

YOUR PLACE

Home success a matter of design

by LYNSEY HUGHES

DISCOVERING the perfect home in a great location is something we all aspire to.

After all, it's the biggest investment most of us will make, it is the place where we will raise our families and spend most of our time.

So consider the possibilities of writing a wish list of every conceivable feature you desire in your ideal home.

This is what Avalon-based building designer Peter Downes asks of his clients, the results seeing him win four awards at the recent NSW Building Designers Association annual awards night.

One of these awards was granted for the Best Use of Steel for a second-storey addition to a Balgowlah home.

The house had a history of unstable foundations and was unable to support another storey. This however, didn't stop Peter who drew on his background in mining engineering to design a self-supporting structure made from steel girders.

Due to Peter's design, the home's existing foundations were also strengthened.

"Coming from a non-typical background (designing engineering projects), I'm coming from a position of strength. I haven't been taught to think with old boundaries," Peter said.

Initiating his career in home design by carrying out massive renovations to his own home, Peter owes much to the ongoing education process provided by the NSW Building Designers Association.

Monthly meetings featuring guest speakers have put exposed him to other designers, giving him a wide range of viewpoints and practical design theories to consider.

"I design a house as if I'm going to live in it. And I have the practical experience to know how many bathrooms a family will need or how close the bedrooms should be to each other," Peter said.

According to Peter every home should have four basic zones. A dormitory and recreational area for both parent and child ensures everybody has their own space, enhancing the lifestyle of the family.

"There's always collaboration of some sort with clients. The wish list stops them from being bogged

down with the actual process of building it, so they can concentrate on the needs of their lifestyle," Peter said.

And it seems a definite trend is taking place, with open-plan living and the maximisation of natural light at the top of most lists.

"I can't remember the last time I designed a formal dining room. Open plan living is becoming very prevalent in the northern parts of Sydney, especially on the northern beaches," Peter said.

"For the first time Australia is developing its own architectural design. It's very exciting to part of such a pioneering movement."

Pitched rooves designed for heavy snowfall and small windows to keep out bad weather are now being seen as relics from our English colonisation.

By contrast, skylit ceilings and spacious living endeavour to bring our beautiful outdoor environment, inside.

"The best designed house is when you're sitting inside but you feel like your outside," Peter said.

"The Japanese designs have a great relationship with their environment. They always have a verandah as a stepping stone to the outdoor surroundings, so it's not completely separate. I draw from that."

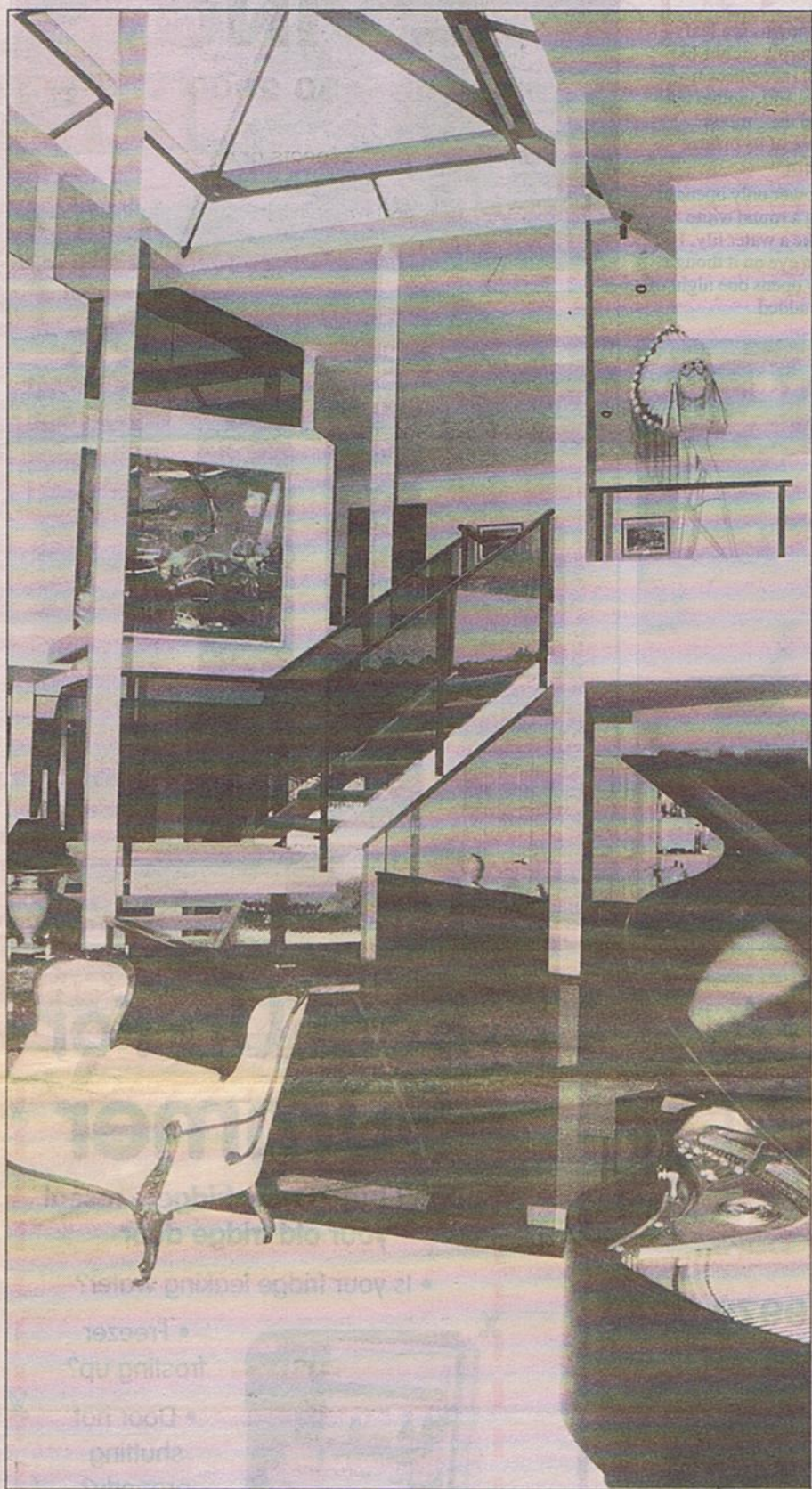
Working in northern parts of Sydney set within natural bushland has heightened Peter's consideration of the environment in his designs. But perhaps it is his own leafy living environment which gives him first-hand experience in the advantages.

"I originally moved here for the surfing but I've found the natural beauty of the area and the local culture that strives to preserve it inspiring," Peter said.

"I always think you should feel uplifted when you walk into a home. Your mood should go up."

The gifts of a well-designed house extend further, offering low maintenance and proving to be more economical to run. It is also essential for re-sale.

For further information call Peter Downes Designs on 9973 3312.



The Bilgola home designed by Peter Downes which was the winner of Best Use Of Glass for NSW Building Designer Awards