



# BRAIN TRUST

AR ASKS A PANEL OF INDUSTRY EXPERTS THEIR RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION: **WHAT CAN AND SHOULD ARCHITECTS BE DOING TO HELP WITH THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING SITUATION?**

## / JOANNE JAKOVICH, CO-FOUNDER, BIG WORLD HOMES

Wow. Have you thought about how inflexible our housing market is? Young people are now eternally priced out. Our key workers – police and fire-fighters, teachers, nurses, service people – have to commute miles across the city each day. Our fixed ideas of ownership drag everyone into a desperate net, only to climb the ladder. And there's an increasing many who cannot or choose not to clamber.

Alex Symes' start-up Big World Homes emerged out of a six-week SOUP (Strategic Open Urbanism Platform) Innovation Lab on housing affordability in 2014, supported by the Committee for Sydney, UrbanGrowth NSW and over 200 collaborators, who

all backed a new approach to imagine alternative ways forward.

The SOUP community launched Big World Homes in late 2016 with a dazzling global media response to a simple proposition:

- remove the extraordinary cost of land
- remove the inhibitive cost of labour
- make it safe and fun
- design first – be remarkable and sustainable, and
- bring back the communities that we all knew as children (you know the ones).

Big World Homes is a transitional housing solution that combines an extremely affordable, community-driven, DIY housing product with a network approach to leasing underutilised land (think Airbnb for land). The model separates land and home ownership, enabling both the aspiring homeowner and landholder to find a mutually beneficial way to empower housing security.

Our world-first patented DIY housing technology integrates insulation, waterproofing and structure in lightweight panels that are modular, adaptive, cheap, durable and easy to install. Our homes are completely off-the-grid and can be built by two unskilled people in just a few days using only a hammer and a drill.

We started this journey as architects disillusioned in servicing the one percent. By

taking the open entrepreneurship pathway, we have not only rapidly evolved an alternative systems approach to a staid problem, we have also convened an enthusiastic community of supporters to help us coordinate disparate resources from across the city to realise the vision.

## / DEAN LANDY, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, PHILANTHROPIST AND PARTNER AT CLARKEHOPKINS CLARKE

Part of the affordability conundrum is housing diversity. The property market has recently been quite polarised. On one end of the spectrum, myriad small one- and two-bedroom apartments have been built in inner suburbs that appeal to investors, but don't cater to families or downsizers. On the other, we have seas of detached housing in greenfield suburbs that only cater to families. Affordability isn't just about cheaper housing in greenfield areas, which too often have a low level of amenity and liveability; it's also about making sure there are a range of housing choices, in a variety of locations that cater for a range of household types.

Architects tend to have cross-sector relationships with government, developers,



community organisations and other built environment consultants. These diverse relationships combined with a sound understanding of the commercial imperatives and constraints of property development, put us in a great position to identify market opportunities, and to effectively advocate for and even broker relationships and deals that enable diverse and high-quality affordable housing solutions.

Soho Village, a project ClarkeHopkinsClarke undertook with c|jent, MASBuild, incorporates one- and two-bedroom apartments and townhouses into a relatively high-density town centre in the outer Melbourne suburb of Point Cook. This was an area in which the predominant housing typology was detached homes.





The prevailing thinking was that medium density development wouldn't sell; Soho Village proved that hypothesis wrong with all apartments and townhouses selling quickly off the plan. Many have been sold to first-home buyers and downsizers. Soho Village is now somewhat of a demonstration project showing how vibrant, high-amenity town centres and housing diversity can be successfully introduced into greenfield areas.

## / SALLY MATTHEWS, DIRECTOR, MATTHEWS AND SCAVALL ARCHITECTS

In being approached to contribute a 'Pertherspective' to the Brain Trust question of the issue, I discussed the statement with a few of my colleagues. There is no shortage of ideas, opinions and lamentations in regards to affordable housing.

(This topic certainly holds enough fodder to write fair bit over the word allowance on the many issues. I will only discuss a single observation of this many faceted beast.)

I realised while discussing the issues, many of my architectural colleagues live in their own form of 'affordable housing', being their own homes they have designed and built.

These come in quite a few forms such as:

- the renovation of the overlooked house on the 'difficult block'
- accommodating a secondary residency on a single block to sublet space
- the 'small and efficient' floor plan that borrows external space that allows the owner to afford a little block in the high-end suburb, and
- the 'testing of ideas' house on an elevated block with amazing views in the unpopular suburb.

And so on and so forth... you may be sitting in one of these as you read this magazine.

Why can't there be more transference of this nimble development to the wider community?

This may take a little more faith from the bureaucrats and a little more flexibility in planning and approvals, and a few more people on the 'other side of the table' that are able to recognise and understand these proposals.

Architects should continue to lobby government and industry to improve communication, legibility and trust in architects' skills and professionalism.

A good starting point would be to have architects in all local councils and architects to put their hands up to take these positions when offered.

## / SOPHIE DYRING, DIRECTOR, SCHORED PROJECTS

Architects certainly have the skills to positively contribute to Australia's unaffordable housing situation. Affordable housing is a general term, including housing affordability to allow low-income workers to purchase property, and is also used to describe the social housing sector. It's important to make this clear as it illustrates the breadth of the issue. Schored Projects works across both areas to address housing affordability.

Architecture training provides us with knowledge across the construction process, which puts architects in a unique position. We understand design, construction methodology and, in some cases, costing. Innovative combinations of these elements can contribute to making housing affordable.

Architects can apply their knowledge in best practice design solutions to improve affordability in three ways. Affordability should be considered beyond the construction costs for a project and also include future building maintenance and running costs. Our Fredi.e transportable home considered these three ways in terms of construction methodology, materiality and environmental sustainable design.



The construction industry can be slow to embrace new technologies that can save time and money. Construction methodologies, such as modular construction and cross-laminated timber, can save time, minimise waste and increase quality in a factory environment. Architects designing with new technologies can encourage industry uptake. Fredi.e works with the particular construction systems of a fabricator we collaborate with to minimise construction costs.

Architecturally designed custom houses often suffer from budget overrun. Bespoke projects will always be valued and required, but if we could inject greater standardisation into the housing sector, this could have an impact on reducing project construction costs, even in bespoke projects.

Finally, architects should take the initiative to rattle the current system like our VicRoads Launch Housing Ballarat Road project, which is installing 57 Fredi.e units or the Nightingale housing model. These are examples of how we can redefine the architect's role in addressing affordable housing from reactive to proactive. **ar**