

# Housing Style

## The Fibro Cottage

Although fibro was used in house construction in the 1930's and 1940's it didn't really take off as being a dominant form of building material until after the second World War.



It was used extensively in the 1950's by the Housing Commission in large developments and was highly regarded for its low cost.

According to Architect Don Flecknoe, fibro was mainly used in outer city suburbs, in contrast to properties closer to the city which were generally made of brick.

Often positioned on large, flat blocks, Don says fibro cottages usually consist of a timber frame and a cut roof frame as opposed to traditional trussed roofs. Towards the later period of the fibro's reign of the suburbs, these roofs were often made of corrugated asbestos cement.

The internal layout of a typical fibro cottage consists of box-like rooms leading off a main hallway that ran through the centre of the house.

A major flaw of the design of most fibro cottages Don notes, is the lack of attention paid to the natural features of the site, such as the orientation, aspect and views.

For instance, he says that most fibro cottages followed a traditional layout of a main bedroom and living room at the front of the house without regard to the site, with the remaining bedrooms, laundry and kitchen towards the back.

### Positive Features

When it comes to the positive features of the fibro cottage it is important to firstly discuss the negative. With asbestos cement presenting a serious health risk when it is broken up, any renovations to fibro cottages require the safe deconstruction and disposal of the fibro sheets.

The good news is today fibro is still used to construct homes but it has been modified to remove the dangerous asbestos fibre component which has been replaced with wood fibres.

According to Don, a strong point for the style is that the fibro cottage lends itself particularly well to renovations, particularly first floor additions. This is because unlike many project homes where only the external walls are load bearing, a typical timber framed, fibro cottage has many internal load bearing walls.

### Renovation Potential

With its boxy rooms, one of the more common renovations to fibro cottages says Don is to open up the house and rework the floor plan to take advantage of the site's positive features.

This often involves relocating the bedrooms and extending the back part of the house to include an open plan kitchen that overlooks a large, informal living and dining area.

Upper floor additions are also commonly added to fibro homes and Don notes that while this is aided by the styles structural composition it is also due to the typically large block which allows for favourable FSR (Floor Space Ratio) Council requirements.