Completed 2024

SIZE

Each house 76m²
Land 679m²

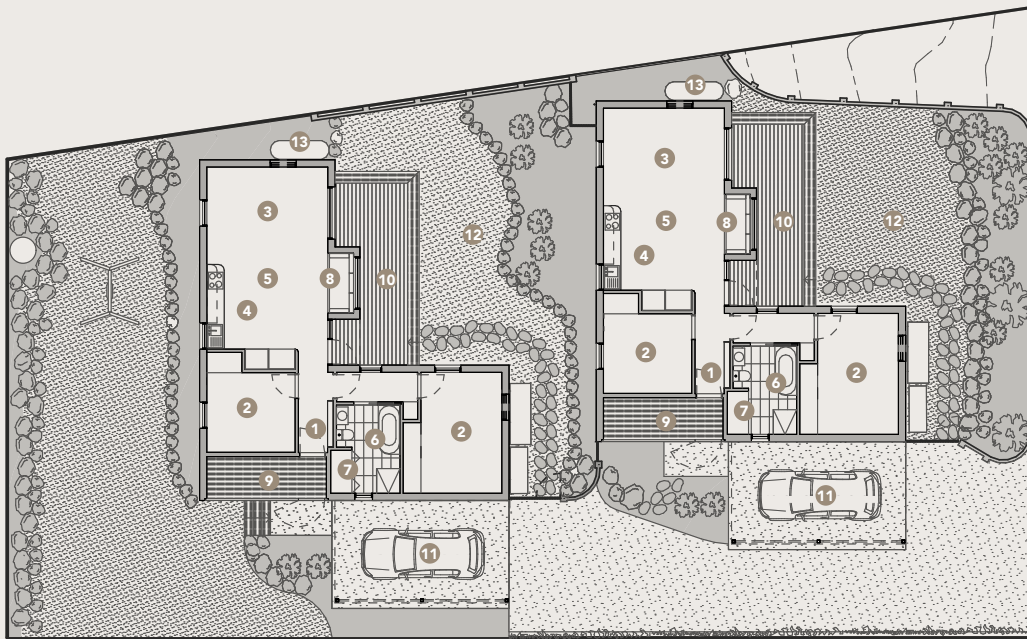
ENERGY RATING

Each house 7.4 Stars

ENERGY ASSESSOR

Red Sustainability

FLOOR PLAN



HOT WATER

- Chromagen Midea 170L heat pumps

RENEWABLE ENERGY

- 5kW solar PV systems with Sungrow batteries

WATER SAVING

- 2,000L Next Gen Roto slimline rainwater tanks for gardens
- High WELS rated tapware and fixtures

PASSIVE DESIGN, HEATING & COOLING

- Optimised northern glazing with considered shading
- Roof form maximises solar harvesting potential
- Cross ventilation paths designed for effective night purging of heat in summer

ACTIVE HEATING & COOLING

- Daikin 6kW reverse-cycle air conditioner to each house

COOKING

- Fisher & Paykel induction cooktops

BUILDING MATERIALS

- Prefabricated timber frame construction
- Carbon-neutral, Tasmanian-made brick cladding from Brickworks
- Small areas of painted fibre cement sheet cladding
- Lysaght Colorbond roof
- Tasmanian oak plywood wall and ceiling linings (PEFC-certified) from Ta Ann Tasmania
- Tasmanian oak floorboards
- Insulation: Knauf Earthwool batts to ceiling (R5), Knauf Earthwool HD batts to walls (R2.5), Kingspan Aircell Permifloor under floors
- Spotted gum decking

WINDOWS & GLAZING

- Bradhams thermally broken aluminium-framed double-glazed windows
- Velux double-glazed skylights in bathrooms

LIGHTING

- LED lighting throughout
- Minimal lighting fixtures

PAINTS, FINISHES & FLOOR COVERINGS

- Dulux low-VOC paints
- Loba Easy Finish low-VOC sealant to interior timber
- Godfrey Hirst Carramar wool carpet to bedrooms

OTHER ESD FEATURES

- Small footprint homes to save on materials and minimise energy use and ongoing maintenance and operational costs
- Homes designed to be replicated: the modular design can be constructed as prefabricated components or as full prefabricated modules
- Non-toxic materials and finishes for good indoor air quality
- Minimal painted areas to reduce maintenance
- Daybed doubles as guest sleeping nook: sized to a single bed, with privacy curtain and window blind
- Native garden