

Life's ups and downs

COURIER MAIL

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Land value plays part in deciding

Working out whether to go for a highset or lowset home can be a dilemma, writes property editor **Michelle Hele**

AS OUR population grows and block sizes get smaller, many have discovered the only way is up when it comes to squeezing as much house as they can on their land.

Double-storey homes are making a resurgence in popularity, particularly in high-population areas where land is in demand and costs are high.

According to Stockland general manager residential Queensland Kingsley Andrew, the trend towards building double-storey houses appears to be very much based around location.

"Generally speaking people are opting for a highset home when the land values are higher," he says.

There appeared to be more people opting for highset homes in estates in areas such as Kawana on the Sunshine Coast, where the land was more expensive.

On smaller blocks of land, a highset house can give owners just as much floor space – if not more than a single-level home – but also more yard space.

"The cost difference between single-storey versus double-storey is not double," Andrew says.

"It is not significantly more, as a rate per square metre, to go for a double-storey configuration."

Andrew says the secret to making a double-storey home appealing is to get the layout right.

And he says tastes and ideas seem to change between different states of Australia.

In Western Australia, homeowners tend to want the master bedroom and amenity on the ground floor with the



COSTS CONTRAST: Lowset houses, per square metre, are cheaper to build.

children on the top floor. In Queensland, demand is for all bedrooms upstairs and living areas downstairs.

While it is easy to get configurations right in newly built homes, the trend of buying, raising and building under Queenslander homes can be fraught with problems because of having to work with an existing layout.

"With existing houses you don't always get the best outcome," Andrew says.

And he says the typical double-storey home is no longer just a solid brick block of years gone by.

"Queenslanders are a little more creative," he says.

Andrew says there has definitely been a shift in the past three to five years back towards highset homes as people became a lot more economically savvy with what they wanted in a home.

Master Builders Association

Queensland housing policy director Paul Bidwell says their research has found that building a double-storey house costs about \$75 per square metre more than a similar-sized single-storey house.

He is not seeing a big shift towards building highset houses.

Bidwell says many builders are managing to be creative with what they can fit in terms of a lowset home on smaller blocks.

When it comes to buying a home for investment, Simon Pressley of 6-Point Property says there is no real difference between high and lowset.

He says investors are more focused on things such as the area a house is in, the street, how big it is and the price.

"I wouldn't specifically go seeking a high or lowset home," he says.

"There is no statistical evidence to suggest that one style of home produces better returns on investment

than the other." But he says there are some risks between the two products.

Make sure a highset home meets legal height requirements if you plan to add value to the property by building in underneath.

If it has already been built-in, make doubly sure it is the right legal height and relevant approvals were sought.

Pressley says the benefit of highset homes is they provide potential for overall bigger floor area than a lowset home on the same size block. At the same time they still retain ample room for yards, gardens and pools.

"A two-level home can create lifestyle opportunities such as game rooms, teenage retreats, and home offices," he says.

But he says on the flip side, so many people just don't like stairs.

Pressley reckons highset versus lowset decisions are based more on features and benefits than financial investment considerations.

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