

a different approach

Englehart Homes is one of the most recognised brand names for luxury homes in Melbourne.

Nassim Khadem reports.

Ron Englehart, who heads Kew-based Englehart Homes, has been at the top of his game for three decades, continually setting new benchmarks in home design.

‘We have always strived to be different with our homes,’ Ron says. ‘We aim to be the market leader. As a result, we have a bit of a following.’

Ron worked for a series of prominent national and international companies prior to starting Englehart Homes almost 30 years ago. His background in management and marketing helped him identify a niche that propelled Englehart Homes into the top-end market.

‘When I started Englehart Homes in the early ’80s, there wasn’t a project home that catered for the third-home buyer,’ Ron says.

‘I wanted to design and build a high-quality house that had so-called

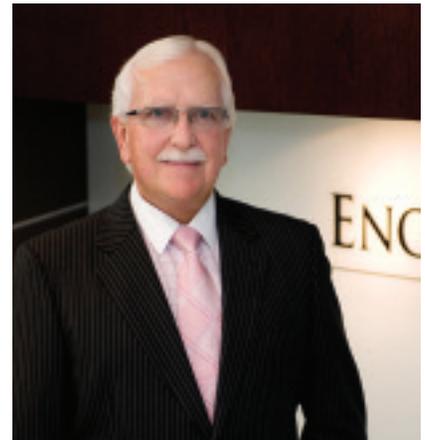
architectural features that would set apart Englehart Homes from the typical display home, without the high costs associated with architects at that time.

‘We developed a design that offered a dramatic streetscape and incorporated new features not normally associated with display homes, such as balanced roof lines, highlight windows, feature timber brick and open living spaces resulting in an environmentally efficient design.’

‘We employ the best architects and designers to get the best outcomes for our clients’

The house, the Cooida (Aboriginal word for happy place), was built in Melbourne’s inner-eastern suburb of Templestowe in 1980 and was an instant success.

Since then Englehart Homes has evolved, increasing its range of designs and its share of Melbourne’s housing market. The company’s focus is on display and custom-built homes but Englehart also offers house and land packages in inner Melbourne.



Above: Ron Englehart, founder of Englehart Homes.

It employs 35 direct staff and works with leading architects to offer consumers innovative designs catered to their individual needs. There are, at any one time, between 100 and 150 tradespeople working on various projects.

Ron also heads Lucas Morris Homes, which he was associated with in the late ’70s, acquired in the early ’90s, and recently revamped. Englehart Homes delivers individual designs for third-home



buyers in the \$500,000 plus home range. Lucas Morris focuses on project homes, for the third-home buyer in search of a more affordable product, generally in the \$300,000 to \$500,000 range.

Meeting expectations

Englehart Homes' current display homes are influenced by the principles of Frank Lloyd Wright, a famous American architect who led the way in organic and 'open living' design in the '20s and '30s.

One of the company's most popular designs is the Saville, with the latest display characterised by its projecting roofline and wide eaves, open living spaces and catered for the Australian lifestyle and climate.

In a few weeks Lucas Morris Homes will launch a new display home in Balwyn North, which Ron expects will become the new hit in luxury affordable housing.

As consumer expectations continually increase, meeting the Englehart motto of 'we are only as good as the last home we build' becomes even more important.

'We have a far more intelligent marketplace that wants their signature on the design,' Ron Englehart says. 'The quality of workmanship and materials used in the home has dramatically improved as a result.'

'From painting doors off-site to selecting the finest porcelain and marble tiles, we make sure we offer the best quality homes.'

Together, Englehart and Lucas Morris deliver about 60 projects a year. Ron aims to keep annual turnover between \$25 million and \$30 million.

'From our first design, the Cooida, to our current display range, we have always tried to take a different approach,' Ron says.

'We employ the best architects and designers to get the best outcomes for our clients. And we focus a great deal of effort on marketing our brand and the associated service we offer.'

Englehart Homes has won more than 90 industry awards since its inception, most notably as HIA's 2007 Professional Builder of the Year.

It has also received national recognition for low-energy housing, and in 2006 Englehart Homes won one of the state's top business awards, the Age/Dun & Bradstreet Builder and Allied Services Victorian Business Award.

Ron says the number one issue for his business is to win back consumer confidence damaged by the global financial crisis.

Another issue is maintaining affordability in an environment where governments are introducing more taxes, and meeting the Victorian government's planning objective of creating more high-density housing in inner Melbourne.

Ron is one of several main players involved in the high-rise Doncaster Hill

Development in Melbourne's east. The project has stalled because the market is still to accept that a high-rise apartment needs to sell on the market for a similar price to a three-bedroom home on a 500-square metre block of land.

'As much as there is a pent-up demand for downsizing and as much as we would like high-density housing to be successful, the government needs to accept that changing from medium density to high density doubles your price,' Ron says.

'In my view, the move from five-star to six-star has a very high cost with little environmental benefit'

Ron says a solution is for governments to recognise infrastructure savings and the benefits of reduced urban sprawl by subsidising taxes such as stamp duty and land tax on high-density developments.

He also wants the state government to stop increasing the cost of new housing through environmental and other regulations.

'In my view, the move from five-star to six-star has a very high cost with little environmental benefit,' Ron says. 'We will be required to either compromise the house design or install expensive glazing and other measures to achieve the rating.'

It's a view that Ron has been actively putting forward for some time, having been involved in various HIA roles and committees for more than 20 years.

Ron was the inaugural chairman (and is currently a member of) HIA Victoria's Planning, Environment and Development Committee. He was also HIA's first national GreenSmart leader.

While the current downturn has slowed growth, Ron intends to expand both Englehart Homes and Lucas Morris Homes over the next few years to increase buying power to ensure value to home buyers.

'Maintaining consistency in quality and service is the most important factor,' he says.

'Over the years, I've seen many builders come and go, but the reason we've survived for three decades is that we've remained creative, dependable and consistent.' 

