

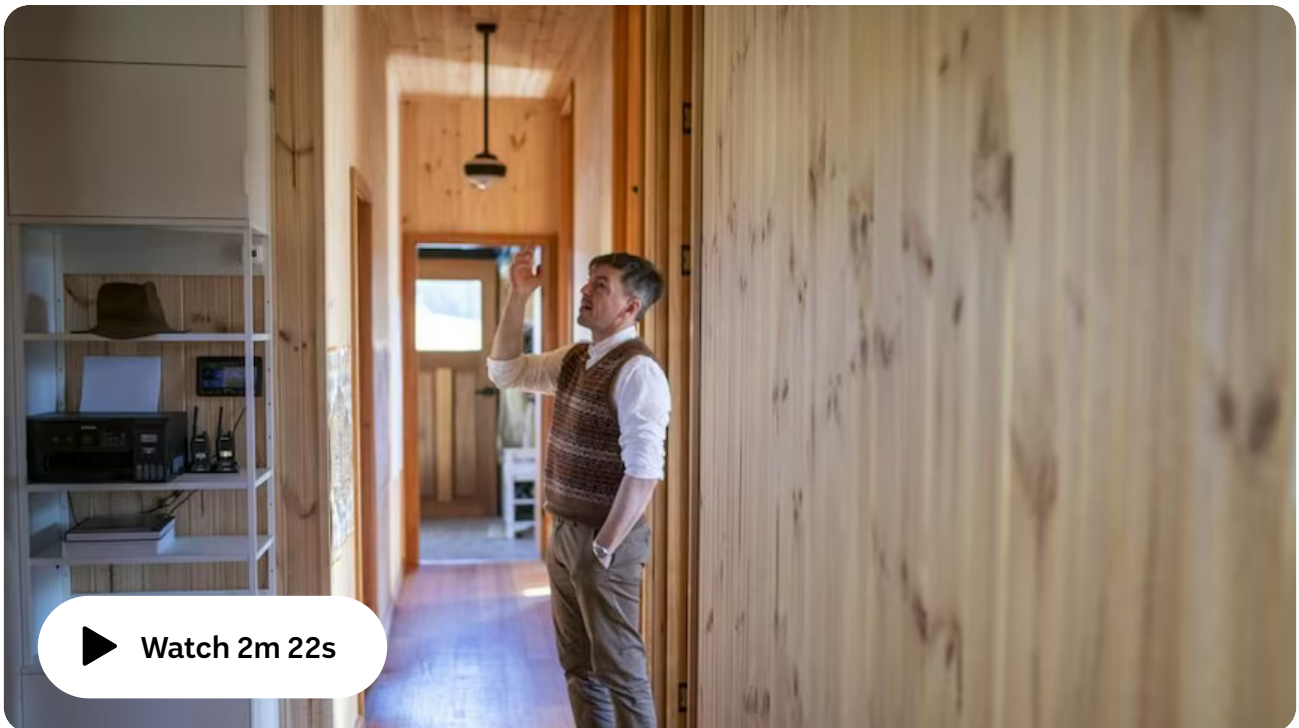
Tasmanian architect releases free plans for \$150k owner-built structure to support 'economical' housing



By Bec Pridham

Housing Policy

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Jiri Lev's house plan is being used by Josh Rayner to build his family's home. *(Bec Pridham)*

In short:

In a bid to support self-built low-cost housing, a Tasmanian architect has released free plans for others to download and use.

He used one of his designs to construct his own family home, with the build taking

six months around part-time work and costing about \$150,000.

What's next?

The Housing Industry Association says homes by owner-builders can work out more costly if things go wrong.

On a rugged plot of land in Tasmania's Central Highlands, Josh Rayner is preparing the earth for foundations, bringing the home he is constructing himself closer to fruition.

"I grew up watching Grand Design UK ... and I've always wanted to [build a house]," Mr Rayner said.

"The opportunity arose, and I thought, 'Well, why not? Might as well try'."

It wasn't always the plan.



Josh Rayner and his family at their DIY building site. (*ABC News: Ebony ten Broeke*)

Gifted the land from his parents, Mr Rayner dreamt of his "forever home".

"We drew up a really big house ... had all the bells and whistles; and then when we went to have it built, we got an appraisal for it and how much it was going to cost," he said.

"And it was just way out of our budget."



Josh Rayner shows part of the plan for his DIY home. (ABC News: *Ebony ten Broeke*)

Stumbling upon a [free online design by Tasmania-based architect Jiri Lev](#), Mr Rayner decided to take on the build himself.



There is quite a bit to do! (ABC News: *Ebony ten Broeke*)

He downloaded the 120-square-metre three-bedroom blueprint, had Mr Lev revise it for his property, took it to an engineer and sorted approvals.

Mr Rayner, a joiner by trade, also has a qualification in carpentry, but hasn't practised.

He said he was learning as he went, turning to online videos.

"We have no expectations, we just want to enjoy the process and just not be scared by it," he said.

"Hopefully we can build it up, and one day maybe our son, Henry, he might want to take it on."

Building home 'a natural act for human'



Jiri Lev is also guiding people through an Instagram account. (ABC News: Morgan Timms)

Mr Lev put his design to the test in 2023, when he built his family home in the state's north.

He said it took about six months and came in at about \$150,000 — including electrical, plumbing, and his labour.

Mr Lev, who had no experience building, fitted in construction around part-time work.

"But it was entirely manageable. It wasn't something that anyone living on a farm is not accustomed to, day in, day out," Mr Lev said.

He said he kept costs down by avoiding imported materials — turning to what was available locally at hardware stores.



Mr Lev advises "a site plan and structural engineering will all need to be done by an appropriately qualified person, such as any draftsman, building designer or architect". (*ABC News: Morgan Timms*)

He also avoided finishes such as paint, plastic and chemical treatments — coating required surfaces with natural oils.

"I try to be economical. Not cheap, but economical," he said.

Mr Lev said he released his designs to support self-built low-cost housing.

"The housing crisis doesn't need to be a housing crisis," he said.

"You'll find that it's quite a natural act for a human to build a home.

"We're not trying to reinvent the wheel, we're trying to remind people what the wheel is."



Mr Lev said he released his designs to support self-built low-cost housing.
(ABC News: Morgan Timms)

Benefits of building yourself

University of Tasmania architectural science laboratory director Mark Dewsbury has also constructed his own home and said there were benefits.

"As an owner-builder, you generally have a bit more personal concern or care about how the building evolves. Whereas for a builder, it's a business transaction," he said.

"Yes, they want to do a good

job, but it's a business transaction."

Dr Dewsbury said owner-builders could also save "considerable money", depending on how much of the work they took on themselves.

But he said blowing the budget was still a risk and recommended having a financial buffer of 10 to 20 per cent.

Dr Dewsbury said homework was crucial, so people knew what to ask design professionals, engineers, surveyors and tradespeople; how to read the building code; and how to plan their timeline.

Industry warning about structural problems

Housing Industry Association (HIA) Tasmanian executive director Stuart Collins warned against building without experience.

He said professional builders typically spent four years completing an apprenticeship before obtaining further qualifications and industry experience.

"Yet, it seems that mums and

dads can go and do a two-day workshop," he said.

"And they can pick up a hammer and suddenly be responsible for what is one of the largest investments that people can make."



Jiri Lev outside a home built to one of his designs. (ABC News: Morgan Timms)

Mr Collins said builders had established accounts with suppliers and relationships with trades that an inexperienced person would pay a premium on.

And he said people could end up turning to builders with a major problem — from structural integrity to waterproofing.

"The builder will need to take on the risk, and there's a lot of unknowns," he said.

**"So it could, and often will,
turn out to be a much more
expensive build ... it's
absolutely devastating."**

Mr Lev said anyone considering his designs should seek further advice.

The architect has since built another house, guiding people how to do it through an Instagram account.

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