

06 Modern Coastal

Design Handbook 2025

With James Foley,
FOLAR Architecture



Meet your guide

James Foley

As part of our Design Handbook series for 2025, we’ve collaborated with James Foley of FOLAR Architecture, a leading expert in coastal-inspired design. James will show you how to create stunning, functional homes that embody the Modern Coastal aesthetic, both inside and out.



From James Foley:

‘It’s about designing spaces that embody a sense of openness and lightness, effortlessly connected to nature. A harmonious balance where simplicity meets sophistication.’

Cover

A vibrant, fresh facade in Hardie™ Brushed Concrete Cladding and Linea™ Weatherboard Cladding exudes contemporary elegance.

The handbook will guide you in achieving the Modern Coastal aesthetic, while kickstarting your journey to creating a harmonious coastal-inspired home. James Foley’s expertise in Modern Coastal design makes him the ideal collaborator to explore the principles and applications of this timeless style. From the roof to the windows, floorplans and bespoke details, this guide is crafted to help you create spaces that reflect the simplicity, warmth and barefoot luxury of the Modern Coastal aesthetic.



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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 Modern Heritage homes are evolving to reflect these shifts.

01 Building Efficiencies

Modern Coastal homes can take advantage of passive cooling strategies to reduce reliance on artificial climate control. Orienting the home to capture prevailing coastal breezes, using wide eaves for sun protection, and incorporating high-performance insulation all help regulate indoor temperatures naturally. Large sliding doors and louvered windows enhance cross-ventilation, minimising the need for air conditioning and lowering energy costs over time.



03 Flexibility

Low-maintenance materials, salt-tolerant fittings and flexible layouts ensure the home adapts to changing needs, creating a stylish, comfortable and enduring living space.

‘We enjoy designing with two distinct pavilions to create zones for privacy while still maintaining shared family spaces.’ says James.



02 Wellbeing

Modern Coastal designs typically locate the living, dining and kitchen areas on the same level as the courtyard and pool to help maximise the family living experience and interaction, as well as maximising accessibility.

A strong connection between indoor and outdoor spaces is at the heart of Modern Coastal design, creating a feeling of openness, relaxation, and effortless living. By positioning living, dining, and kitchen areas on the same level as the courtyard and pool, our FOLAR Architecture home has a cohesive, family-friendly environment for entertaining. This design approach ensures natural light filters in from all angles, enhancing wellbeing by bringing the outdoors in.

James notes that courtyards, alfresco spaces, and greenery are intentionally placed to frame coastal views and provide a tranquil retreat within the home. They’ve also thought about wellness spaces such as a home gym, infrared sauna, and ice baths are becoming more popular. While these are not in this home yet, they have intentionally left spaces with the flexibility to convert down the track. Thoughtful ventilation strategies, like cross-breezes from courtyards to living areas, reduces the reliance on artificial cooling.

04 Resilience

Reinforced structures, impact-resistant windows, and proper drainage protect against storms, while sustainable elements like solar panels, rainwater harvesting, and cross-ventilation enhance energy efficiency.

- 1 Split-level formats of this design with wrap-around verandahs and balconies create mini private spaces or open the opportunity for separate entrances for upstairs/downstairs living. Design by Habitat Studio Architects. Photo by Kristian Van Der Beek. KvdB.
- 2 Modern Coastal spaces are designed to harness sunlight and create a lifestyle in harmony with the surrounding climate.
- 3 This project by Rowland Building Co offers an effortless connection between indoors and outdoors created through the use of streamlined sliding glass doors, louvres and screens. Photo by The Palm Co.



Spacious, light & laid-back

Modern Coastal design provides a fresh twist on classic coastal style.

Theme insight Wellbeing

The pared back, effortless coastal design epitomises laid-back luxury ideal for entertainment and relaxation. Indoor/outdoor flow and coastal views ensure an uninterrupted connection to nature and one another.

1

It continues to grow in popularity as a naturally resilient style built to withstand our climate. It's also the perfect style for multi-generational living with the potential for upstairs/downstairs living and private retreats.

Modern Coastal design now has clear regional differences. The more sun, the more bright white features – think Queensland and northern New South Wales. In more southern regions, darker exteriors are more typical. Ultimately, the pared back, effortless coastal design epitomises laid-back luxury ideal for entertainment and relaxation. Modern Coastal homes are foundationally open-plan beach house designs and lend themselves to a laid-back, luxurious lifestyles.

Large overhangs create shading across the extensive glass used for natural lighting, and open floor plans promote natural ventilation.

On the facade, flexible roof styles range from a bold gable, flat roof or skillion roof to create a designer look. Generous windows are enhanced with hoods or vertical screens to provide additional shade and frame any beach views or native landscaping.

Theme insight Flexibility

Modern Coastal is the perfect style for multi-generational living, with the potential for upstairs/downstairs living and private retreats while maintaining an effortless flow through the house. James highlights that flexibility is key—whether it's a room that can transition from a gym to a teen retreat or a garage designed for multiple uses, every space is intentionally crafted to evolve with the needs of its occupants. This forward-thinking approach ensures that homes remain adaptable, functional, and timeless for years to come.

- 1 A facade of Linea™ Weatherboard is complemented by vertical batten screening for shading.
- 2 The pared back and effortless Modern Coastal feeling epitomises laid-back luxury, ideal for private gatherings and relaxation.
- 3 Seamless indoor-outdoor connections and luxurious pool amenities create a serene oasis that blends relaxation, style and the beauty of natural light.

2



Theme insight Resilience

This style continues to grow in popularity as a naturally resilient, sustainable code built for our climate; large overhangs create shading, extensive use of glass for natural lighting, while open floor plans promote natural ventilation.

3



Design features

‘Simplicity of roof form is an opportunity to enhance the pure architectural style that we are always seeking in Modern Coastal design.’

– James Foley, FOLAR Architecture

Theme insight Resilience

James emphasises that resilient coastal homes are designed to work with the environment, not against it. Thoughtful elements like large overhangs, vertical screening, and carefully placed windows provide essential sun shading while filtering light and shadow into the home. These features not only enhance natural ventilation but also reduce heat gain, ensuring comfortable, energy-efficient living year-round.

1 Framed windows and doors

Crisp, white window and door frames are enhanced with shading hoods or vertical screens to add both architectural detail and sun protection.

2 Weatherboard exterior

The facade typically features weatherboard cladding with deep shadow lines to add coastal charm without the maintenance of traditional timber

3 Light colours

Whites, light greys, beach beiges and muted pastel tones evoke a fresh and airy coastal palette and create a sense of spaciousness.

4 Indoor-outdoor flow

Interior and exterior spaces are seamlessly connected through wide-sliding doors, sliding glass doors, louvers and screens to give a luxurious resort feel.

5 Interiors

Light woods, bricks, and prominent white plaster bring a bright and open atmosphere indoors. The natural textures and neutral coastal shades of soft greens and blues enhance the fresh, modern feeling.

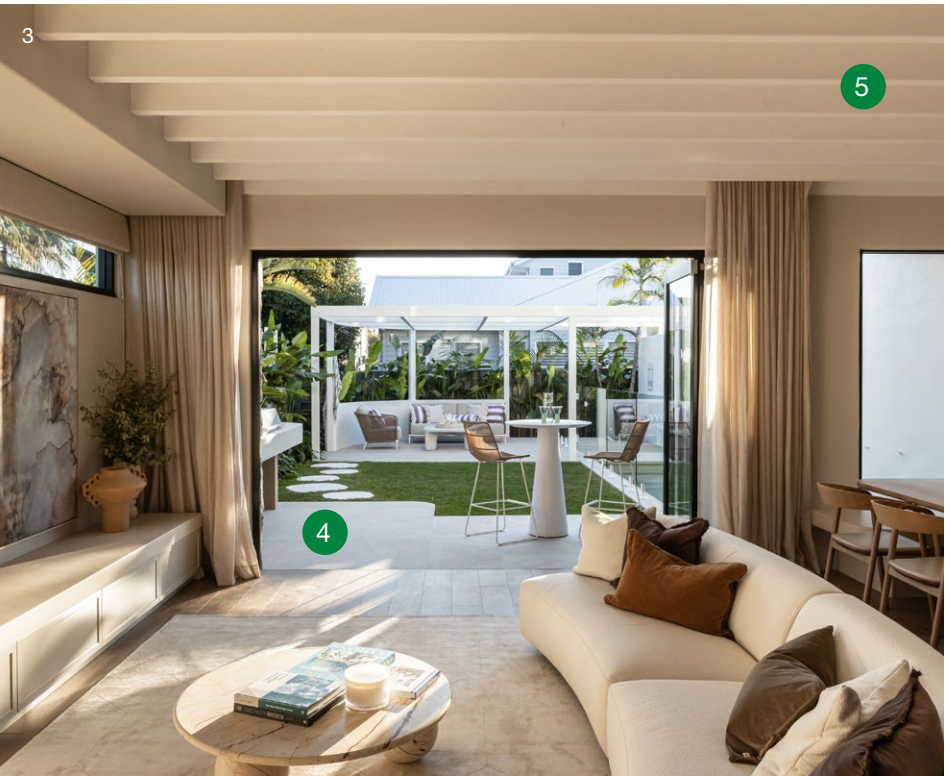


Theme insight Wellbeing

Outdoor entertaining spaces have an unmistakable coastal feel with comfy couches, built-in barbecue and sink as well as a television for outdoor entertaining for sports fans. A fan can be included air movement in hotter climates.

‘The open gable roof allows us to bring in highlight windows, filling interiors with natural light’ says James.

- 1 The deep shadow lines of the Linea™ Weatherboard evoke the timeless charm of a classic beach house designed by BCG Building Design. Photo by ABI Interiors.
- 2 In this coastal house designed by Bower Architecture, Linea™ Weatherboard provides clean, smooth lines and geometric forms. Photo by Shannon McGrath.
- 3 A seamless integration of interior and exterior spaces is achieved through sleek sliding glass doors, louvers, and screens. Designed by Kyal and Kara. Photo by Grace Picot.



Cladding solutions

Crisp, white, lightweight cladding such as weatherboards, add coastal charm without the hassles of traditional timber. As well as the cost-effectiveness in materials, installation and maintenance, James Hardie exterior cladding products deliver the elegant facade typical of the Modern Coastal home.

Linea™ Weatherboard

The sharp horizontal lines nod to a traditional beach house with a modern twist. The deep shadow works well with the generous windows and shading elements, creating a functional yet stylish exterior. Using with Linea™ Aluminium Corner Soakers differentiates from a more traditional Hamptons look which has trim covering the corners.



Hardie™ Brushed Concrete Cladding

Its organic, flowing texture adds depth and character to the facade, creating a natural look that is perfect for coastal environments.



Theme insight Building Efficiency

James highlights that simplicity in material selection is key to both aesthetics and efficiency. By limiting the palette to two or three complementary materials, Modern Coastal homes maintain a timeless, uncluttered look while avoiding unnecessary complexity in construction. He notes that weatherboard is an ideal choice, delivering the classic beach house aesthetic without the upkeep of traditional timber. Combined with lightweight James Hardie materials, this approach maximises cost-effectiveness, offering a durable, low-maintenance alternative to concrete and steel. The result is a home that not only saves on material costs but also enhances overall buildability and long-term performance.



‘In my experience, weatherboard can be used in a contemporary style. When painted a crisp white, it also adds shadow, texture and enhances the horizontality of the built form. Hardie™ Brushed Concrete Cladding is a standout choice for Modern Coastal home exteriors, offering the perfect blend of resilience and refined design.’

—James Foley, FOLAR Architecture

Complementary Products



Axon™ Cladding



Hardie™ Fine Texture Cladding

Materials & textures

The colour palette of soft, neutral tones and touches of matte black speak to the laid-back luxury of Modern Coastal style.



Theme insight

Wellbeing

The use of neutral tones, tactile textures and biophilic design elements fosters relaxation and a strong connection to the surrounding natural environment, promoting both physical comfort and emotional tranquility in the Modern Coastal home.

‘Natural materials like timber, stone and rattan pair beautifully with Modern Coastal design, complemented by textured finishes such as weathered wood, fine-textured cladding, and woven fabrics’

—James Foley, FOLAR Architecture

- 1 The calming materials palette carefully enhances the coastal feeling with natural materials.
- 2 Prefinished engineered oak timber flooring, designed for fluctuating climates.
- 3 A cream external tile with stone-like effects bring subtle texture.
- 4 Use deep greens and moody tones for glass mosaic pool tiles.
- 5 Light, warm timbers works well for accents like garage doors or decking.
- 6 Textured linens in neutral tones add a soothing quality to coastal interiors.
- 7 The smooth, semi-matte finish of marble brings in textures found in nature.



Theme insight

Resilience

‘We carefully select resilient materials that can withstand the harsh coastal climate, from aluminum window frames to engineered oak flooring designed for fluctuating temperatures’ says James.

Colour palette

A Modern Coastal color palette typically features soft, earthy tones that reflect the natural coastal environment, such as sandy beiges, crisp whites and warm greys. These are complemented by muted blues and greens, inspired by the ocean and coastal vegetation, to bring a sense of serenity.



‘I often incorporate deep blues, charcoals or muted greens as accents to add depth and visual interest while maintaining a sense of tranquility.’

—James Foley, FOLAR Architecture

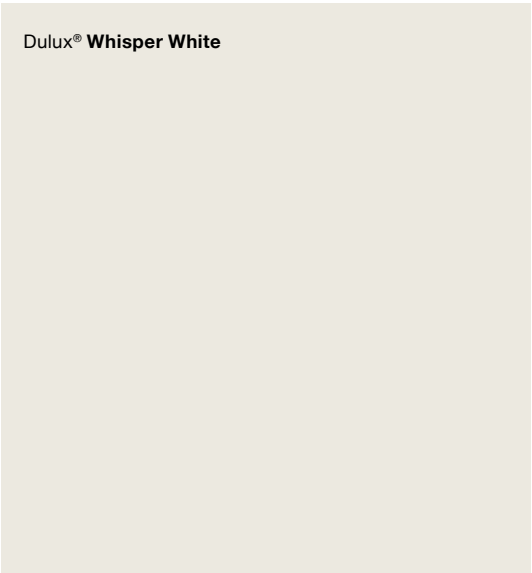
Theme insight Flexibility

Utilising a flexible colour scheme allows space to adapt to changing seasons, evolving design trends and shifting personal style; allowing the home to evolve with simple updates, like swapping out decor, furnishings or artwork, while maintaining the relaxed and cohesive coastal aesthetic.

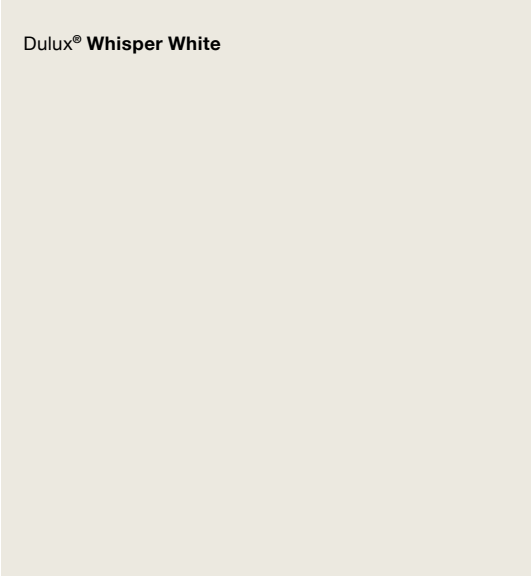
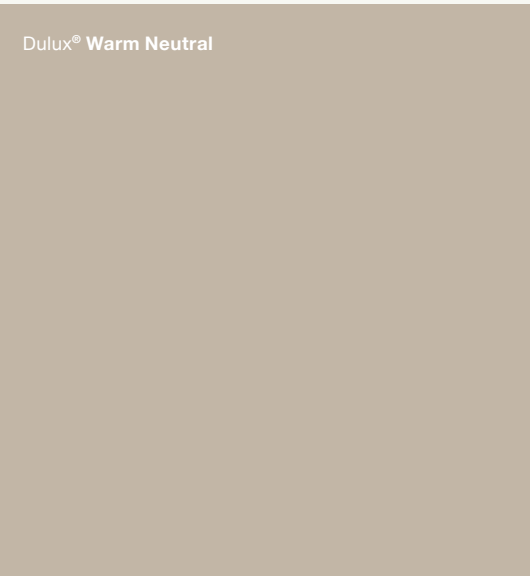
Scheme One

Scheme Two

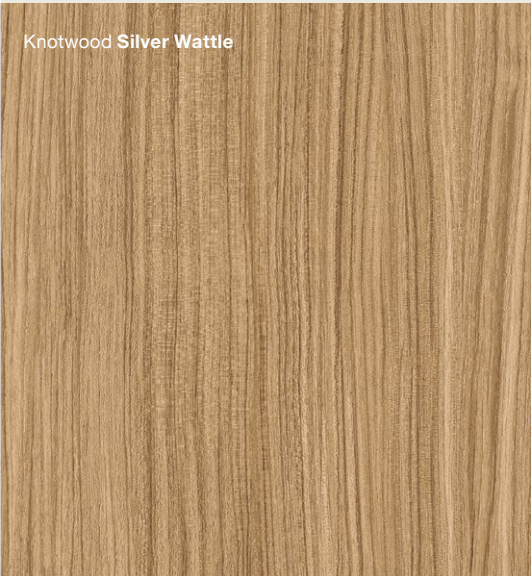
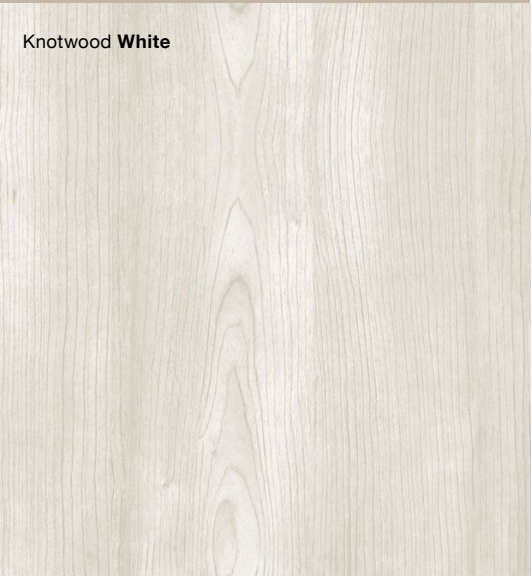
Fascia



Main Walls



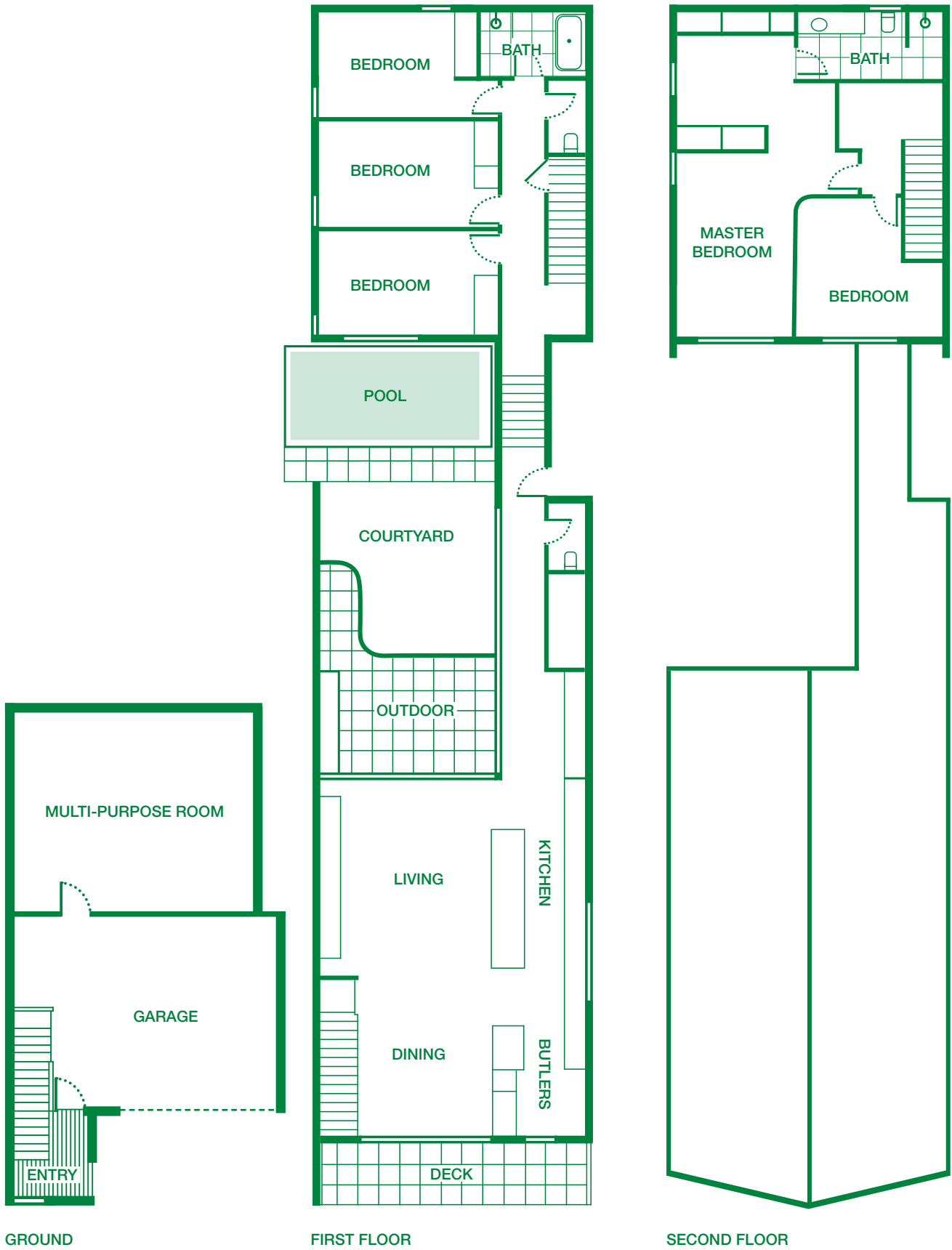
Details



Floorplan

This flexible 5 bedroom home has been designed to suit the changing needs of James’ family. He chose to maximise the block at his home in Queensland and has built the home around a central pool for entertaining and for an enhanced connection to outdoors for a sense of connection and wellbeing.

Designed by James Foley, FOLAR Architecture.



James’ top tips

1 Prioritise a simple and intentional material palette

Keeping the material selection streamlined isn’t just an aesthetic decision—it’s a cost-saving strategy. James emphasises that limiting the palette to two or three key materials prevents a home from feeling cluttered while also reducing unnecessary construction complexity. Using lightweight, durable cladding instead of masonry speeds up installation, minimises structural requirements, and lowers both labour and material costs.

2 Maximise structural efficiency

A well-planned structure is one of the biggest opportunities for cost savings. James notes that aligning upper and lower floor layouts reduces the need for expensive steel beams and custom structural elements. He also suggests keeping decks and overhangs above internal spaces rather than cantilevering, which simplifies engineering and minimises material waste.

3 Design for build speed

The longer a build takes, the more it costs. Using pre-primed cladding accelerates painting time, and lightweight materials reduce labour costs. Choosing products that are easy to install, such as Linea™ Weatherboard and Hardie™ Brushed Concrete Cladding, eliminates delays and ensures a faster, more cost-effective build.

4 Invest in smart energy efficiency upfront

While some energy-efficient upgrades require an initial investment, James highlights that thoughtful design decisions can save thousands in long-term running costs. Large overhangs, well-placed windows, and cross-ventilation strategies reduce reliance on air-conditioning, while features like solar panels, battery storage, and high-performance glazing create a low-maintenance, energy-efficient home that pays off over time.

5 Design with flexibility in mind

A flexible floor plan ensures a home adapts over time without costly renovations. James suggests designing rooms that can transition between uses, like a rumpus room that converts into a guest suite or a garage that doubles as a gym or workspace. Future-proofing spaces allows homeowners to adjust their homes to suit evolving needs, maximising long-term value without excessive redesign costs.



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