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# HOUSING



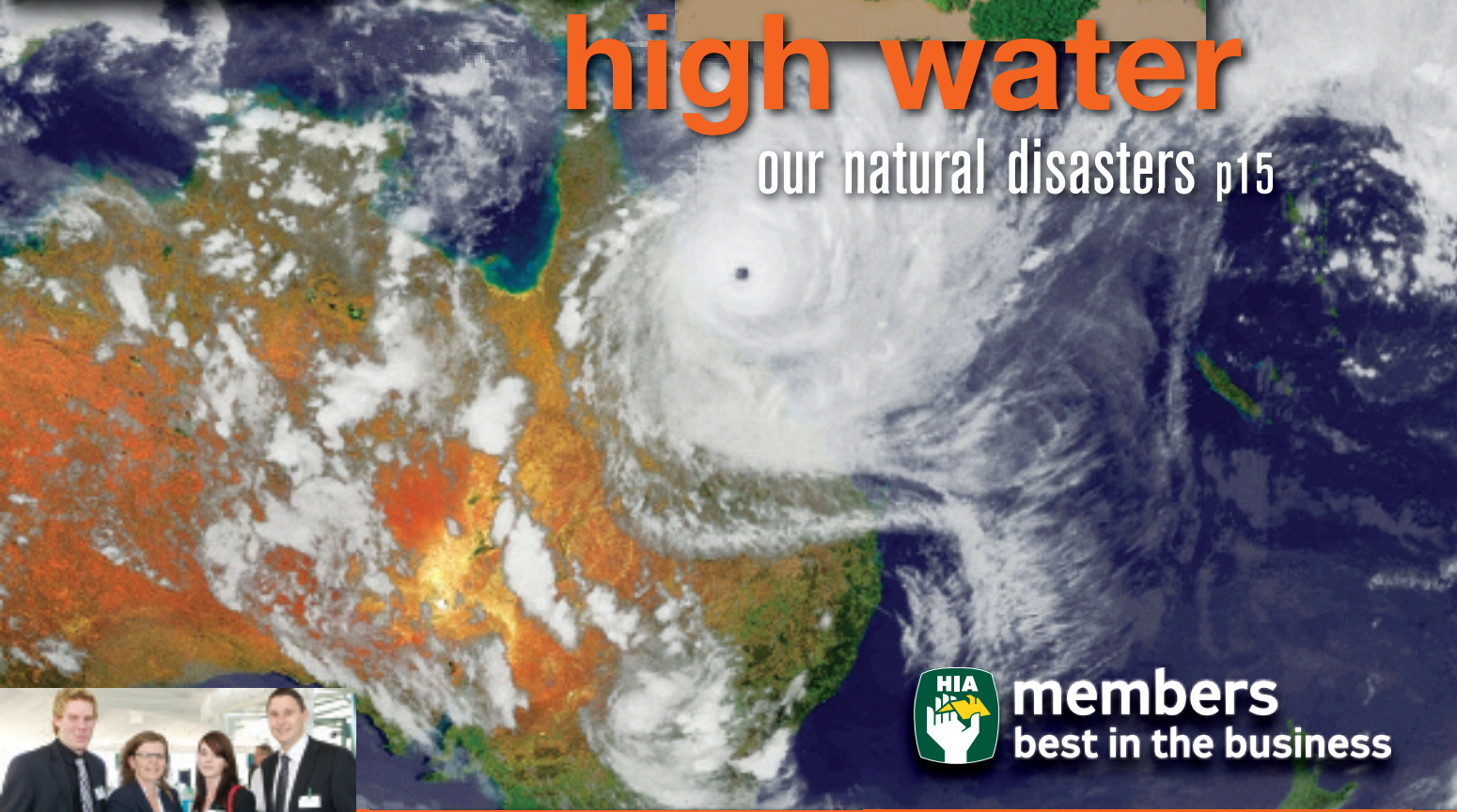
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**SCHOLARSHIPS**  
Build Your Future p68

THE NATIONAL MAGAZINE FOR BUILDING PROFESSIONALS



hell and  
**high water**  
our natural disasters p15



**members**  
best in the business

**in focus**

HIA at work and play p116

The credit squeeze – where's the money gone? p10

# a happy balance

For A-Plan Kitchens, striking a balance between design and price is all important. Amanda Williamson reports.

**A**-Plan Kitchens likes to make people happy. Michael Terley, owner of the Sydney-based kitchen manufacturer, explains that A-Plan's role is the 'bit between architect and builder', where they take the architect's inspiration and 'fashion it' to optimise the available room space so the builder can create what the customer wants.

A-Plan talks to builders and clients in terms they understand. To the client, it's about finding out what they are trying to achieve and getting the 'right design for the right reasons'. And for the builder it means that A-Plan looks after the details so they can concentrate on the big picture and not have to deal with the client when it comes to decisions on finishes for doors and benchtops, splashbacks, lighting, hardware and appliances. The result is that 'the customer is happy, the builder is happy and the architect's direction is maintained'.

'We work in tandem to get a good result for our client ... I try to make

*Below: Michael Terley with a customer in A-Plan's showroom.*



relationships where everybody wins,' Michael explains. And of course, 'happy clients recommend us to family, friends and colleagues: word-of-mouth is the most valuable advertising you can get,' he says.

This approach is one of the reasons the company became involved in the television program *Domestic Blitz*, where A-Plan works against the clock to design, manufacture and install new kitchens for families who have recently faced tough times.

'We understand when a builder wants something and it's urgent. We are one of the few companies who can deliver a well designed, well thought through, quality product for any given room space. With TV companies, they don't always have the experience that a qualified kitchen person has, so they come to us [with the concept] and we design it, so that it caters for their wishes and directions. We create a fabulous design and get the product there on time,' says Michael.

Michael describes himself as a businessman, whose own job at A-Plan Kitchens is to make sure that 'we've got the right people doing the right job'. He started the company in 1984 because he wanted a cheap kitchen for himself, and realised that there were a limited number of places available to get a quality product.

**The products and designs he showcases are those he believes are best suited to the Australian style, specifically the Sydney style**

'The market seemed to be driven by companies that had very high price expectations; they'd look down on you unless you spent \$20,000. Or alternatively there were others who would say to you "look mate, I'll give you the cheapest deal in the world". Two extremes – those who looked down their nose and said I couldn't afford their



### Eurocucina – the ‘kitchen catwalk’

According to A-Plan Kitchens the main trends to come out of last year’s Eurocucina in Milan, which Michael calls the ‘kitchen catwalk’, can be readily adapted to suit the Australian lifestyle.

**Natural materials** An increase in the use of natural materials such as timber and natural stone was a big trend. Solid surface products and stainless steel remain popular, however, replicating nature was ‘everywhere to be seen even including ... fresh herb gardens within the working space of the kitchen’.

**Floating cabinets** Kitchen cabinets have traditionally gone from floor to ceiling, but floating cabinets, already popular in bathrooms in Australia, were a big feature and lend themselves to a more open plan design and provide a greater sense of room space.

**Integrated living spaces** Integrating kitchens with their surrounding living areas by using similar colours and textures, and the adoption of ‘soft boundaries’ between kitchen and living spaces.

**Playful shapes** A-Plan found kitchen designers ‘played’ with shapes – both curves and angles, as well as solids and voids – resulting in a range of kitchens that didn’t look like kitchens but more like display areas.

product, and others who would offer the cheapest deal.’

It motivated him to try to strike a balance between design and price. ‘It just seemed to me that there was a place for people who could appreciate good advice and good design at a reasonable price. I still maintain that’s the case.’

Michael also believes that customers now have higher expectations and are much more knowledgeable. ‘People today are well informed, well read, well educated. They know what value looks like and they recognise what good quality is.’ He says this is one of the biggest changes he has witnessed in the 30 years he has been in the business.

‘[You need to think] about the next room, and how it is going to coordinate with the rest of the house. It’s important that all of these things should complement each other,’ he explains. ‘It’s about trying to make sure that everything works in a seamless way ... It’s only when you start to think about the complexity of a kitchen and the connection it has [with] the decoration and general layout of the house, [that you realise] it’s worth putting in a little bit extra attention and care to get the right result. It doesn’t happen accidentally.’

Michael argues this approach is increasingly important as the kitchen becomes part of the overall living space, a theme he also noticed at last year’s

*Right: A-Plan manufactures its own kitchens from its factory in Stanmore.*

Eurocucina, the biennial kitchen design fair held in Milan (see box at left).

He visits Europe annually to keep in touch with the latest design trends and to get inspiration, and A-Plan Kitchens’ showroom in Camperdown is a reflection of these influences. Michael says the products and designs he showcases are those he believes are best suited to the Australian style, specifically the Sydney style. This he describes as sleek and ordered, with muted colours to complement soft furnishings and other furniture, and which look just as good in the evening as during the day.

A-Plan deals only with good quality manufacturers in the hardware they use, and also buys Australian wherever possible. ‘We try to make sure that we don’t buy Chinese imports that are of poor quality,’ Michael explains.

### ‘I try to make relationships where everybody wins’

With this in mind, A-Plan is about to release a new range of cabinets for builders, tradesmen and DIY-ers, which are low on cost but retain the high quality materials and processes A-Plan is known for. ‘It will be an internet-based range for customers who know what they want and don’t need a design service. They will be able to select and pay for the cabinets online and we’ll manufacture and distribute all orders from our factory in Stanmore,’ Michael says. ‘It is very exciting because it will compete with Chinese imports, but you have Australian quality and delivery times. We believe it is something that offers customers fantastic value for money.’

And no doubt, Michael hopes, much happiness too. 

