

THE AGE Issue #28 February 07

# theage (melbourne) magazine



**Goodbye Cathy, hello Catherine: a superstar's search for identity**

Nice ice-cream: we taste test eight of the best

The mini seachange: work in the city, live in the bush

What a view: great houses of the Great Ocean Road



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To celebrate the Great Ocean Road's 75th anniversary, we visit four of its spectacular cliff-top homes.

# cliff HANGERS

Yes, it's that house...  
The Pole House, Fairhaven

**Above** The Pole House has hung over this stretch of the Great Ocean Road between Araya Trail and Lorne since 1975.

**Opposite** The "love shack" and the view over Fairhaven Beach.

**Below** The bedroom with its lacquered cork bedhead. Berber carpet lines the walls between windows.

If you've ever driven along the Great Ocean Road you have also, no doubt, seen the Pole House, suspended 40 metres above Fairhaven beach, and wondered what it's like inside.

The shower is, well, a bit of a 1970s love shack. There's an open bedroom area, which can be curtained off, a living area with open fireplace and kitchen, and a small bathroom. And all the walls are covered in thick Berber carpet, all the way up to the ceiling, broken up only by the windows and large pieces of lacquered cork for the bedhead and a kitchen trestle.

Seventies touches abound: orange bubble reading lamps, sets of tumblers and, over the kitchen bench, green wine bottles converted into pendant lights.

Built in 1975 by architect and engineer Bruce Dixon, it was used as his family's weekenders until they sold it at the beginning of 2005 to its current owners, Kathi and Ray Carter, who have made it available to rent. The property is available for honeymooners or couples celebrating special occasions.

"I'm a holidaymaker in a visitor's home," says Carter. "When we admired this house we thought about just going to the beach and watching the waves. We had the wonderful experience of going inside, listening to the waves crashing on the beach. An experience of

Dixon reportedly designed the structure while he was laid up in bed for six weeks with a surfing injury. He allowed for the house to sway slightly in the wind, using a newspaper of the time. "Some people, when they're in the house, can be a bit perturbed by the movement but it doesn't bother me in the slightest, it's designed for that." (The pole itself, with its cruciform shape, runs eight metres below ground.)

Owner Kathi Adams says of visits to the house: "We go down there and do nothing, but sit and look at the view because it changes every five minutes. I get a thrill."

"We say, 'Let's go out for dinner and we go. No, let's get takeaways and we go looking at the view.'"

The couple have also taken to the plow at the foot of the mountain. "When you're with your husband for 30 years, one of you looks out for the other. Lighthouse (Araya Trail) and Pole House looks out to Lorne."

"We were watching a sunset and lighting the other night. It was so beautiful. And when the moon came out over the water, it's just this magical moment to let yourself go."

To book the Pole House, visit [www.polehouse.com.au](http://www.polehouse.com.au) or call 03 5223 1111. Prices begin at \$270 a night.





We're going to  
need a crane...

Super-modern cantilevered  
house, Wye River



Greg Lloyd was at a local fête when he heard about the possible upcoming sale of an unusual block of land, right on the cliff at Wye River. It was, the builder and designer discovered, stunningly steep, but had extraordinary views.

"I'm always on the hunt for a block of land," says Lloyd. "Then you get one and hope you can do it justice." He bought the land just as the "for sale" sign went up, with plans for a dream home for his young family – partner Ceina and daughters Saskia, five, and Freya, 11 months.

Lloyd has holidayed in the area since he was a child. More recently he returned to build beach houses for clients and has made a part-exchange, moving backwards and forwards between Dwood and Wye River.

This site was a challenge: at an average slope of 40 degrees, it was difficult to even scramble up it. Builders had to remove 80 truckloads of earth to first make a ledge they could work on. From there, they

drilled foundations five metres into bedrock and brought in a crane to raise the main structure. "It's a similar method to how they build oil rigs, where you have to build a platform under the ground so the earth can move but the house is stabilised," says Lloyd.

"The point of the way we built this house was to touch the ground as few times as possible because hitting the ground was so expensive, and we wanted a very clean look from down below, too."

Another challenge was that the only utility available was electricity: gas is bottled, water is collected in rainwater tanks and heated by solar power, and sewage is treated on-site.

The house has an elegant, pared-back but family-friendly design with living/dining area upstairs and three bedrooms – all with "killer views" – and two bathrooms below. A devotee of clean architectural lines, including those of 1950s modernist architecture, Lloyd wanted to "express the steel structure of the house, where normally

you hide it behind walls". Materials and finishes are few but stylish: benches made of white Caesar stone, walls painted in white, floors in extra-wide American oak boards, a hearth and window-frames in black powder-coated steel, and, says Lloyd, "lots of glass".

The structural steel frame of the house is visible on the outside, and is filled in with blackbutt timber boards. The whole house can be lit from underneath at night, accentuating the hovering effect.

Inside, the main living area has huge glass sliding doors opening onto a veranda with a view that reaches, on a clear day, past the Aireys Inlet lighthouse and Bells Beach to the Point Lonsdale Rip.

Last year, Lloyd woke early to see dolphins in Wye River bay. A local mate confirmed the sight; together, they watched the schools make their way down to Apollo Bay. "There must have been hundreds," says Lloyd. "I've never seen this sight before." →



**Above** The elevation is steep, with views on a clear day as far as Point Lonsdale and The Rip.

**Left** The upper floor is open-plan, with doors open onto the veranda.

"It's a similar method to how they build oil rigs, where you have to build a platform under the ground..."