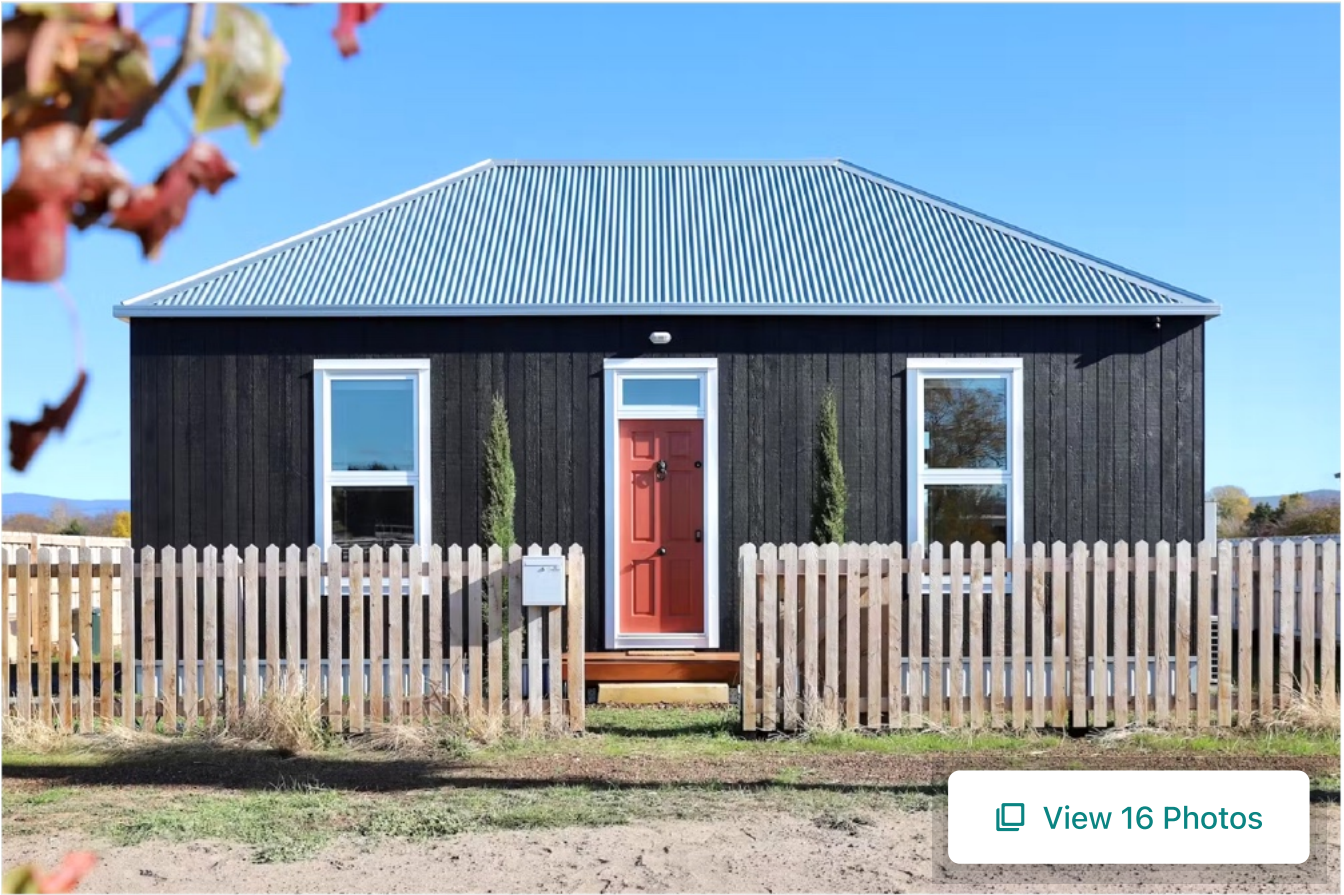


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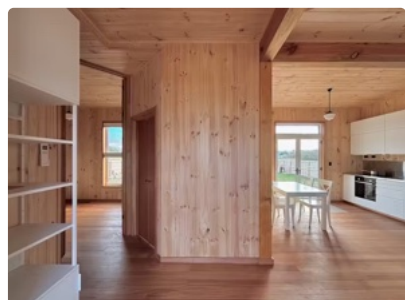
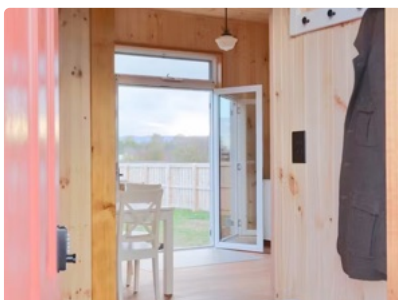
Dwell+ Exclusive

Budget Breakdown: How an Architect Built a Family Home in Tasmania for \$72K

Jiri Lev assembled the two-bedroom house by hand—and he's offering the plans and step-by-step advice, for free, to anyone who wants to do the same.

Text by

Mandi Keighran



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In an era of chronic housing shortages and sky-high mortgage rates, the idea of building a debt-free home with your own hands might feel like a dream. Architect Jiri Lev, however, proposes that it can be done. With his second self-built home, Tasmanian House 3, the Czech-born Australian architect hopes to prove that a family can build a healthy, sustainable home for less than the cost of a typical deposit.



The modest home is clad in Weathertex panels made from 97% eucalyptus woodchips and 3% paraffin. The cladding is finished with a charcoal-colored stain to enhance street appeal and avoid any unsightly weathering.

Photo by Jiri Lev

Photo Categories: [exterior](#), [house building type](#), [metal roof material](#), [wood siding material](#), [hipped roofline](#)

The result is a 645-square foot, two-bedroom cottage built on a shoestring budget of \$72K (plus about \$50K for land). The build cost covers materials, permits, and the handful of licensed trades Lev didn’t have the expertise to take on himself (electrician, plumber, and building surveyor)—and it’s less than a third of the \$230K quote he got from a local builder.

\$49,629 Land	\$2,992 Foundation	\$19,211 Structural
\$2,463 Wall Finishes	\$2,947 Flooring	\$1,668 Roofing
\$640 Hardware	\$5,567 Electrical	\$5,772 Plumbing
\$1,921 HVAC Equipment	\$1,281 Landscaping	\$1,281 Kitchen & Bath Fixtures
\$1,366 Lighting	\$1,921 Cabinetry	\$961 Countertops
\$740 Appliances	\$7,850 Windows & Glazing	\$640 Doors
\$1,823 Millwork	\$2,561 Furnishings & Decor	\$3,062 Permitting
\$64 Waste Removal	\$5,377 Other	
Grand Total: \$121,737 USD (\$190,103 AUD)		



Standard off-the-shelf windows with affordable aluminum frames are featured throughout the home. The symmetrical window layout creates a pleasing rhythm and reflects Lev's commitment to simplicity. "All the windows are the same size," he says. "It makes fabrication cheaper and reduces the chance of error."

Lev was inspired to build his own home after being on-site during the construction of the first cabin he designed for his family in 2021. He sold the cabin and, with his newly gained knowledge—and a lot of YouTube instruction—decided to build a three-bedroom home, Tasmanian House 2. To encourage others to take on the challenge, he made the plans available to download, for free.



The red front door opens to a small entry hall with storage and seating. The space leads directly to the open-plan kitchen, living, and dining area. The furniture throughout is

primarily from affordable Australian retailer Early Settler.



The untreated timber lining is locally sourced and left unpainted, making the house fully breathable. "There's no paint, no tiling, no plaster," says Lev. "The interior is just natural wood finished with Danish oil on the floor and touch surfaces."

Lev calls his third project more of a "teaching house," designed as a "proof of concept" rather than a home for his family (although they are currently living between Tasmanian House 2 and Tasmanian House 3).



The light timber wall lining and large vertical windows make the compact living room feel spacious. Lev kept lighting consistent throughout, using Schoolhouse pendant fittings to unify the interior and keep costs down.

Not only did Lev again make the drawings readily available through his website, but he also started an Instagram account ([@jiri.lev.arch](https://www.instagram.com/jiri.lev.arch)) to document each step of the building process in detail, and he's offering tours to architects and anyone else who might be interested in learning more.

"I'm not reinventing the wheel. I'm reminding people what the wheel was."

—Jiri Lev, Architect

"It's a teaching opportunity," explains Lev. "It's about encouraging and empowering people. They can see that I've done it—and I'm not the fittest guy in

the world—so they know it's possible. People used to build their own houses all the time. It's instinctive."



Simple French doors open to the backyard, extending the living area outside.

While the concept behind the affordable, self-build home is radical, its design is anything but. Instead of chasing novelty—something Lev believes is all too prevalent in contemporary architecture—the project harks back to the more traditional principles that define the modest Georgian farmhouses commonly found in parts of rural Australia.



The floor plan prioritizes simplicity, and the two bedrooms are located next to each other, with each one occupying a corner of the house.

The house—with its simple rectangular floor plan, minimal circulation space, and identically sized windows—is designed for ease of construction. "Every extra

detail or junction is another opportunity for the budget to blow out or water to get in," explains the pragmatic architect.



A curved glass shower enclosure and matte black fixtures give the bathroom a contemporary feel—while the timber wall lining continues uninterrupted, echoing the simplicity and palette of the rest of the home.

Lev estimates he spent around 20 hours a week over five months on-site, and he says that most of the work was done singlehandedly, with some help from his teenage son. It's this "sweat equity" that is behind most of the savings.



One of the home's smallest design features is also its most efficient: what Lev calls "the shortest hallway in the world." The unusual space between the two bedrooms and the bathroom is angled at 45 degrees to minimize circulation area.

In the wet areas, Lev used linoleum and stainless steel instead of tiles—which are expensive and challenging for a novice to install. The kitchen cabinetry and storage is from Ikea, and the fixtures, fittings, and furnishings are all affordable, off-the-shelf options.



The kitchen is made from standard Ikea cabinets, paired with a custom stainless-steel countertop and backsplash, which was fabricated for just \$650. Three-meter-high ceilings create a sense of spaciousness despite the compact 645-square-foot plan.



The bathroom features linoleum flooring made using linseed oil instead of costly tiles. "Linoleum is a beautiful, long-lasting material," says Lev. "You often see it used in preschools and hospitals, but rarely in residential projects. It's puzzling to me, as it's readily available, affordable, and natural."



Lev seamlessly integrated standard Ikea furniture into the home. "The skirtings run right up to the cabinets, which are fixed to the wall," says Lev. "It's far cheaper than

custom joinery, but still feels integrated."

Cost-effective detailing and a considered material palette—including the untreated pine off-cuts that line the interior walls and ceilings, and Lev's "convection doors" that allow for airflow without compromising privacy—elevate the restrained design.



Lev's signature "convection doors" extend from floor to ceiling and have an operable upper panel that allows warm air to circulate freely in winter whilst maintaining privacy. "It's a super simple solution that saves money and energy," he says. "If someone likes their bedroom cooler, you just close the top panel."

Because the house meets Australia's annex standard, it can be built on most residential blocks without extra permissions—another nod to replicability and affordability. Most people, however, don't have the benefit of architectural training, and few of us can pause paid work for months to undertake an extensive construction project.



The home's small scale is offset by carefully considered proportions. At about eleven and a half by nine feet, the secondary bedroom comfortably accommodates bunk beds

that make full use of the ceiling height. "It doesn't feel tiny, even though it is," says Lev. Lev is the first to admit that even a modest self-build project demands time, energy, and basic physical ability. But he insists the barriers are lower than many imagine: "You're not building a spaceship," he says. "Fair enough, I'm an architect, but as far as building goes, I didn't know much at all. It was all online research and YouTube. Of course, it's hard work. But with a clear plan and patience, most people can do this."

It's a concept that appears to have popular appeal. So far, the plans for the two houses have been downloaded almost 19,000 times, and Lev says he is aware of at least 20 homes being built around the world.

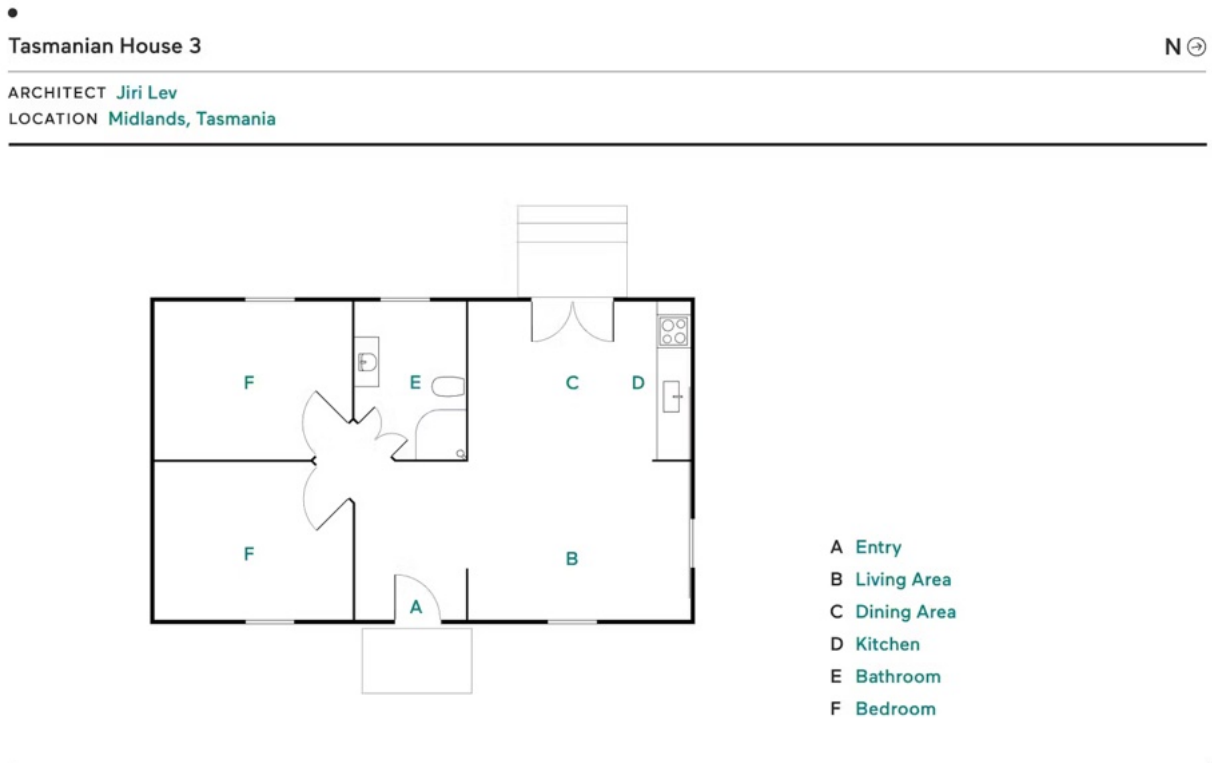


Architect Jiri Lev's wife, Sasha, and youngest child, Frankie, stand at the entry of Tasmanian House 3. "A young family could live here indefinitely," says Lev. "It could be a forever home."

Lev's approach is less about radical architecture and more about radical ideas, suggesting that it is possible for homeowners to reclaim control and ownership of what is undoubtedly one of the biggest investments they will make in their

lifetime. It not only raises questions about the role of architects and the building industry, but also suggests that affordability and sustainability don't have to be mutually exclusive.

Perhaps most remarkable, however, is the idea that none of this is new. "I'm not reinventing the wheel," says Lev. "I'm reminding people what the wheel was."



Floor plan of Tasmanian House 3 by Jiri Lev

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Project Credits:

Architect & Builder: [Jiri Lev](#) / [@jiri.lev.arch](#)

Furniture: Early Settler

Kitchen & Cabinets: Ikea

Appliances: Bosch

HVAC: Daikin



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