



This Avalon Beachcomber has been refurbished with care

Inside, the Beachcomber was practical, with three bedrooms upstairs, a bathroom, a kitchen and a lounge room that opened out to the front deck.

Underneath the house was space for motorcars, which were becoming increasingly within reach of the average Australian household.

A laundry, toilet and shower were also below, with a staircase that led up to the front deck.

"People were buying the Beachcomber in dozens and dozens," Mr Sydney said.

After less than a year with Lend Lease, Mr Sydney was made Chief Architect.

During his 13 years with the group he estimates he designed about 70 original Lend Lease homes, including individual projects for top company executives,

including founder and CEO Dick Dusseldorp.

"Most of the Lend Lease bosses wanted new houses for their own families," Mr Sydney said.

"It seems they liked my work."

Eventually, Mr Sydney left Lend Lease to start his own firm.

"A lot of people came to me to design a house for them," he said.

"Then I had bigger jobs... a motel here, an office building there."

But the larger projects did not appeal to him.

"I preferred to work from home dressed in my swimming costume and if I didn't get a project that was 50 storeys high, I didn't mind. I was happy that way," he said.



Crowds flooded the Lend Lease display village when it opened in Carlingford in north-west Sydney in 1961

Too many architects, he said, get stuck in the office doing long hours.

And ever client-focused, Mr Sydney said many architects neglect to factor affordability into their designs.

"It's important to put together a good design for reasonable money," he said.

"Many of my colleagues are not good at this.

"They can design well, but if it costs 50 or 100 per cent more than it should, what's the point?"

### AN URBAN IDOL

Today, at 81, Mr Sydney is revered for being a humble icon, responsible for a number of rare Beachcomber gems across the Sydney landscape.

So much so, that an eclectic group of





Helen Thurloe (left) is one of Nino Sydney's (right) many fans



A number of mid-century modernist homes still exist in Carlingford

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...AN ECLECTIC GROUP OF MID-CENTURY MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE BUFFS – FROM TIKI CARVERS TO ACADEMICS TO RETRO SHOP OWNERS – HAVE FORMED AN INFORMAL FAN GROUP THAT MEETS FOR BARBECUES TO TALK BEACHCOMBERS AND NINO SYDNEY.



A Beachcomber in the Blue Mountains is lovingly cared for by its owners

mid-century modernist architecture buffs – from Tiki carvers to academics to retro shop owners – have formed an informal fan group that meets for barbecues to talk Beachcombers and Nino Sydney.

A dedicated website – [www.beachcomberhouse.com.au](http://www.beachcomberhouse.com.au) – also exists.

Launched in 2012 by Beachcomber enthusiast Helen Thurloe, the site tracks the history of this style of housing, Nino Sydney's career and includes extensive images of Beachcombers throughout Sydney.

Ms Thurloe said since she and her husband David Parker purchased their Beachcomber at Avalon in 1995 for \$305,000, they have not looked back.

"We were looking to live in the northern beaches and we looked at a lot of poorly-

built houses," she said.

"Then we saw the Beachcomber and were impressed with the clean lines and the way it had been put so sensitively on the block in relation to the aspect, which looks down the valley to the ocean."

Ms Thurloe said Beachcombers were not popular in the 1990s.

"Our house had been on the market for a while," she said.

She said, however, she was not deterred.

"They're modest houses and have made the most of what they've got," she said.

"They're certainly not a little pokey house with cheap finishes.

"It wasn't like Lend Lease decided to make a box as cheaply as possible."

Inspired to find out more information about

the house, Ms Thurloe successfully tracked down Mr Sydney through Lend Lease.

Through the now-retired architect, Ms Thurloe obtained a range of material to inform the website.

"I just wanted to document the Beachcomber as an important part architectural history," she said.

Ms Thurloe also met a number of fellow Beachcomber owners who sought out Mr Sydney and the residents of the 40 existing Beachcombers she has located so far.

Mr Sydney's wife, Vera, said she was delighted her husband gets to witness this fanfare during his lifetime.

The man himself, though, is modest.

"It's a pleasant surprise," he said, elaborating only with a lasting smile. ▀