



Sustainable Mastery

BRIGHT ALPINE BUILDERS

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMIE DURRANT**

Based in High Country Victoria, Bright Alpine Builders – a multi HIA-Award-winning company – delivers high quality custom-built homes and commercial buildings under the keenly focused eye of Master Builder Steve Graves. Continuity is a huge part of the company's build philosophy. According to Steve, each and every build begins with one very simple, yet firm, step.

'I like to put one foreman and his team and equipment on a new custom home build on day one and have that very same foreman help clean the windows on the day the home is handed over to the client,' says Steve. 'It's the way I prefer to manage all custom home builds – it provides greater efficiency, brings continuity to the build and delivers peace of mind for the client.'

Essentials recently visited a newly completed Bright Alpine Builders custom home, tucked neatly into a steep hillside overlooking the granite cliff faces of Victoria's Mount Buffalo. The unique property stands comfortably in this rustic sub-alpine location, showcasing materials carefully chosen by the owners to sympathetically fit into the natural surroundings. The passive solar design was a key principle for a home built using locally sourced materials, architect and tradespeople from start to finish. The result is a beautiful, hand-crafted custom home that the owners – along with Steve and his team – can be proud of.

'Attention to detail is our strong suit. We're adept at working with clients who have extremely high expectations', says Steve. 'Ensuring a tightly managed and beautifully executed build is what we do best; it's something we're particularly proud of.'

A covered al fresco entertaining area with views east to Ovens Valley farmland and distant mountains features smartly constructed galvanised weatherproof railing. The large-slab bluestone tiles continue around the house as a free flowing walkway that connects the northern and southern perimeter areas. Obscured from view, metres below a rocky escarpment, the Ovens River flows by. The sound of its burbling of water adds to the ambience of the space: nature is everywhere around this home, even when you can't see it. →





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← Deep-set eaves shade the interior from harsh summer sun, and high-rated ceiling and wall insulation passively controls the climate. Temperature control is furthered by extensive use of energy-star-rated argon-filled double-glazed windows that ensure minimum temperature loss through 'thermal break' technology that even reduces the conductivity of the aluminium frames. The sliding doors, built the same way, glide smoothly at a touch of their sleek gallery-inspired handles. The large glass panels showcase grand mountain vistas. The elements are so effectively controlled that despite the home's lofty perch it feels more like a whisper-quiet modernist cocoon safely nestled into the hillside. There's no sense of clifftop fragility as you look out across the slopes and valleys, snugly protected against the harshest winds and noisiest squawking cockatoos.

The design smarts continue with more thermal temperature control ingenuity thanks to an in-slab hydronic heating system using an ambient air heat pump – a magical device that cleverly redistributes heat where needed in winter, and is able to channel excess heat away in summer to maintain comfortable temperatures throughout the house. A second unit uses harvested heat to warm water for everyday domestic use. These units can generate up to 4.6 kilowatts of heat output for every kilowatt of electricity used.

COR-TEN weathering steel was used to make the exterior of the home blend perfectly with the landscape. It develops a stable rust-like finish after several years' exposure to weather: there's no need, ever, for painting. Granite stone and local spotted gum timber beams add eye-catching organic highlights for harmonious natural beauty.

Adam Williams of Wilko Cabinets is something of a veteran of local cabinet design, having worked with Steve Graves for over a decade on mountain homes and commercial properties on the nearby Mount Hotham ski resort. He has created an expansive central kitchen island topped with Dekton – a unique synthesised porcelain/stone surface that features zero porosity and a perfect finish. Impressively, there's not a micro-defect to be found. The kitchen is understated and elegant, with limited use of a charcoal stain laminate and deep neutral-toned glass splashback that sets off the induction cooktop and stainless appliances, rendering the layout both stylish and uber-functional. There's even a neat built-in knife and board utility nook at one end of the island.

Opposite the kitchen island is the main open-plan living space, divided into dining area and lounge separated only by a double-sided wood fire heater set within a massive granite column. A recessed ceiling above the dining area subtly adds an air of formality that makes the lounge area feel even cosier.

We love the small designer touches that abound throughout including the black Unios Titanium cylindrical surface-mounted downlights, a sharply accented touch of cool appeal. Unios Axis downlights with innovative rotating lens heads twist along a diagonal plane focusing toward the kitchen island. Together they add symmetry and contemporary appeal.

Bright Alpine Builders offers clients a complete range of project management and advisory services including land selection, choice of architect, application for council permits and manifold other services all the way through to equipping the home with designer furniture. From start to finish the focus is on an expert and trouble-free build.

Steve Graves combines modern and traditional building techniques to produce outstanding performance in custom home design, always striving to build better. The detailed execution of this alpine custom home demonstrates that Steve and his team are continually raising the bar.

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