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# EVOLUTION SITE





## A Perfect Vessel

The traditional Japanese house has had a surprisingly strong influence on Australian domestic design. This has been most evident in Sydney. But Robert Rolls has designed a house on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria which adapts Japanese elements to a very different climate.

Text  
Stephen Crafti

Photography  
Mark Munro

Living in Japan has influenced the way Robert Rolls approaches design. As a designer/builder, Rolls has absorbed many of the finer Japanese features into the Urushi House, overlooking the coastal dunes of St. Andrews Beach, on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. Rolls spent a year working on the Australian Consul-General's home in Kobe with Stonehenge Homes. "I was convinced many Japanese elements could be successfully incorporated into our own homes," he says.

Even before the house is explored, visitors are kindly asked to remove their shoes. A 'Genkan', an elevated slatted timber platform, includes a Japanese-style cabinet behind the front door for placing shoes. Guests can then appreciate the visual as well as tactile experience of East meets West.

On the ground floor are two bedrooms with a shared bathroom. Instead of doors and walls to the passage, shoji screens are used. When the screens are left open, they borrow space from the hallway to create larger spaces. Rolls' belief in the shoji screen was the impetus for both designing and importing screens and tatami mats into Australia. "Wonderful shadows are created against the rice paper," says Rolls, who nestled the two bedrooms and the garage behind a timber-battened wall. The timber-battened front elevation also allows the glass doors along the passage to be completely opened. "They are not so much about access to the garden as they are about ventilation and allowing a continuous flow of air," he adds.

On the second level of the home are the office, bathroom and laundry. Designed to accommodate a home business, clients can avoid walking through the more private areas of the house. Simply designed with built-in cupboards and a workstation, the office bench extends to the outdoor deck perched in the Tea trees. "I designed the bench, to provide the option of working outdoors during the warmer weather," says Rolls, who was particularly taken with the way the Japanese blur interior and

exterior spaces. "When you see how the Japanese live, you start to appreciate the practicality as well as their fine aesthetics. They also have an innate ability to work with materials, such as stone and timber", says Rolls, who cleverly incorporated both materials into the house. "Eventually the pine will turn silver like the Tea trees," he adds.

On the third level are the kitchen, the main living and dining area. A timber and steel deck wraps around this space, allowing views of the coastal scrub, with its gnarled forms. Rather than creating a division between the kitchen and the living areas, Rolls designed a continuous bank of American Cherry cupboards. At the kitchen end, concealed behind the cupboards, are the fridge and pantry. At the other end are a television and stereo unit. A secret door, aligned with the bank of cupboards, reveals a staircase to the main bedroom and ensuite. "There's that sense of privacy, but the house is also about creating an element of surprise," says Rolls.

There is also great delight in seeing how a traditional Japanese bathroom is designed in a Western style setting. In the bathroom are two 'sit down showers'. "You sit on the wooden stools and wash the suds away with these hoses," says Rolls, who also incorporated in the design two rosettes in the ceiling and a sunken bath for those wanting to clean themselves in a Western style.

'Urushi', the name given to the house, is Japanese for a special container made of lacquer. Rolls picks up an urushi with its signature hues of red and black. "It's the perfect vessel," he says with admiration. >

Design/Build First Impressions  
Architect Robert Rolls  
Engineer Chadwick Grimmand Engineering  
Cabinetry Giron Services  
Landscaping Terra-Australis Landscapes





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#### Flooring

Natural rade Blackbutt flooring throughout the interior with Jarrah decking outside from Everest Timber.

Everest Timber (61 3) 5979 1674

#### Lighting

Dimmers to all main rooms and decks from Beacon Lighting, as is the C Bus system controlling outdoor lighting, uplit and downlit chimney and garden lights, controlled by three sensors on all access points.

Beacon Lighting (61 3) 5278 4264

#### Screens and Doors

Shoji screens made from Tasmanian Oak have been used to create a flexible open plan in which rooms can be separated as required. Backlit shoji inlays at entry. Shoji screens from the Japanese Shoji and Tatami Company. Shower screen from Regency. Imported oriental front door from Oriental Artifacts.

Japanese Shoji and Tatami Company (61 0) 421 126 401

Regency (61 2) 6041 2880

Oriental Artifacts (61 3) 9824 1696

#### Finishes

Dressed Jarrah in the bathroom as wall cladding and for the external screen. External cladding is treated shiplap. Windows are hardwood stained black with Ebony Cetol from Sikkens.

Everest Timber (61 3) 5979 1674

Sikkens Woodcare Products 1800 338 871

#### Cellar

The cellar is a solid structure-within-a-structure with natural temperature control for 1100 bottles.

Cellar Creations (61 3) 9775 5544

#### Glazing

Windows are from Trend. Slumped glass, splashbacks and feature windows are Profile Glass.

Trend (61 3) 9751 7000

Profile Glass (61 3) 9761 4399

