

Escape from the city

MISHO, FOUNDER, MISHO & ASSOCIATES

FLEEING SYDNEY FOR TASMANIA is arguably the best business decision architect Misho Vasiljevich says he has made. After 20 years in Sydney, he had had enough of the traffic and the climate, both weather and business. An investigation by the New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption in 2004 was the final straw. ICAC investigated allegations that Sydney Water's then-managing director Greg Robinson had inappropriately procured services from Misho for the organisation.

Both Robinson and Misho were cleared by ICAC, but the damage was done. Misho says most of his clients cut him loose. "Being accused of inappropriate dealings ... it killed me," he says. "It was horrific. I didn't want to work for government ever again."

Tasmania beckoned, and he moved in June this year to a 24-hectare property at Huonville, south-west of Hobart.

Misho admits the investigation was a blessing in disguise, and says he has no regrets about leaving Sydney. Most importantly, being out of the NSW capital has given him the time to work on projects he had put off, including his latest venture, Escape In A Box.

The concept is simple: design a small, uncomplicated house that can be built by one or two people in as short a time as possible.

The house measures 6 metres by 6m, with a 2.4m ceiling and a 2m verandah on all sides. It can be made from a combination of steel, plywood, recycled and plantation-grown timbers, and is modular.

Each unit, provided as a kit, can be self-contained for water, power and sewerage, requiring no connection to the grid. The design does not need a concrete slab on-site and four points of contact with the ground mean units can be placed on difficult terrain. The kits will fit on a large truck or semi-trailer and the units can be joined together as a family grows to create bigger homes.

Misho admits he probably could not have developed the idea to the construction phase had he remained in Sydney. "I probably would have just kept talking about it," he says. "I realised I should stop drawing it and just build it." He has spent the past six months doing just that.

The idea for Escape In A Box came from Misho's family farm. Its premise is built on the human desire for escapism. He has built a model – he won't call it a prototype – and is looking for seed funding to take the concept to production with the aim of delivering the first units by mid to late next year.

Misho wants Escape In A Box to cost about the same as a family four-wheel-drive vehicle, linking it directly to the concept of escapism. The house can be built in a few days with simple tools and no heavy machinery.

Escape In A Box could also potentially be used for disaster relief in Australia and overseas. Kits could be delivered to disaster areas and the frames assembled and clad with canvas until more permanent materials are added.

CHRIS LARSEN

LUIS ASCUI

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