

Mainstreaming green homes



Given the wealth of green content that BPN has served up, **Warren McLaren** writes, especially since formally incorporating Environ into its editorial mix way back in 2002, readers might be forgiven for assuming that green building design was all pervasive, and dominated the architectural scene.

After all, the indicators are there, aren't they?
For example, 2012 is the Green Building Council of Australia's 10th birthday. In the past decade they've registered 530 Green Star projects, signed up 850 member companies, and accredited 4,500 building professionals.

When Ecospecifier started out as a joint project between RMIT and the Society for Responsible Design in 1999 it touted reviews of 150 green building materials. David Baggs and Mary Lou Kelly took the project under their wing in 2003, and with their guidance the database now references over 6,000 eco-products, materials and technologies, with the Ecospecifier websites eliciting over two million page views annually. (Handily disproving the myth that green building materials aren't readily available.)

The most recent figures released by the Clean Energy Council suggest that over six per cent of Australian households now have installed solar power. At first glance that doesn't sound like much, but digging a little deeper reveals just what a phenomenal uptake there has been by Aussie homeowners.

In 2006, the year An Inconvenient Truth started showing in cinemas, there were just 3,390 solar photovoltaic (PV) power

systems on Australian household roofs. By August 2011 there were 513,585 such systems installed nationwide. With a whopping 230,000 of those installed in the first eight months of 2011.

This robust embrace of grid-connected solar power by Australian households saw us, by the spring of 2011, become one of planet's first countries to achieve "grid parity", whereby photovoltaic cells output electricity for the same price as normally charged by the traditional grid.

Solar hot water systems saw similar growth. As of 2006 we had 37,088 new systems installed to heat water for Australian homes. Three years later the rate of installations has soared to 201,783 heaters, more than fivefold increase.

The Australian Window Association have experienced related interest in the energy efficiency of their product speciality. Their (Window Energy Rating Scheme) WERS now showcases 150,000 rated window products from some 280 window manufacturer members. In late 2011 they launched the efficientglazing.net website with tools for consumers to see what money and carbon emissions they could save by installing better windows.

The Federal Government's "Your Home: Australia's guide to environmentally sustainable homes" website and printed



manual is now, since its debut in 2001, in its fourth edition, with updates. The Commonwealth also has a new website, LivingGreener, comprising "information, how-to's & rebates for sustainable living." Even the Bureau of Meteorology have web data for "Comfortable, Low-energy Houses," explaining how readers across six different climatic zones can design or renovate to "have a comfortable home, save energy and dollars, reduce pollution, and protect the environment."

Yet somehow this information bom-

Jigsaw Housing are one group recognised for pushing green mainstream. Their Franklin House pictured serves as office and sustainable home showcase. Photography: Ben Wrigley