

- 01 Nat Cheshire designed the furniture in this former photographer's studio, including a bespoke brass-and-timber table
- 02 Nat Cheshire
- 03 Cabins are 29 sq m and clad in charred cedar



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Preface

From Sweden to Singapore, we meet five architects dedicated to building the perfect home, be it a solar-powered cabin, a house on a cliff edge or a family home in tune with nature.

Editor
Tom Morris

Nat Cheshire's tips for the perfect home

1. Make homes as efficient as aeroplanes

Size is interchangeable with quality.

2. Treat humble things as if they are made of gold

Then leverage that humility by being incredibly generous with just one thing.

3. Treat yourself to luxury

Abandon the white tiles and chromium of the surgical washroom; instead, make your bathroom a day spa lined with fragrant timber.

4. Form and function is never enough

You have to push beyond that. Ensure you have poetry.

Nat Cheshire Cheshire Architects, Auckland

Nat Cheshire runs an architectural practice with his father Pip and is best known for his work on large urban regeneration projects in Auckland's central city: restaurants, bars and shops in formerly derelict industrial buildings that in the past few years have brought bold new life to the city's formerly staid downtown.

However, at the same time he was designing two cabins just north of the city for a couple of men and their partners: just 29 sq m each and built with a minimal budget. They are off the grid, powered by solar panels, harvest their own rainwater and are super insulated with no great need for heating. They are beautifully contemplative, poetic structures.

You first spy them 2km up a private road: two dark chunks reminiscent of farm buildings that slowly reveal themselves as angular cabins clad in burnt cedar. "They are bespoke little pieces of furniture," says Nat. "We worked very hard to reduce them to the edge of nothing." They sit 30 metres apart in a grassy meadow right by a tidal estuary and are identical: two large openings – one a door, one a window – a tiny kitchen and bathroom downstairs and a mezzanine loft bedroom upstairs. One of them is painted black inside and the other is dark raw plywood, a difference that seems vast in such a small space.

Nat trained as a painter before switching to buildings and when you ask him about design he speaks of artist Donald Judd and complexities of objects and space. There is a theatricality, almost a sense of staging in his work: fittings are bespoke, functions are often hidden and the most prosaic of things – staircases, taps, a green marble fireplace hearth – can turn into something beautiful.

In a house he worked on recently – a former photographer's studio in an inner-city suburb – Nat focused on both rationalising the building's loft-like living room and making sense of a rabbit warren of small rooms off it. He moved the kitchen into the main space, designing a wall of cabinetry and a table-like counter with mahogany legs. In the bathroom he contrasted brass fittings with marble tiles and rough blackened timber. "It makes it dark, smelly, atmospheric and rich," he says. "You have to believe that you can resolve things beautifully and in a way that doesn't look like you were just solving a problem but seeking divine inspiration." — SFG

cheshirearchitects.com

Clare Cousins,
Clare Cousins Architects,
Melbourne

When Melbourne architect Clare Cousins married her husband, builder Ben Pedersen, a collaboration was inevitable; their wedding vows even mentioned a dream of building a house together. The adapted Edwardian cottage that they and their two daughters now occupy in the suburb of Prahran is the realisation of that ambition. “It is our perfect house,” says Cousins, who completed the project with Pedersen in 2011. “It is modestly sized but we don’t feel on top of each other. It is all about quality over quantity.”

With its economic use of space and emphasis on natural textures, the design perfectly encapsulates why Cousins has a reputation as one of Australia’s most skilled emerging architects. Many of her trademarks are present: built-in furniture, cleverly positioned nooks and an overarching lack of fussiness. There is also a characteristic hint of luxury in the concealed bar that bookends the glass-walled living area.

The subtle transition between old and new parts of the house, in which white concrete walkways give way to golden-oak floorboards, is particularly pleasing. “When the sunlight hits the timber it attenuates the light and becomes a lovely rich space,” says Cousins. “There is something quite powerful and emotional about robust materials.”

Her practice, which was founded in 2005, is accustomed to working with existing structures. In June it received a commendation from the Victorian Architecture Awards for transforming an apartment in a heritage-listed building in Melbourne’s city centre. The space was gutted to create a minimalist two-bedroom residence that was almost completely clad in plywood.

“We were looking at Japanese influences such as Kazuyo Sejima [of architecture studio Sanaa],” says Cousins. “The bedrooms were made as compact as possible and we made sure the living spaces were generous and engaging.” A similar philosophy was at the centre of the Christmas Hill House, a structure she designed pro bono for a couple that lost their home during the Black Saturday bushfires in rural Victoria.

Such an enthusiasm for compact living is at odds with traditional Australian architectural values, which often assert that bigger is better. But Cousins is determined to change this paradigm. “When you have the typical Australian quarter-acre block you can be a little more lazy with how you design a space. I often draw clients’ attention to how people live in Europe and Japan. It’s all about how you can live compactly but still have a great sense of enjoyment.” — AC clarecousins.com.au



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Clare Cousins’ tips for the perfect home

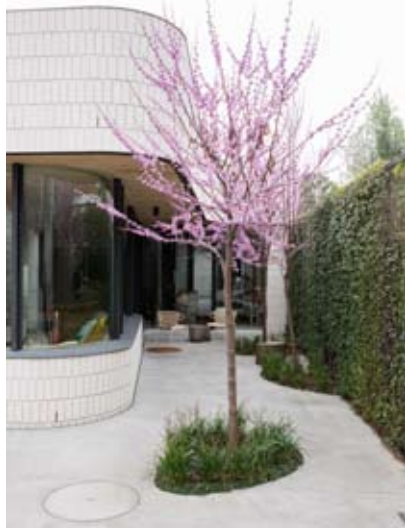
1. Leave no space unused
Ask yourself if you really need that dedicated guest bedroom or formal dining room.

2. Include furniture in your plans
It is easier to understand how people will circulate through a house with the furniture on the page. Doing so can also help you decide if a room could be smaller.

3. Quality over quantity
One of the reasons we use brick over endless amounts of plasterboard is because it looks the same today as it will in 100 years.



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- 01 Clare Cousins
- 02 Edwardian front façade of Cousins’ house
- 03 Eastern redbud trees in bloom behind Cousins’ house
- 04 Custom-built sofa in the main living space
- 05 Cousins’ daughter Ivy plays in the lounge



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- 01 Model of Liljevalchs art gallery, a project Petra Gipp was involved in
- 02 Team (from left): Emil Bäckström, James Hamilton, Giulia Donati, Diego Cittadini, Petra Gipp, Jonas Hesse and Malin Heyman
- 03 House on a cliff, designed by Petra Gipp
- 04 Gipp also designed this house in the Grimeton nature reserve
- 05 Exterior of the wooden box-like structure



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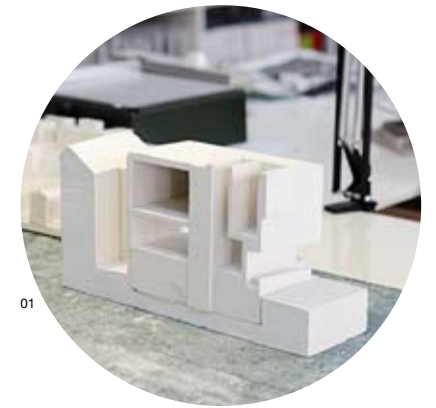
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Petra Gipp’s tips for the perfect home

1. Think long term by choosing solid materials
They will grow even more beautiful with age. Marks on a hardwood floor, for example, won’t show and can even add character.

2. Mix materials
Gipp loves the contrast of rough concrete against wood. The same feeling can be achieved by adding glossy paint to a rough surface.

3. Mix room sizes
The bedroom can be dark and small whereas the living room and kitchen should be opened up for socialising.



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Petra Gipp
Petra Gipp Arkitektur, Stockholm

At the top of a hill in the Grimeton nature reserve in the Swedish city of Varberg is a black, wooden box-like structure. When stepping through its door the full impact of the landscape emerges. “Since it is a nature reserve we wanted as small an imprint as possible,” says Stockholm-based architect Petra Gipp. “I believe in contrasts: my buildings refer to the landscape but also turn inwards to focus on the purpose of the space. The bedroom is dark with a narrow window from which you only see a pine tree, whereas the living room opens up to magnificent views of the forest and lake.”

After getting a degree in art in Copenhagen, Gipp tried a career in photography and sculpture but is now focused solely on architecture. She dabbled in public architecture – her portfolio ranges from art galleries to a PE hall – but it is her residential work that sets her apart. She has worked on a house on a cliff edge in the Stockholm archipelago and a beautiful wooden structure overlooking Lake Vättern in the east of Sweden. What links all her homes is the focus on solid materials, such as wood and concrete. “I work with clean materials that are allowed to age and are very robust,” she says. “I’m interested in the details, volume and environment.”

The wooden structure in Varberg is tarred in order to refer to the nature that surrounds it. “The land has belonged to the owner’s family for generations. It’s amazing to know the whole story around him. He’s worked in the woods to take down trees and now we have built a small refuge for him and his family from the same material.”

Gipp’s work evolves from long discussions with the client. “There is a view that architects finish the plan and then say, ‘Take it or leave it,’” she says. “But by adding something extra to each project, magic happens. We don’t necessarily get paid for that but profit is not my primary interest.”

Instead she prefers the low-scale projects where she grapples with fewer square metres and a smaller budget. “Otherwise you end up trying too hard. If you’re forced to compress it then you end up with a more coherent result. If you design homes in this way the people living there will get closer to each other as well.” — JDA gipparkitektur.se



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PHOTOGRAPHERS: PETER TARASTIUK, CHRISTOPHER HUNT, AKE E:SSON LINDMAN, BJÖRN LOFFERUD, BJÖRN LOFFERUD



Alan Tay
Formwerkz Architects, Singapore

Established by a group of university friends in 1998, Formwerkz Architects is run by four partners – Seetoh KL, Gwen Tan, Alan Tay and Berlin Lee – who lead a team of 25. The studio has delivered a steady flow of mostly residential work in the owners’ native Singapore with a range of other projects across the tropics, from Southern China to Malaysia and Indonesia.

The studio’s regional focus means it can precisely angle a window to catch a breeze yet retain privacy, infuse a space with daylight without baking it with heat and creatively integrate plants for both character and cooling. Partner Alan Tay notes that the design-demands of the tropical climate – large eaves, for example – can sometimes be at odds with the density demanded in a land-scarce island nation: “Singapore is often referred to as ‘a city in a garden’ but ironically, many new homes are built up and out to the exclusion of greenery,” he says.

“In Singapore the cost of land is so high that it can dwarf building costs, creating a condition where owners begin to think of their house more as a commodity than a habitat,” Tay adds. “People are often tempted to demolish and build out to the maximum allowable area. But the drive to maximise resale potential can often inhibit people from realising what is really good for their family.”

In response, Formwerkz urges clients to build “just enough” space for their needs and to consider retaining existing elements, as executed to great effect in the Extended House – voted the nation’s best building of 2013 by the Singapore Institute of Architects which brought new life to a 1970s bungalow by inserting concrete elements.

Terrace House, completed in 2013, is located in Upper Bukit Timah, a leafy, affluent area in northwest Singapore. The clients, an extended family of five,



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- 01 Bridge through the atrium to the roof terrace at Terrace House
- 02 Government-built housing blocks can be seen from the roof terrace
- 03 Terrace House’s breezy central atrium connects spaces for dining, living and play
- 04 Terrace House is located on a quiet residential street in Upper Bukit Timah
- 05 Partner Alan Tay



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requested simplicity, privacy, light and nature. The architects responded with a “staggered plan” of linked spaces that overlook each other across a double-height atrium while being screened from external views and the more private bedrooms. Each of the spaces – from glass-fronted study to sunken den – retains a sense of intimacy, while their linked nature allows the clients to host larger gatherings of their extended family. A sloping roof terrace offers views out over the surrounding city.

The team at Formwerkz is excited about its first big public project: a new mosque, due to open in 2015. As Tay puts it, the mosque’s “very domestic typology” will allow the studio to interpret many of the issues explored in their houses on a larger scale, furthering their ambition to “use architecture as a vehicle to raise awareness of space” and counteract Singaporeans’ “desensitisation” to their environment. — *S1 formwerkz.com*

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Alan Tay’s tips for the perfect home

1. Good communication
The best projects arise from a design process centred on how the client chooses to use their house. Select architects on their ability to translate a client’s dream into a practical reality.

2. Good concept
A strong idea provides clarity, addressing the myriad design considerations that affect the project as it develops.

3. Good construction
Sensible details, reliable methods and careful workmanship ensure the project’s longevity.



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Juan Guardati
Estudio Aire, Rosario, Argentina

Rosario is Argentina’s self-declared second city, some 300km northwest of capital Buenos Aires. The birthplace of Ernesto “Che” Guevara, today the city is awash with wealth generated by the surrounding countryside and the sizeable soy industry, meaning construction is booming.

Architects Juan Guardati and Román Renzi, both 42, founded Estudio Aire in 2003. The pair met at university and, after initially going separate ways, decided to join forces and run a studio. The architects have worked on residential housing and some 12 individual houses, most of them located in the neighbourhoods skimming the periphery of the town.

Guardati and Renzi have a very particular style: for them what a residence achieves is far more important than how it looks from the outside. “We think the important thing is what the form [of the house] produces and not the form itself,” says Guardati. The idea is that the atmosphere of the house is maximised, whether that be the circulation of outside air or the quality of light coming in. “The form of the house is designed to maximise all these factors,” the architect adds.

Estudio Aire’s portfolio is largely dominated by two materials: earlier work has used brick covered with a smooth plaster finish; recent residences have gone for more industrial exposed concrete. One of the most renowned homes in the former category is Casa AG, completed in 2010 and located in Roldán, Greater Rosario. “The house is shaped like a U,” says Guardati.

“The communal spaces – the living room, dining room, kitchen and gallery – are all built around this U and a central courtyard.” The house, the architect says, is a weekend residence for a large family – from grandparents down to grandchildren – and the challenge was mixing light-filled communal areas with the need for privacy in the bedrooms, all of which face outwards.

With Estudio Aire busier than ever, the studio’s latest work has seen it move into the collective-housing market. More recent individual houses, meanwhile, are made entirely of concrete. One of Guardati’s influences was Brazilian Lina Bo Bardi, who argued that the mark of the worker and not just the input of the architect should be palpable in a building’s surfaces.

Whatever the project being worked on at Estudio Aire, the client is always involved in the design process. “They’re part of the team,” Guardati says. “We never try and push ideas: they’re decisions we reach collectively.” — *EJS estudioaire.com.ar*

Juan Guardati’s tips for the perfect home

1. Design a simple structure
This allows the living space to be the protagonist.

2. Build an internal patio
This preserves the intimacy of domestic life and an important shared area.

3. Think about light
Manipulate natural light: observe how a day passes from inside the house.



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- 01 Concrete exterior of another Juan Guardati project, Casa RV
- 02 Side view of Casa AG
- 03 Estudio Aire’s patio
- 04 Architect Juan Guardati

PHOTOGRAPHERS: TAN HAI HAN, ALBANO GARCÍA