



Large window openings maximises the northeast aspect's of warming winter sun and cooling summer breezes.

Starting to build? Just point me in the right direction and all will be well.

At this stage you're now the proud owners of a block of land that's ticked as many of the boxes as you could get, and you're armed with at least a rough idea of the kind of home you want to build. It may just be pencil sketches scrawled on your kid's homework, or it may be architect's blueprints, but the next exciting stage is about to begin.

Alignment comes first

The first fundamentally important step in attaining a low-cost energy efficient dream home is placing it on your land so it's facing the right way. This is so fundamentally important that it's surprising how many get it wrong. The common mistake is to simply face it to the street.

Where we live in the world determines this — the southern hemisphere. The weaker winter sun shines from the north, so that's where you will want your living areas facing — to absorb as much as possible. Bedrooms ideally should face the east or south. Let your garage be the low-cost barrier from the intensely burning western Summer sun. If your house plans are still at the scrawl stage, this is a really good time to reevaluate where your living areas are in relation to this, and how your house will actually fit on your block.

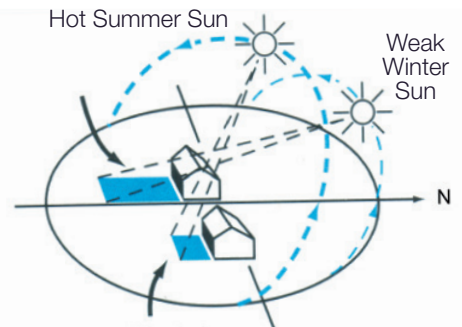
If your house plans cannot be altered, positioning your home on the allotment will be the critical trade-off.

Remember the main point — don't waste money

As the point is building a livable home that doesn't cost much to build energy efficiency in from the start, and that costs less to heat and cool once it's built, it must make full use of natural heating and cooling which comes at no cost.

Therefore the cheapest heating you can get is the sun's rays, and you want to be

able to store as much of that as possible. By the same token, the cheapest cooling is to stop that heat from becoming uncomfortable. The greatest energy expenses are in heating and cooling. That means building in heat retention qualities where they need to be, and stopping heat with quality insulation in all the right places.



It's what you build in, that matters

Size and placement of windows, choice and colour of building materials and how much thermal mass you build in, heights of ceilings, amount of roof overhangs, location of breezeways, patios and verandahs all have a direct bearing on passive heating and cooling.

The next aspect is building in what you want — it's your unique home. Do you need a large office? Extra bedrooms or bathrooms? Outdoor entertaining? Do this now at the planning stage — so you're not later pulling down walls.

You've got a budget?

Everyone does. Be comfortable with that. It's not the size of your budget, it's what we can do with it that is the focus. There may be trade-offs, but before sod is turned or a nail hammered, in you want to know it is *your dream home*.

— Geoff Gibson

Look for this column in next month's Style... we'll be talking about how to turn 'energy efficiency' from just a concept, into a very livable family home where everyone benefits.

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