

05 Barn

Design Handbook 2025

With Julian Brenchley,
Group Architects



Meet your guide

Julian Brenchley

Julian is the mastermind architect behind many of The Block’s transformations. He’s an expert in barn design, and how to create the rustic barn feel whilst ensuring energy efficiencies, flexible floor plans, and modern kitchen and entertaining spaces.



From Julian:

‘The barn form is instantly recognisable—like a kid’s drawing of a house. A strong, symmetrical roofline makes it powerful. From there, you can play with the design—rotate it, split it, or create double barn forms for added flexibility.’

Cover

The Barn has bona fide street appeal. Stria™ Cladding Smooth painted an earthy rust colour, and a timeless peaked-roof silhouette are symbolic of the heritage of the design.

This handbook will show you how to achieve the Barn look inside and out and support your journey to creating a Barn home. From the steeply-pitched roof, to the oversized picture windows, to open floorplans and interior details, this guide is designed to help you create spaces that embody the spirit of Barn style.



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Lifestyle themes

The Modern Homes Forecast 2025 identifies four lifestyle themes changing the way we design and build our homes today. Global and local changes are reshaping how we live, and here we show how Barn homes are evolving to reflect these shifts.

01 Building Efficiencies

Barn-style homes, inspired by Nordic minimalism, are renowned for their straightforward design, cost-effective construction and efficient use of space. The open-plan layouts enhance natural light and ventilation, contributing to energy efficiency. Barn designs also adapt well to natural surroundings, allowing for optimal orientation that maximises passive solar gain and natural cooling, reducing reliance on artificial climate control. Furthermore, the use of durable materials like Hardie™ cladding products ensure longevity and low maintenance.

Builders love working with the Barn style because it’s predictable. Standard spans, simple rooflines, and uniform cladding all make for a cost-effective build. Early contractor engagement ensures the design stays practical and budget-friendly.

‘A barn is a simple structure. If you overcomplicate the build, you create more surface area, more complexity, and more cost. The beauty of a barn is its straightforward form—it’s efficient to build and easy to adapt.’

—Julian Brenchley, Group Architects



03 Flexibility

Barn spaces are inclusively designed to reflect a family’s evolving needs. Visibility of play and pool areas, private yet accessible parents’ retreats and the flexible floorplans to adapt as children grow or multi-generational living becomes a reality are central to these designs. Such homes cater to a variety of stages—welcoming young children, accommodating guests or grandparents, and even addressing the needs of adult children who stay longer than expected.

‘The barn layout is completely adaptable. Inside that iconic shape, you can create anything—open-plan living, separate zones, even a secondary dwelling with its own entrance. It’s about designing for now and for the future.’ says Julian.



04 Resilience

Incorporating steel frames and non-combustible external cladding systems, such as James Hardie’s fibre cement products, significantly enhances the resilience of barn-style homes. Steel frames provide robust structural support, offering resistance to pests like termites and reducing the risk of warping or rotting over time. When paired with non-combustible cladding materials, these homes achieve superior fire resistance, a crucial consideration in areas prone to bushfires.

02 Wellbeing

Effective use of natural light and ventilation, enhanced by cross-ventilation strategies, creates fresh and comfortable interiors while reducing reliance on artificial systems. Colour plays a key role, with the option for colourful, well-balanced designs using Australian bush tones, accentuated with bold colour blocking and warm timber elements, fostering both individuality and harmony with the surrounding neighbourhood.

- 1 Barn style houses typically have a complete absence of eaves, and oversized windows, as seen in this Barn project, ‘Big Red’, designed by Architect George and clad in Axon™ Cladding. Photo by Max Combi.
- 2 The simplicity of shape and cladding dominant materiality of the barn works well with bold colour blocking. Shown here using Hardie™ Oblique™ Cladding in 200mm and 300mm painted in terracotta.
- 3 Large windows accentuate the form of this Barn home, clad with Hardie™ Oblique™ Cladding, combined with Hardie™ deck and large sliding doors to connect with nature.



Easy, flexible & cosy

Combining dramatically high ceilings with flexible floor plans, the Barn offers rural charm in urban surroundings. As the style has evolved, the Barn design has become illustrative of simple, relaxed design with an emphasis on function and family.

Theme insight Wellbeing

A well-designed barn home prioritises natural light and airflow, creating a healthier indoor environment. Large windows strategically placed to capture northern light improve mood and energy efficiency by reducing reliance on artificial lighting. Cross-ventilation strategies, such as aligning windows and openings to encourage airflow, help prevent moisture buildup and maintain indoor air quality.

‘The barn aesthetic promotes wellness through a strong connection with nature—large window openings, indoor-outdoor spaces.’ says Julian.

This style continues to grow in popularity due to its potential for flexibility and cost effective structural profile in both new builds and renovations.

New interpretations of the Barn play with roof lines to create asymmetry and use bold colours to stand out. The interiors remain warm and uncluttered, with natural-look materials and soft textures providing a sense of calm and wellbeing.

Australian Barns have evolved from their Nordic predecessors to suit local climates and surrounds. The Barn also taps into our desire for simplicity in busy, complex times with its agricultural heritage offering a sense of authenticity.

A sense of calm, comfort and wellbeing is at the forefront of design. While the peaked roof is symbolic of the heritage of this design, modern interpretations play with the roof lines to create asymmetry and use bold colours to stand out from the crowd. The Barn silhouette is consistent as a simple diagrammatic form. Adopting clean lines, the style mimicking the look and feel of craftsmanship from early settler homes ultimately fulfilling a heritage feel without sacrificing modern convenience.

Theme insight Flexibility

The Barn architectural design style offers inherent flexibility, making it adaptable to various modern needs while retaining its rustic charm. The key flexibility qualities of the Barn style include open floor plans, multipurpose living spaces, indoor/outdoor integration and energy efficiency upgrades.

‘With flexible zoning, a home can function as a family home today and as an investment property tomorrow.’ says Julian.

The barn form allows for clever zoning—you can lock off a section as a secondary dwelling with its own entry. Whether it’s for aging parents, adult children, or rental income, it’s a future-proof design solution.

Theme insight Resilience

The Barn style prioritises sustainability through light, insulation and eco-friendly materials and is a good passive house choice. ‘Shading is key for resilience—shade hoods over windows prevent overheating.’ says Julian.

- 1 Stria™ Cladding Smooth works well with the timeless Barn silhouette and large windows. These barn-style windows can be used to great effect for bringing light and ventilation into the home.
- 2 Dramatic ceiling heights offer vertical opportunities for space to be utilised through mezzanine levels to squeeze in separate living or working areas.



Design features

1 Steeply pitched roof

A gable roof should be elevated and high set with a pitch of 35 to 45 degrees to create a diagrammatic form. The roof is typically clad with corrugated steel.

2 Deep and/or absence of eaves

There should be either a complete absence of eaves, or there should be over-sized eaves. This provides a striking silhouette and shade to entrances and alfresco areas.

3 Artisan exterior

Vertical or horizontal cladding detail creates an artisan look and can be painted any colour to either mimic or stand out in the surrounds. Small touches of timber or stone are often used alongside cladding.

To improve cost efficiency, ensure ceiling heights and room dimensions align with standard material sizes—for example, Julian suggests using 3m cladding panels eliminating unnecessary horizontal joints, reducing waste and labour.

4 Rectangular windows

Long, rectangular windows and sliding doors accentuate the dramatic height of the house. This also helps to highlight the connection to nature and outdoor spaces.

5 Interiors

Barns enjoy warm and uncluttered interiors, with soft textures, natural-look materials, and interior barn doors. Every square metre in a barn home should serve a purpose. Julian maximises usable living areas to lower overall construction costs. He suggests stacking bathrooms and wet areas vertically to simplify plumbing and installation expenses.

‘The beauty of barn design lies in its incredible flexibility—it’s a structure that can seamlessly adapt to narrow sites, making the most of compact spaces, while also flourishing on wider lots where its full potential can be realised. It’s a barn, after all, so you’ve got heaps of options to shape it into something uniquely yours.’

—Julian Brenchley, Group Architects



Theme insight

Building Efficiencies

Want to cut heating and cooling costs? Zone your home. Close off areas you don’t need all the time—like extra bedrooms—and focus on heating or cooling the spaces you actually use daily.

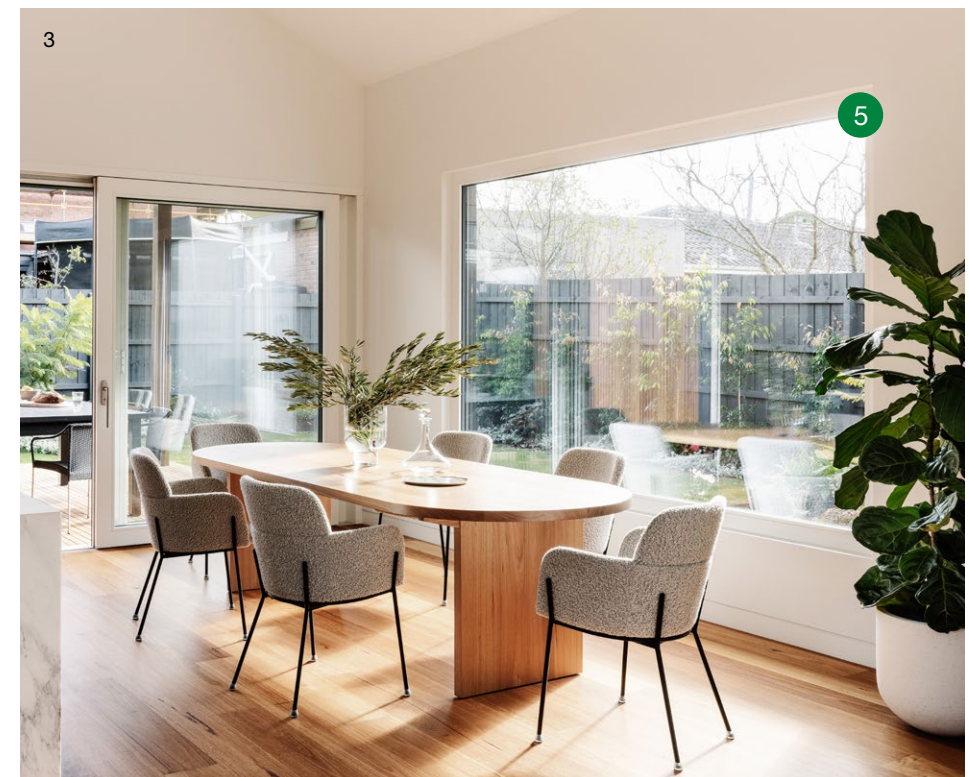


Theme insight

Flexibility

The Barn really leans in to smart spacial planning. ‘You can lock off parts of the house to create a secondary dwelling inside the barn itself. Separate entry points allow teenagers or elderly parents their own space while still being part of the home’ says Julian.

- 1 The vertical lines of Hardie™ Oblique™ Cladding accentuate the feel of craftsmanship. Vertical joint cladding can handle dark colours and provides an artisan look.
- 2 Modern interpretations of the Barn style play with the roof lines to create asymmetry, and create interest using Hardie™ Oblique™ Cladding in alternating 200mm and 300mm widths.
- 3 Interior spaces are airy and uncluttered, inspired by Nordic minimalism. Designed by Altereco. Photo by Marnie Hawson.

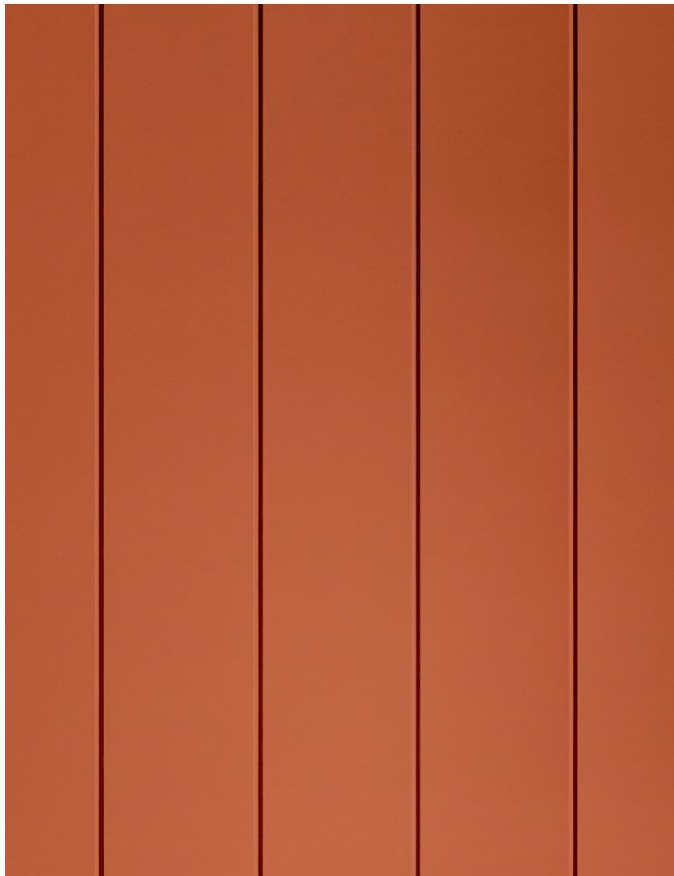


Cladding solutions

The Barn’s adaptable structure supports numerous facade treatments, allowing for personalised aesthetics that suit different environments and tastes.

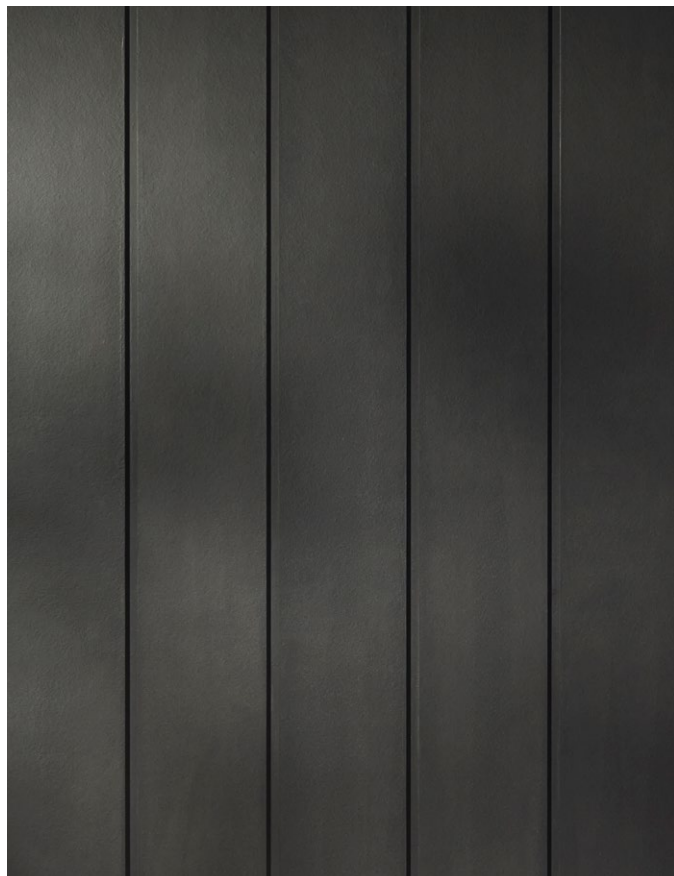
Stria™ Cladding Smooth

Featuring deep, square-shaped grooves, this cladding can be installed either horizontally or vertically, creating a striking effect that complements robust Barn shapes. The sleek vertical lines emulate the intricate detail of vertical joint timber, offering a handcrafted look and feel.



Hardie™ Oblique™ Cladding

The unique square and slanted edge grooves evoke the look of standing seam metal, adding drama and visual interest to Barn facades.



Theme insight

Resilience

Julian designed his barn with thermal breaks, deeper roof frames, and insulation layers to create energy-efficient spaces.

‘Bushfire resilience is a must—James Hardie products and steel frames provide a non-combustible solution’ says Julian.

Theme insight

Building Efficiencies

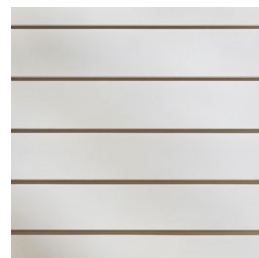
Keep it simple with a single cladding type to reduce material waste and speed up construction. Modular cladding layouts make the build more efficient—just like setting a datum line around windows to minimise offcuts.



‘Barn style offers incredible versatility in its design, allowing you to create a striking uniform look by using a single product en masse for maximum impact. Using modular cladding layouts reduces construction waste and speeds up the build process.’

— Julian Brenchley, Group Architects

Complementary Products



Linea™ Weatherboard

Materials & textures

Natural materials such as timber, stone and brick introduce warmth and craftsmanship.



Theme insight
Resilience

Choosing resilient materials when building modern barns is essential for ensuring durability, safety and long-term performance. Resilient materials like steel, fibre cement and natural timber are designed to withstand environmental stresses, including harsh weather, fire risks and pest damage, reducing the need for frequent repairs or replacements.

Resilience is key—especially in the Australian climate. Julian recommends steel frames and non-combustible James Hardie cladding products to ensure durability and bushfire resistance. Stria™ Cladding Smooth adheres to bushfire attack level requirements to BAL40.

‘Natural materials create a harmonious connection to the environment and add warmth and depth to the simple, clean-lined interior and exterior forms.’

—Julian Brenchley, Group Architects

- 1 Natural look materials and textures create a sophisticated yet unpretentious aesthetic, blending rustic charm with contemporary design.
- 2 Blue stone pavers offer a great focal point for pathways in drought tolerant landscaping.
- 3 Minimalist wooden fence slats create elegant boundaries, balancing privacy with openness.
- 4 Perfectly imperfect timbers showcase authentic wood grain, while their organic lines promote a connection to nature.
- 5 Textured walls can add a further layer of depth and tactility to the material palette.
- 6 Natural linens used in window coverings provide a soft tactile feel, while maintaining the clean aesthetic essential to Barn style.
- 7 Loop pile wool carpet combines durability with comfort, its thick weave adding texture underfoot.



Theme insight
Building Efficiencies

A barn can be positioned to maximise natural light and ventilation. If you get the orientation right, you reduce reliance on artificial heating and cooling. Shade hoods over windows are a simple but effective solution to prevent overheating.

Colour palette

The colour palette takes its inspiration from Nordic minimalism, with added warm feature accents to ensure a calming, balanced Barn interior. The colour palette helps to emphasise the architectural simplicity of Barn style, allowing the play of light and shadow and the beauty of the Barn form to take centre stage.



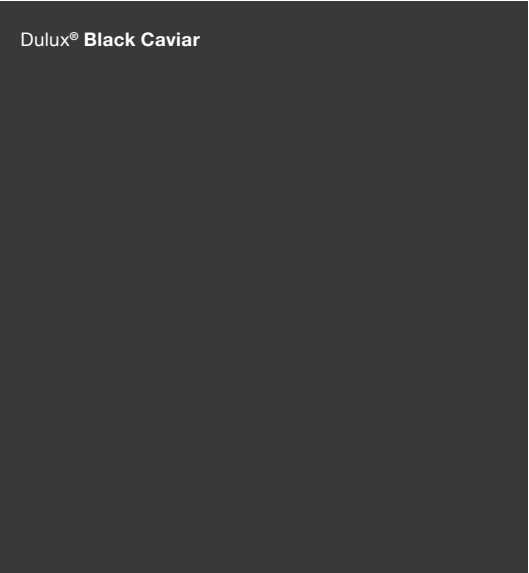
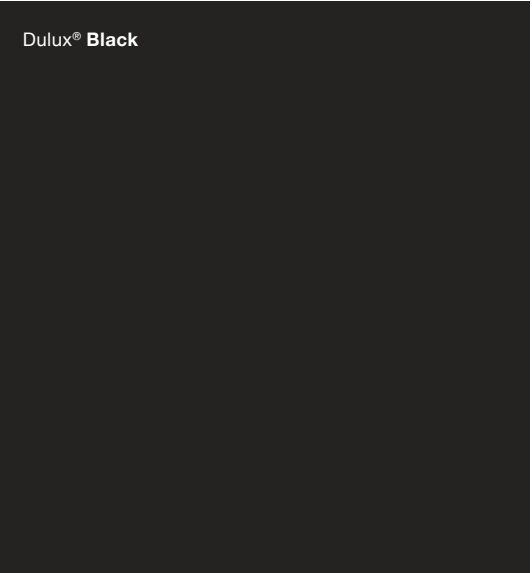
‘The Barn doesn’t have to be black or white. I chose terracotta because it’s earthy and timeless—it blends into the Australian landscape while feeling warm and inviting.’

—Julian Brenchley, Group Architects

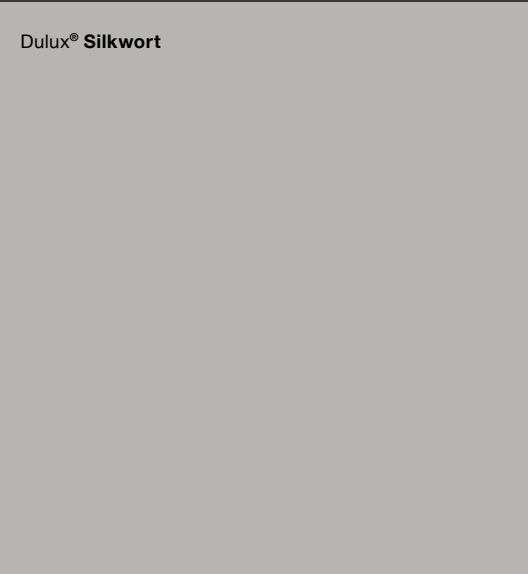
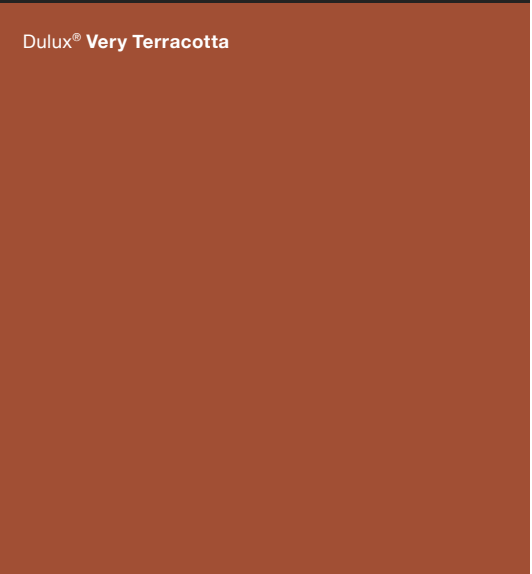
Scheme One

Scheme Two

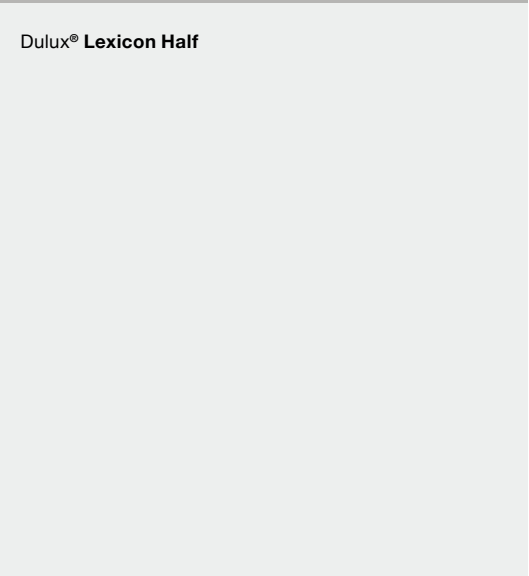
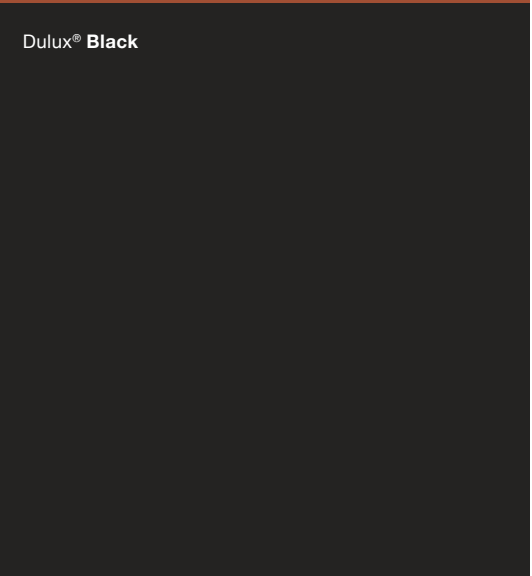
Roof & Fascia



Main Walls



Details



Floorplan

This 400m² Barn is designed for modern family living, balancing warmth, functionality and a connection to nature. Built within a \$1M–\$1.5M budget, the design embraces established native gardens, dappled sunlight, and expansive sky views. A whole-house cladding solution elevates durability and resilience, important to Julian in this brief. Dual entrances were important for his flexible plan, future-proofed for changing stages of life.

Designed by Julian Brenchley, Group Architects.

Julian’s top tips

1 Optimise internal layout for maximum efficiency

One of the simplest ways to save on construction costs is by designing an efficient internal layout. Stacking bathrooms vertically ensures plumbing remains centralised, reducing installation complexity and material costs. Another key cost-saving measure is designing rooms around standard material dimensions—for example, using 3 metre cladding panels eliminates unnecessary joins, reducing both material waste and labour.

2 Keep external finishes simple and uniform

Mixing multiple exterior materials can quickly drive up costs due to the added labour, complexity, and the need for different waterproofing solutions. By choosing a single, high-quality cladding material, such as pre-primed and pre-finished fibre cement panels, builders can streamline installation and eliminate the need for additional painting and finishing. Stria™ Cladding Smooth is pre-sealed and paint-friendly ready for any colour choice.

3 Utilise standardised construction elements

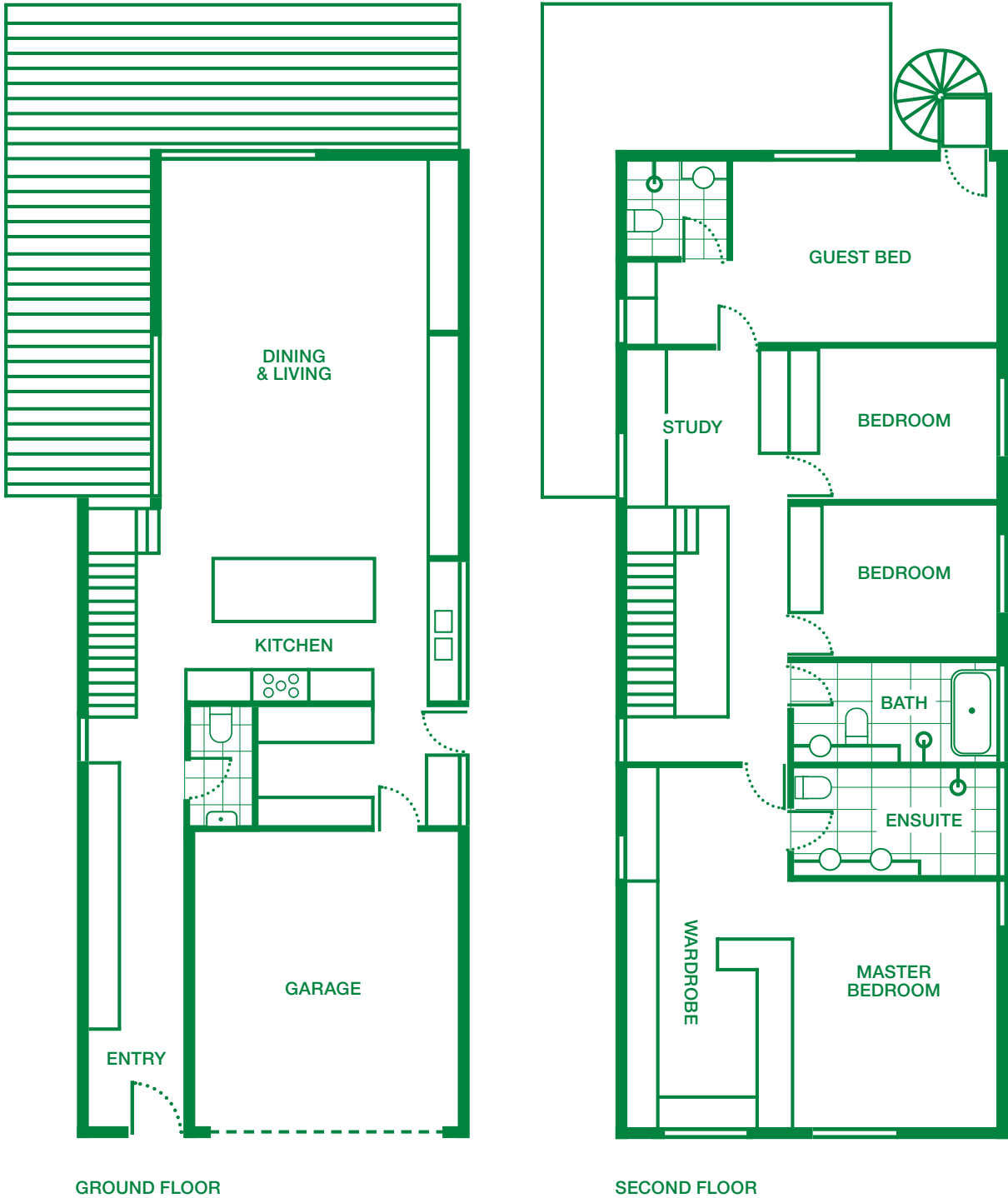
Simplicity in structural design means faster build times and lower labour costs. The barn’s natural form—simple, rectangular, and symmetrical—lends itself to cost efficiency by avoiding unnecessary curves, complex rooflines, or bespoke structural elements that can drive up costs. Keeping the design straightforward makes it easier for builders to work with, reducing the likelihood of errors and expensive modifications.

4 Engage contractors early in the design process

One of the most overlooked cost-saving strategies is early contractor engagement. Involving builders during the design phase allows for better collaboration between architects, engineers, and construction teams, ensuring the design is both practical and cost-effective. This prevents expensive design changes throughout the build, helps streamline material purchasing, and ensures that structural decisions align with on-site realities. By working together collaboratively, architects and builders can find smart, budget-friendly solutions together.

5 Design for long-term efficiency and future savings

Beyond the build costs, a well-designed home should also be energy-efficient and future-proofed. Passive solar design—strategic window placement, cross-ventilation, and shading—significantly reduces artificial heating and cooling costs. Also, incorporating multi-use spaces or secondary dwellings can add financial flexibility; homeowners can generate rental income or reconfigure areas to suit changing family dynamics. Whether it’s an attached granny flat, a locked off suite, or a future Airbnb rental, designing with flexibility in mind means the house is a smart investment for years to come.



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