



Savings plans



Water-conscious design doesn't mean sacrificing a home's good looks, as this expert shows

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It's sleek, contemporary and has water conservation down to a fine art. In fact, this Prahran house gets ticks of approval for the major components of home design: orientation, energy efficiency, attractiveness, useful outdoor spaces and an ability to change with its residents.

The man in charge of the project, since it was just a block of land in inner Melbourne, is Luke Middleton, head of EME Group, a specialist in ecologically responsible house, school and office design.

Now occupied by its second owners, the house is part of Museum Victoria's Water Smart Homes project, and opens its door to the public today.

A second home, in Hawthorn, will also show its water conservation abilities to the public today as part of the scheme.

A peek at how the experts keep water use and costs down is a great way to get ideas to transfer to your own home.

One of the keys to wise-water use in Luke's design is the reflection pond at the entrance to the house, where hot air passing over the water cools down before entering the house.

"The water feature provides light and cool air to the house; water stabilises the temperature and acts as an evaporative cooling system," he says.

"It's like when you go to the beach and the temperature there is always a bit cooler than elsewhere.

"It's like having your own mini beach."

And Luke is the one to ask if you have any questions as you take the tour. He turns guide for the day to explain the finer details of the home's conservation strategies.

There is the 5500-litre rainwater tank used for flushing toilets, watering the garden and to top up the pond, and an attached metre that keeps track of usage.

The tank supplies 40,000 litres of water to the house each year. That means residents get thousands of litres of free water, and do not have to rely on a mains supply while their tank does such a good job.

"The shower head is Australian-designed and gives nine litres a minute, and because it's such a large, efficient shower rose, it means you take shorter showers," Luke says.

The average, old-style, small shower rose uses 16 litres of water a minute.

The garden has been designed to conserve as much water as possible, with mulching and groundcover plants low to the soil, both factors that retain moisture.

The garden is intentionally lawn-less, with courtyards serving as outdoor living spaces.

And permeable surfaces, which let water seep through to the ground below, have been used, with loose pebbles and timber decking, rather than pavers or concrete surfaces.

"We believe the future is all about energy and water efficiency without sacrificing beauty and comfort," Luke says.

He says the house was intended to be an adaptable home, with room layout and use that could change as its occupants required.

What used to be an upstairs work studio for a fashion designer is now a living area.

The house has two distinct zones, one upstairs and one down, with bedrooms, bathrooms, living space and their own outdoor access to functional fresh-air spaces.

The house, at 41 Wrights Terrace, Prahran, is open today, from 11am-3pm. Entry is free. For more information, phone 131 102 or visit www.museum.vic.gov.au/watersmarthome



Cooling off

As hot air passes over this reflection pond it brings cool air to the house (top)

Swap and change

Adaptable living spaces are an integral feature of this house design (top right)

Tap into it

Four-litre-a-minute taps were fitted as part of the water-aware move (above left)

Savings account

A metre keeps track of the home's water savings, through rainwater use (left)

Below deck

A water tank has also been fitted under the deck (right)

