

Imported designers change face of city

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Ben Mountford yesterday in front of a house he designed. Picture: Colin Murty Source: The Australian

AS Western Australia's flourishing construction industry lures talented designers from the eastern states, the traditional residential face of Perth is being transformed.

Imported designers have moved the city away from its traditional "brick and render" style, towards well-considered and versatile homes, which are in demand from increasingly affluent home-owners.

Although not as strong as pre-global financial crisis levels, WA's construction industry continues to outstrip the east coast. During the last quarter of last year, per-capita construction spending in NSW -- public and private combined -- was just \$600, half that of WA.

About \$1200 per person is spent in the western state, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, while \$800 was spent per person in Queensland and \$1000 in Victoria.

Former Sydney and now Perth architect Ben Mountford said that, compared with NSW, WA had fewer council and state regulations, which helped drive design flexibility and productivity.

Mr Mountford grew up in Sydney but like many young designers, the 38-year-old moved west and has since established a thriving architectural practice, which has capitalised on the state's boom.

"NSW has more bureaucracy, there's too many hoops to jump through with councils," he said. "There's more support for development in WA; it seems everyone's building something over here, even though labour's more expensive."

Recently, the Committee for Sydney released its 2013 federal election paper, saying Sydney lost \$43 billion of potential GDP growth to other states over the past 10 years.

Mr Mountford said the WA government's strong support for construction through building civic buildings was important for a strong industry. However, he said a skills shortage driven by the mining boom in WA had pushed up the cost of tradesmen.

His most recent design, at Attadale, in Perth's south, is typical of the changing nature of home design, which he says has adopted a more versatile material palette that allows more daring and innovative designs.

"People are demanding more of their built environments; they want to live in well-considered, nice homes that show an appreciation for good design," Mr Mountford said.

By using lightweight materials, including plantation timber and fibre-cement, more glass could be incorporated into the design because of the longer span of beams.

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