



# Changing households

***Changes to the shape and style of our housing stock are required as the structure of our households is changing rapidly.***

Berni and I were spending time in each others' houses in Melbourne and we were quite happy with that lifestyle. We were both in our mid 50s and busy with demanding jobs. Berni worked at Ormond College in administration and I in residential land development as a project manager.

BY HOWARD BARTLETT

On one of our frequent trips to visit family in Canberra we stopped in Benalla for a break. Before we left the next morning we checked out the town, driving up and down the wide streets with established street trees. On later trips we began to look at houses as a possible retirement project. The plan was to sell at Melbourne prices and invest the surplus to fund our early retirement.

## **Finding the right place**

We trolled the internet looking for the right property. We looked at shiny new houses in new estates on the fringe of Benalla; large houses with double garages and spare rooms for family and friends to stay. We opted for the wide tree-lined streets of the old part of town, within easy walking distance of three supermarkets, three pubs, medical clinics and the Benalla Railway Station on the Melbourne to Sydney line.

We found it!!



Two solid brick terrace houses on 800m<sup>2</sup> for \$230,000. How could we go wrong? Our offer was accepted and Unit 2 was rented out. Unit 1 was in need of major rebuilding and modernisation.

### Work begins

The urgent jobs were a new roof, air conditioning and insulation. The two houses were on one title so I put on my project manager hat and subdivided the terraces to enable transfer of the ownership to be as separately owned.

At the same time, the rear of Unit 2 was not required by the tenants so an artist's studio was built for Berni. The

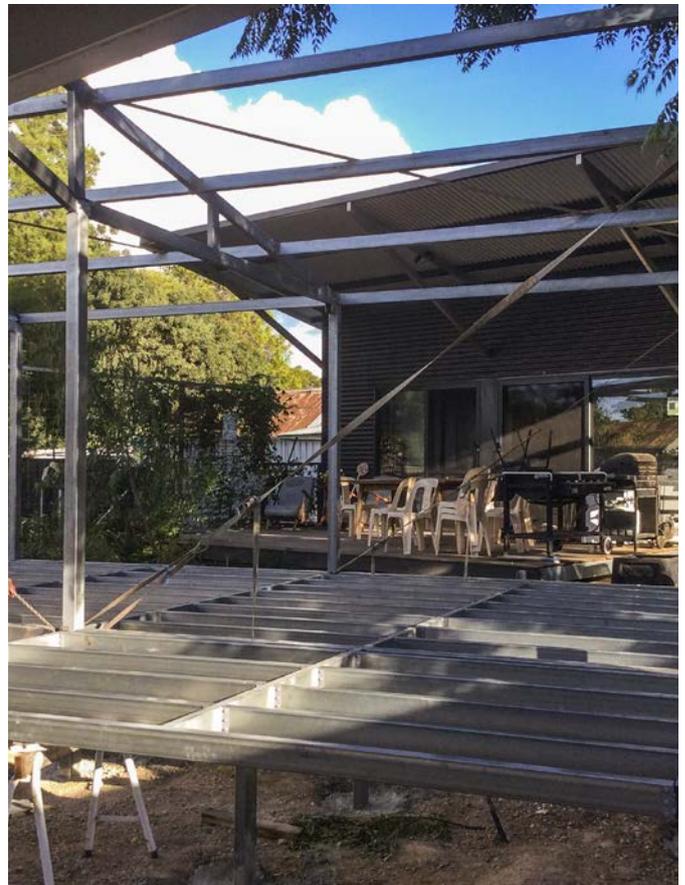
siting and design of the studio was a simple rectangle with the blank wall located close to the south boundary and the north wall including a bank of double glazed sliders opening onto a timber deck. The roof, a simple skillion, was angled to trap the low winter sun and cast welcome shade over the windows and deck in the heat of summer.

### Sleep-out

The next job was to demolish the old bungalow that crossed the title boundary to make way for a sleep-out; this would give us somewhere comfortable to sleep while Unit 1 was being renovated.

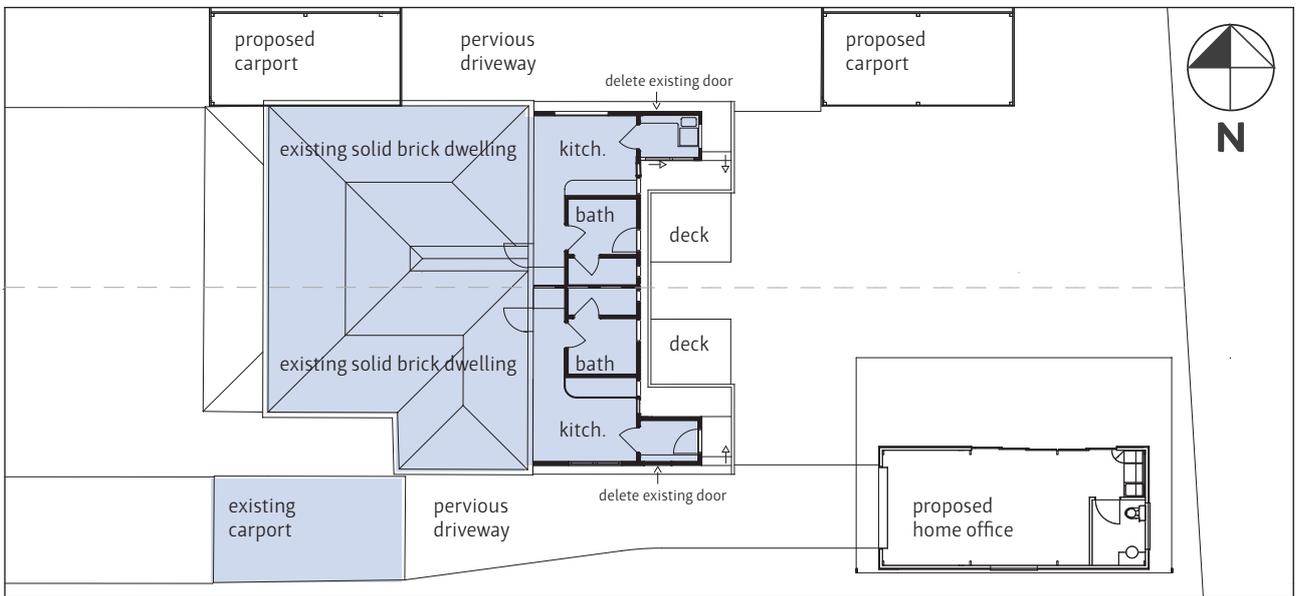
The council planner came on board when it was clarified that the building proposed was not a second dwelling. I explained that a dwelling defined in the Planning Scheme was a self contained building containing a bathroom AND a kitchen. It was okay to proceed as long as the sleep-out did not have a kitchen.

Similar to the studio, the sleep-out is a simple rectangle with a skillion roof including a large cantilevered eave on the north side. This time it was angled slightly west of north to create a triangle of garden between the studio deck and the blank wall of the sleep-out. The finished building connected to Unit 1 with a covered alfresco area.

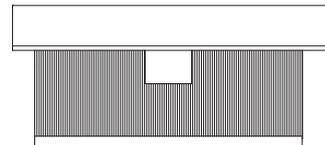




**Proposed floor plan**



**South elevation**



PLANS: HOWARD BARTLETT

## Household structure

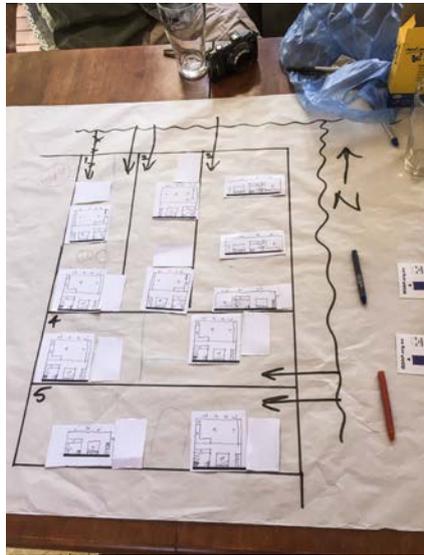
As with Berni and myself, the structure of our households is changing rapidly. Single people, childless couples, single parents, empty nesters, grey nomads and traditional couples with children represent a diverse market.

Changes to the shape and style of our housing stock will require today's owners, builders and designers to work with prospective tenants to rapidly reconfigure the stock of dwellings to be fit for purpose and cost effective.

SOAP House Design Inc. is a self-help group incorporated in Victoria. Our aim is to assist owners to rapidly reconfigure their existing housing to respond to today's needs with minimal cost, and to economically meet housing needs for family, friends and tenants.

With thoughtful, transparent design and consultation processes, owners are invited to: discuss simple changes to existing houses and gardens, to make the best use of inside and outside spaces, and to provide separate access to surplus space to be freed up for family or tenants. Even better, these changes can be made with the assistance and agreement of adjoining neighbours.

Currently, three of us run separate but overlapping workshops; I cover house design and siting, Lubosh gives tiny house talks (with or without wheels) and Neil does *Hempcrete* workshops.



*Howard and Berni's property will be open for Sustainable House Day 2017: 1&2, 25 Barkly St, Benalla Victoria 3672. Workshops will also be held on the day.*

## SUSTAINABLE HOUSE DAY

AUSTRALIA WIDE  
17 SEPTEMBER 2017

Open the door to sustainable living by touring some of Australia's most environmentally progressive homes. This unique peer to peer education is a valuable resource for anyone looking for inspiration, ideas and the key to sustainable living.

[www.sustainablehouseday.com](http://www.sustainablehouseday.com)

## Four + Four Rules

We have four golden rules:

- Smaller buildings are cheaper, simpler and quicker to build, more economical to run and maintain
- Careful arrangement of inside and outside spaces enables adaptable living as suits the weather
- Separate access for people and cars to a complex of buildings enables space to be shared, rented or sold
- Construction of a series of buildings provides the comforts of home and the infrastructure to plan and build the next stage.

And we have four simple rules:

- Use sunlight and shade
- Maximise open space, location, orientation and size
- Allow access for people and cars
- Create privacy between neighbours inside and outside spaces.



## Links & resources

### ◆ SOAP House Design Inc.

A nonprofit organisation with the purpose of promoting sustainable building design techniques for small dwellings.

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*soap.org.au*

