



# ART HOUSE

Take one inspired builder and his motley crew of 'do or die' craftsmen, add a stubborn block with great potential and you might just end up with a grand masterpiece determined to be different.

TEXT: Rachael Ciccarelli IMAGES: Matt Galligan

Adam Fleet is one of those guys you've just got to love to hate. Artistic talent comes to this man in spades – he's an accomplished musician who spent his youth cavorting about the countryside in a band, and a painter who found unsolicited success from his artworks ("My mate just started selling them and I couldn't paint them fast enough – it stopped being a hobby, so I didn't like it as much.") And, it's likely Adam is the world's most motivated builder.

He's a man who not only designed and built this Ameling Rise residence, but also sourced the materials and laid the bricks, too. "I really got involved. This job would eat you up if you didn't love it," he says.

Given his illustrious background, this Fremantle home is what you'd expect from someone like Adam. It's an incredibly ambitious, but perfectly crafted, work of art. Plus, it's a bit 'renegade' and has little regard for trends. Think air-conditioning left by the wayside in favour of clever architecture, light drawn in through a glass pyramid and the house's design and sweeping sea views left to do the talking.

With a long, narrow, 350sqm block that originally sat six metres above street level,



(CT) The balcony (above) is finished with simple glass panes, giving views over Fremantle; the staircase (right) is fitted with stainless steel and glass rails to ensure light travels from the pyramid-light through the stairwell. (opposite) The glass pyramid atop the home acts as a light tunnel, bouncing captured sun off the stucco walls and through all four levels to the basement.

Adam and his team had their work cut out from the beginning. "It was just a great big rocky knoll, and we had to tunnel in and build it up," says Adam. He called in "the biggest excavator you have ever seen" and crawled it up a steep driveway. "That was the biggest nightmare," says Adam. "When it did get up here, I couldn't stop thinking 'it's going to crack the driveway'. This thing was about 20-odd tonne - my heart was racing from then until the house was finished."

Removing 1000 cubic metres of ground, including tough limestone, the four-storey house is dug into the rise, only reaching above the original block level at the third floor.

"Site access was a major, major problem - there was none," says Adam. "When the limestone blocks were delivered for the house, we had to physically lift each 30-kilogram block up to the building - it was labour-intensive."

While the build was undeniably tough, Adam still managed to finish construction within 12 months - refusing to let the house "beat him", working six days a week with early mornings, and having a fantastic time of it all the same.

"It was pretty funny because my dad, who's not the youngest guy in town, was the one who was there every day, working hard. A lot of people came and went, but it was a pretty small bunch of us who actually built it - and some guys were in their 50s and 70s, all such hard workers. It was such fun to build. I was pretty disappointed when it was over, to be honest. All the challenge was gone. It was like, what do I do now?"

A modern take on a terrace house, the five-bedroom, 4.5-bathroom structure towers impressively over a private lane below. The neutral, soft tones of the facade sit perfectly beside its creamy neighbours, and limestone cladding above a two-car garage is a reminder of the excavation. The



**BARREL OF FUN:** The unusual barrel-vaulted ceilings are recycled brick laid into steel frames - a feat of engineering that has attracted international attention. (below) The kitchen decor is minimal thanks to appliances hidden in a scullery behind.

only exterior hint to the home's unusual interior design features are double-arc windows, which are framed in brick that was recycled from an old hospital.

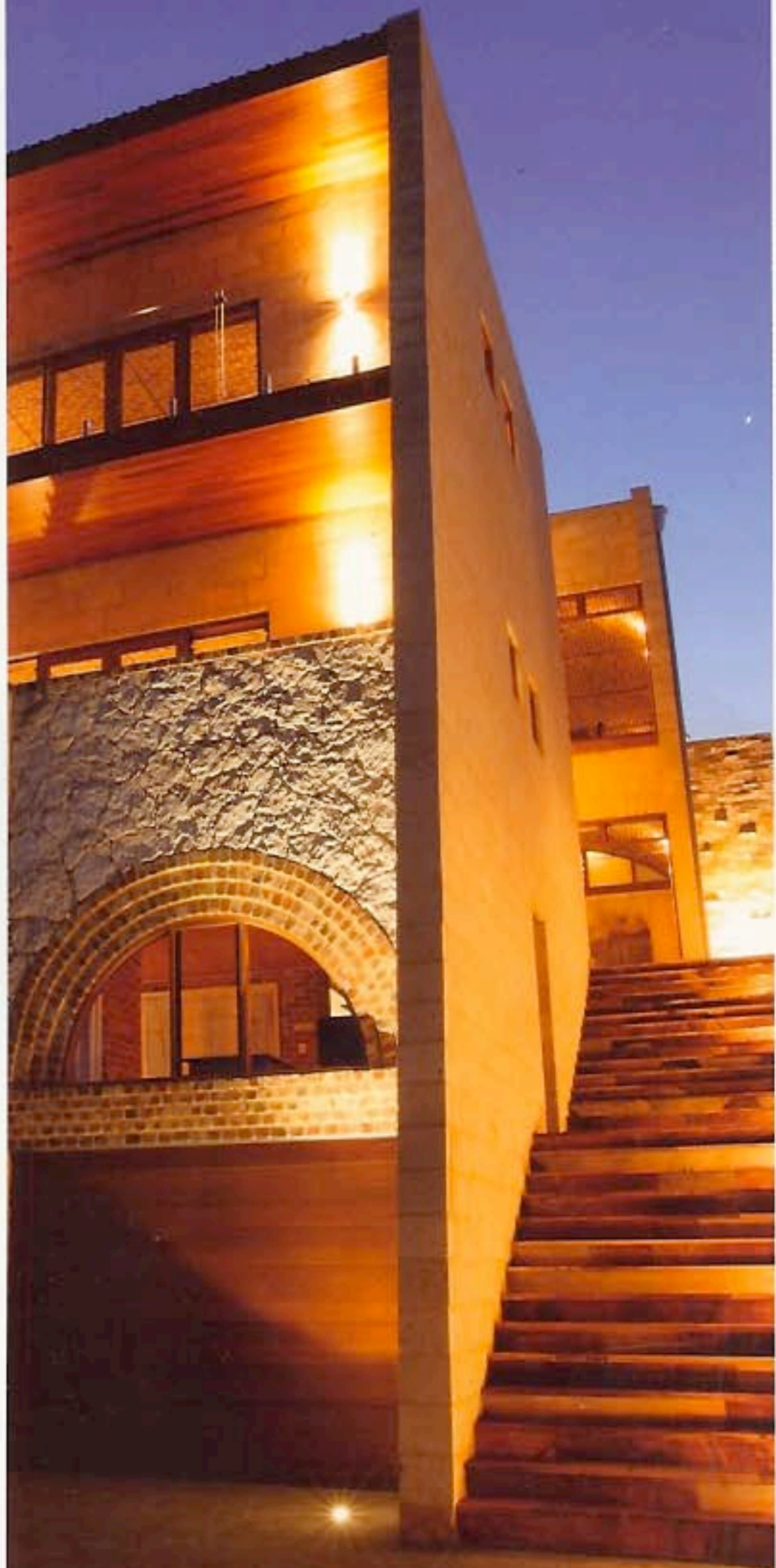
"I built the home around brick barrel-vaulted ceilings," says Adam. "My parents are from Liverpool, and I went to The Cavern, where the Beatles used to play, and there are barrel-vaulted ceilings. A band was playing, but I was just gob-smacked as to how the ceilings stayed up. I think I just had to build it."

The barrel vaults feature throughout the house and are clad in recycled brick to help keep the house at a comfortable temperature. They also afford a look of antiquity, which complements the raw limestone walls.

These ceilings have even attracted international attention: an Italian with a doctorate in ancient engineering found the house online and emailed wanting to meet Adam in July this year.



STONE LOVE: The external stairs were paved in Kimberley stone, a local material selected by Adam for its tendency to produce rich, varied colour and "crazy" patterns.



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"He was really excited about it, he actually teaches - he's a professor, and offered to give us a hand with anything," says Adam. "It's great because the problem we've found is finding an engineer who will confidently say 'it's going to hold'."

Imperative to the bright and light nature of the building is the central spine of the house: a column running through all levels of the home and finishing in a glass pyramid shape at the apex. The light drawn in through the pyramid bounces off stucco walls, and doors in translucent glass help to keep the daylight distributed through the home.

"I wanted to get the light into the basement... but I didn't quite know how. So, we ordered the glass and pinned it all together into the pyramid shape. Afterwards, we were in Spain checking out architecture and we went to one of Gaudi's

(that's architectural great Antoni Gaudi) buildings in Barcelona. There was a hole through the middle and he used ceramic tiles to bounce light down, and my wife Anna said, 'That's what you've just done!' It made so much sense."

Atypical design seems to be the theme. One of the most controversial decisions was to leave air-conditioning behind in favour of high ceilings, louvered windows, bricks and limestone - all set to catch the Fremantle Doctor breeze. "We have no need for air-conditioning, so we didn't even put one in. Everyone was like, 'Oh God, what are you doing?' But we've had 40-degree days where it feels totally nice up here. Whatever breeze there is, we'll get it."

Standing in the living area on the fourth floor during the height of summer, the breeze is evident and the space not

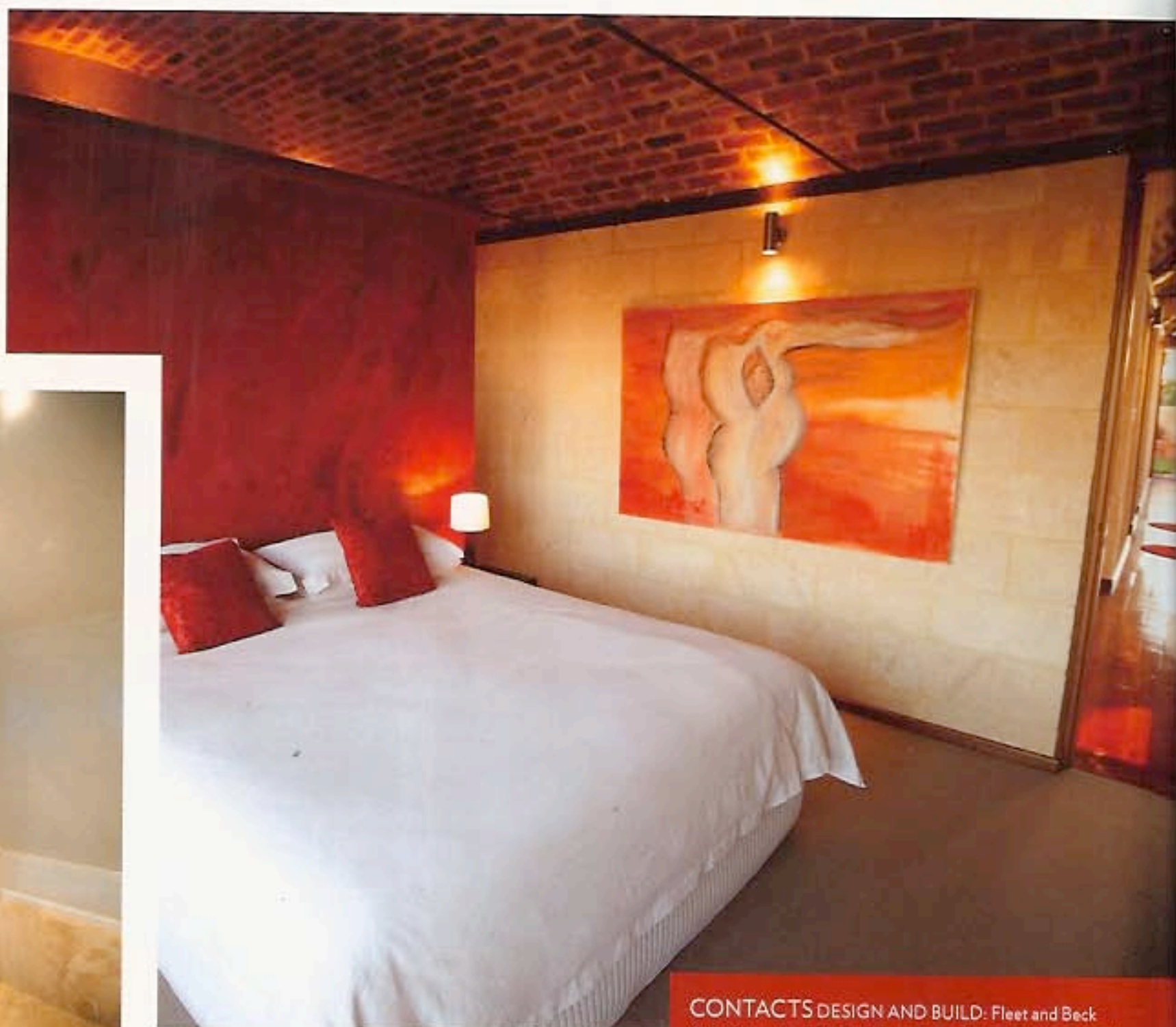
over furnished or crowded with artwork, but completely comfortable. The kitchen has minimal fittings, only push-to-open drawers and Essa stone benchtops along the perimeter of the room, with the appliances and less aesthetically appealing everyday bits hidden in the scullery behind.

This allows the raw limestone walls, gigantic windows and an open balcony capturing views over Fremantle Harbour to be more than enough visual fare.

Where most builders would be understandably exhausted after building their own property, especially a 400sqm, labour-intensive one on a tricky block, Adam has nothing left but enthusiasm and itchy fingers for his next big project. "We're actually starting to build another one down south on Caves Road in Yallingup." We wait with anticipation for the tour. ①

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SMART ART: (right) The stucco walls from the stairwell reoccur as a rich red feature wall in the master bedroom. Most of the paintings through the interior are works by Adam. His loose brushstrokes in earthy tones are a perfect complement to this home. (below) The ensuite employs the same Essa stone benches as the kitchen.



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