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# Winning ways

It's awards season for Melbourne's most striking homes. By Alison Barclay

When is a house like a fruit tree? When it's designed to roll with the seasons – all tucked up in winter, preparing to burst afresh when summer's radiance beams anew.

In Melbourne the best of these seasonal houses are scattered along the bay from Port Melbourne to Portsea. Now, as the blistering "breeze" blasts the last hint of warmth from the air, the latest specimens are about to show us their year-round credentials. Among the finalists in the 2012 Australian Interior Design Awards are these dazzling bayside homes, including one in St Kilda West, one in Elsternwick, one high above St Kilda Road and two in Sorrento. These abodes are contenders in the AIDAs' two main residential categories – design and decoration – with the winners to be announced in Sydney on April 27.

Susi Leeton had her work cut out for when confronted by strict planning controls on a drab little house in St Kilda West. But she did her expansive best, turning it into a five-bedroom family home with four living areas, solar heating and lots of water tanks stashed beneath. In midsummer heat or bitter cold, this now very sustainable house will maintain its cool.

"Our aim was to create a home which created a vibrant atmosphere as a background to a busy and robust family life," says the South Yarra architect, a finalist for the residential design prize. "[It's] a warm, relaxed haven set in a beautiful garden in a dense urban Melbourne suburb by the sea."

Leeton – winner of 2011's Australian House and Garden Room of the Year award – is also up for her revamp of an Elsternwick Edwardian, whose huge garden trees now shelter a sleek, double-glazed extension opening onto the lawn. As well as organising two studies, four bedrooms and living space "where the building essentially floats above the garden", she got tough on the storage front, ordering masses of joinery to reduce clutter.

Interior designers Nicolina Caia and Tania di Lizio had the opposite problem when handed the keys to a 15th floor St Kilda Road flat. The urban eyrie was so vast and echoey, the owners struggled

to make it look lived in.

The Caia di Lizio team retained the original walls but shrank the rooms with built-in wardrobes, added floor lamps and put up shimmering Florence Broadhurst wallpaper in two of the bedrooms. A rich, dusky palette of mauve, pink and gold brought a sumptuous 1920s style to what was once a coldly banal new build.

"Our philosophy is that our work should have longevity, it should have a life cycle beyond the latest IT gadget. This is achieved by using exquisite materials and exceptional craftsmanship," say Caia and di Lizio, who are nominated in the residential decoration category.

Meanwhile, more than 100km away, interior architect Shareen Joel was creating a glamorous version of a timber beach hut on a small site next to the Sorrento sailing club. "The design was to accommodate a family of four with room for plenty of guests, family, friends and utilities for all the sailing equipment," says Joel, whose success in containing all this around a delightful central garden has made her a finalist in residential decoration.

In stark contrast is a Sorrento house by Robert Mills, up for the residential design award for his tough-looking megalith of exposed concrete, honed basalt and hand-hewn timber. Mills, as famous for his chic inner Melbourne houses as his seaside retreats, combined both in this "contemporary Palladian villa".

"The aim was to create a building that is grand in scale, as sophisticated as any city residence yet still a calming coastal retreat," says Mills, whose team filled this lucky hideaway with the latest furniture by Piero Lissoni, Andrew Lowe and Jean-Marie Massaud. The jolly tangerine splashes come courtesy of several indigenous artists.

Mills is also nominated for another beach house – the Ocean House, with views across Loutit Bay to Lorne. And if you like it, you can rent it. ■

See all the finalists at [australianinteriordesignawards.com](http://australianinteriordesignawards.com)

