

How has the housing industry changed?

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As this will be my last New Homes Plus editorial before I retire, I thought I would reflect on some of the changes that I have observed in the housing industry over the last 35 years that I have been employed with the Master Builders Association.

When I started in August 1983, Perth was a very different place and still celebrating Australia's historic victory in the America's Cup. Housing choices were rather limited. Four-bedroom, double brick and tile homes with a formal lounge, dining room and games room were the norm. Today, with a changing demographic, including more migrants, an ageing population and a trend towards inner-city living, the choice of dwelling styles has changed considerably.

The design of new homes is now very much limited only by a client's needs and imagination. New homes range from luxury mansions to retirement villas and social community homes and cottages for the needy, from family homes to single occupants and granny flats on the same property, from inner-city apartments to forest

retreats, beachside villas or rural homesteads, from single level houses to multi-storey residences.

Building materials and external finishes also vary according to budget and taste and differentiate neighbourhoods immensely. The need for disabled access for elderly relatives living at home has resulted in some clever designs. I expect this diversity to increase.

Some of the more significant changes I have observed include:

- The popularity of the internet in sourcing information about builders, housing designs and land availability.
- The higher volume and proportion of housing commencements carried out by project builders in WA.
- The greater importance attached to energy efficiency ratings to reduce power costs.
- The disproportionate increase in the cost of land compared to the modest increase in construction costs over the last four decades. This has resulted in a decrease in the size of blocks for housing from around 700sqm to 400sqm or less these days. It has also brought about the advent of micro lots. Double-storey homes have therefore become more necessary to accommodate the occupants.
- The increasing popularity of infill

developments which include duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, grouped housing and apartments, even though detached housing remains popular.

- The increasing use of Colorbond tin for roofs and fences.
- The introduction of mandatory housing indemnity insurance in 1996 to protect new homeowners from builders going broke.
- The amazing range of luxury options homeowners can now have in their homes. Sophisticated security systems using facial recognition technology and other security features are available; today's homes have entertainment and theatre rooms, remote-controlled heating and cooling appliances, alfresco areas which have pizza ovens, spas, tiered or revolving parking bays, automatic closing doors, lifts, automatic blinds, gyms and many technologically-advanced gadgets.
- The growing importance of public transport and access to rail and bus stops.
- More females and indigenous businesses working in our industry which is a pleasing trend.
- A much greater awareness of safety and the need to provide safer workplaces.
- The introduction of superannuation, the

GST, portable long service leave and the Construction Training Fund.

- The private certification of building permits, which has streamlined the building approval process. However, the expansion of regulations governing the housing industry such as "bushfire attack levels", a more complicated planning regime, greater inconsistencies across local governments, more forms and reports for builders to complete all add additional costs to homeowners.
- The growing popularity and importance of winning a Master Builders Housing Excellence Award to demonstrate a builder's quality of workmanship and benchmark their performance against other comparable builders.
- Like most other industries, the housing industry is subject to a range of disruptive technologies such as 3D printing, robotics, drones, building information modelling (BIM) and artificial intelligence. This will require careful understanding of the implications, a sensible transition period, proper training and widespread education for both builders and homebuyers. I will be monitoring these developments with great interest.

John Gelavis has been appointed to take over my role as Master Builders Executive Director and he is looking forward to confronting these and other new challenges.



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