

# design anthology



Asia Pacific Edition

Interiors, Art, Architecture, Travel, Style

Issue 36

# The House at Lizard Island

*Text by Kee Foong*

*Images by Peter Bennetts*





WANDERLUST  
GUESTHOUSE, AUSTRALIA

Paradise can be a double-edged sword — a concept of which James Davidson was acutely aware when he was hired to design the ultimate beach shack on Lizard Island, the northernmost island resort on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. The accommodation had to be suitable for heads of state, celebrities and other well-heeled guests regularly drawn to one of Australia's premier resorts. It had to frame the spectacular setting within the Great Barrier Reef, a World Heritage-listed natural wonder. And it had to withstand the fierce tropical cyclones that occasionally batter the region.

To that end, Davidson appears to have succeeded, having created a singular residence that stands apart literally and figuratively from the other suites and villas at the resort. Simply named The House, the three-bedroom concrete dwelling is flanked by granite boulders, Moreton Bay ash trees and sparkling blue water. It fuses indoors and out, the natural and manmade, and ruggedness and comfort in an inviting whole.

Creating The House brought challenges that were not only weather-related. Davidson, whose practice JDA Co. specialises in flood-, fire- and storm-resilient architecture, had inherited another firm's design that he believed wasn't right. He persuaded the resort's owners, Steve and Jane Wilson, to accept an alternative concept that was more cost-effective and better suited to the environment.

Davidson camped at the proposed site for months before so much as making a sketch. He studied the weather, landscape, tides and the sun and moon, and pondered how best to resolve logistical issues like getting materials to such a remote location.

The result is a house for all seasons. Its shape references a stingray and subtly acknowledges the country of the Dingaal people. Floor-to-ceiling windows face north-east to take advantage of the natural light and dazzling views of the Coral Sea and nearby islands. From the south and west, the building appears defensive, with window slits and copper grilles that shield it from the elements.

Granite floors pave the ground-level garden room and terrace. Upstairs are the main bedroom, living room and kitchen, the latter with a dramatic conch-like bench made from emerald quartzite. Crowning the building is an open-air rooftop terrace and spa with 360-degree views of the island and sea.

Connecting each level is a central spiral staircase that winds its way up to an oculus that shows the passing of the day. Although air-conditioning is available, guests can also control the temperature by opening a shutter here and door there to take advantage of cooling cross breezes.

Thoughtful measures have been taken to soften an overwhelmingly concrete space. The floors have been polished to velvety smoothness without being slippery. Copper and rosewood timber, used throughout, are hardy and add warmth. A stylist was brought in to help with furniture and soft furnishings, which were chosen not just for their looks, but to endure harsh conditions.

What Davidson loves most about The House is something less tangible: a sense of peace. It's protected and secluded yet airy and open, a luxurious shelter from the storm and a conduit to nature that is beautifully distinctive, yet firmly of its place.

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Realised by architect James Davidson and his firm JDA Co., The House is an immense three-bedroom concrete dwelling on the rugged coast of Lizard Island on Australia's Great Barrier Reef

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Inside, the robust shell is softened with copper and rosewood elements. The interior design has all the sophistication of luxury accommodation, though the ocean and island views are a constant reminder of the remote location



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Floor-to-ceiling windows and  
doors connect all spaces with the  
landscape so the structure feels  
immersed in nature

Next page  
Whether indoors and private or  
outside and communal, such as the  
garden room and terrace, all spaces  
were designed to be protected and  
secluded yet airy and open



