



# KITTED OUT

Modular housing may be the solution you are looking for, writes  
MICHELLE OSTROW ZUKERMAN.

## SUBURBAN STREETS

are often closed. Sometimes for street parties, sometimes for fun runs. Sometimes even for bringing in a palm tree and using a crane to hoist it over the power lines.

One Sunday recently a street in Kensington was closed. But it was for none of the above. No, this closure heralded the arrival of a funky addition to a property in the form of a two-storey ARKit house.

Modular housing may not be a new concept but ARKit modules are taking them to a new level.

In Balwyn North, an ARKit home is already being used for elderly parent accommodation. A module is also soon to sit atop an iconic St Kilda penthouse some time in November.

ARKit homes may not be the only 21st-century version of the kit home available but, designed and built in Australia, they are the only flat-pack choice for more tricky locations.

Craig Chatman, 38, the architect behind ARKit, believes his point of difference is in choosing to use solid-timber external cladding for its environmental properties and its beauty. Over time “the timber slowly fades to a silvery hue, and it is sourced from sustainable, managed and harvested sources”, he says.

Aside from its aesthetic value, it is termite-proof and experiences low shrinkage. The timber can be left natural or, for a more enduring product, a coat of oil every few years will mean no blistering from synthetic varnishes.

A fully delivered dependent persons’ accommodation measuring about four metres by seven metres costs about \$70,000. For this you get a one-bedroom module with en suite. Additions can be made at a further cost.

The ARKit system, protected by intellectual property



laws, uses integrated wall panels that interlock to form a wall system. It has sturdy, rigid, structural walls where windows are interlocked and plywood is used rather than plastering. Although the homes come with an industry standard seven-year guarantee, Chatman believes they will last 40-60 years.

ARKit modules are suitable for add-ons to existing homes, home offices, artist studios or holiday house accommodation. Modules can be attached to the top of an existing house, depending on the foundations. If the module is for use by dependents, it can be installed



**More choice:** ARKit modules take kit homes to a new level. (SUPPLIED)

without town planning requirements, says Chatman. It can be delivered within four to six weeks, whereas a new house is typically a 12-month process for onsite building works. His team organises everything, including permits, and delivery is by crane, which is used to slot the module or extension into place.

Chatman’s holiday house in the Grampians was the first ARKit prototype and is where he and his long-time partner, a doctor of entomology, test their theories.

Moreover, due to internet exposure, ARKit is now in the planning stages of setting up hotel accommodation on an empty block in rural NSW. The client is renting land, so if a move is required after several years, the business is transportable.

ARKit is not only suitable for the Australian climate but can be ordered bespoke for cyclone, fire, or flood-prone areas, says Chatman.

The name ARKit is also set to go international. Chatman travelled to India to visit the site of a proposed eco resort in Solan. He is planning to set up a small village on private property and hopes to begin the project early next year. Modules will be shipped flat-packed for local tradesmen to erect.

Inquiries are now coming in from all over the globe, including Sri Lanka, Israel, South America and New Zealand, where a friend of Chatman’s has the licence.

Born in Papua New Guinea, Chatman travelled to Fiji, Adelaide and then finally to Melbourne, where his father was the South Pacific regional manager for British Paints. From an early age, he was creating balsa models and configuring Lego into workable art.

After graduating as a bachelor of architecture (Hons) from RMIT, Chatman travelled to Holland to see how the design movement in Rotterdam rebuilt the city after the Second World War.

His philosophy is an important factor in this business, expressing integrity through being able to build, not just design. A jack-of-all-trades, he has an environmental bent, conscious of what goes into building, especially as consumers are becoming more aware of the environment, as much as the building process itself.

Working with Tai Hollingsbee, of engineering company GHD, ARKit’s patented panelised system is going from strength to strength and that ensures Chatman is considerate of his carbon footprint. So far, he has only trodden lightly.

His holiday house and other projects can be viewed on the ARKit website.

*It can be delivered in four to six weeks*

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