

WHITE PAPER

What the World Told Us About Home

and why it is as relevant
today as it was then

Insights from 774 messages sent to PLACE Technologies after our 2018 TED talk, and what they mean for the future of housing.

FOREWORD

People didn't write to us about technology.

They wrote about wanting a home they could shape, afford and be proud of, and about the people they wanted to share it with.

In 2018 PLACE gave a TED talk with a simple idea: design your home, order it from a factory, and help make sustainable housing available to everyone. Over the next three years, hundreds of people from at least 19 countries wrote to us. They were first-home buyers and retirees, parents and students, architects, builders, landowners, and people without a home at all.

We read every genuine message, grouped what people told us into seven insights, and paired each insight with anonymised stories so you can hear the voices behind the numbers.

The messages are a few years old. The need they describe has only grown. We are sharing them openly because the housing problem is too big for any one company to solve. Governments, builders, designers and communities all have a part to play. We hope this helps.

PLACE

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THEN AND NOW

Why it matters more now, not less

These messages were written between 2018 and 2021. Every problem they describe has grown since, and the tools to answer them have finally arrived.

THEN: WHAT PEOPLE TOLD US

NOW: WHY IT IS SHARPER TODAY

1. Hope after being shut out	The national median dwelling value is now A\$912,885. ¹
2. Choice and control	Pattern books now offer pre-approved designs people can choose and adapt. ²
3. Play makes design possible	AI and in-browser 3D make taking part in design easy.
4. Sustainable and affordable, together	Building costs up to 20% lower, build times roughly halved. ³
5. Purpose and connection	About 184,100 Australian households are waiting for public housing. ⁴
6. A sense of place is a life	"What do you love to do at home?" can now be asked at scale.
7. The need is local, everywhere	2.8 billion people lack adequate housing worldwide. ⁵

WHY NOW?

What has arrived

Policy	Pattern books, pre-approved designs and a national certification scheme for factory-built homes give people a legal path to designing their own home.
Manufacturing	Factory-built housing can cut costs by up to 20% and roughly halve build times (Productivity Commission modelling).
Technology	AI and in-browser 3D make design participation fast and cheap, and let you ask "what do you love to do at home?" at scale.

¹ Cotality national median dwelling value, August 2026. ² NSW Housing Pattern Book; national voluntary certification scheme for prefabricated homes (ABCB, 2026). ³ Productivity Commission modelling, as reported by AAP. ⁴ AIHW, Housing assistance in Australia 2025: public housing and SOMIH waiting lists, June 2024. ⁵ UN-Habitat, via UN DESA (2025).

AT A GLANCE

Given the choice, more people wanted to design a home than to buy one.



Share of homepage enquiries, 2018–2021. People could ask for both.

774 genuine messages read	19+ countries, on five continents	314 enquiries in the month the talk went live	Hope the most common reason people wrote
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THE SEVEN INSIGHTS

- 01 Hope after being shut out.** Most people who wrote had been priced out or let down, and the idea gave them hope.
- 02 Choice and control.** People wanted a real say in their home, and pattern books can give it to them.
- 03 Play makes design feel possible.** A generation raised on building games wants a real-life version.
- 04 Sustainable and affordable, together.** People refused to trade one for the other.
- 05 A home with purpose and connection.** People wanted to belong, and to do some good beyond their own walls.
- 06 A sense of place is a life, not a building.** People described what they wanted to do at home, not floor area.
- 07 The need is local, everywhere.** The most common question was "Is it available where I live?"

INSIGHT 01

01

Hope after being shut out

Hope was the most common reason people wrote, in every channel we looked at. Most had been priced out of ownership, or felt let down by builders, councils or banks.

#1

Hope was the top driver across every source

~80

homepage enquiries described despair about affordability

“Barred” from ever owning a home, despite working and saving.

A young Australian in their mid-twenties, for whom this was the first idea that made ownership feel possible again

WHAT WE HEARD

A family looking for stability. A parent in North America shared that their family had been without stable housing for more than a year. Their question was simply how they could find a home.

Security later in life. Several older renters wrote that even a modest home felt out of reach. One hoped to keep secure housing in retirement while caring for their own parents.

WHY IT MATTERS

Housing affordability is usually discussed in prices and rates. The people who wrote to us described it as a loss of hope.

INSIGHT 02

People want choice and control over their home

02

People wanted real choice in how their home looks and works, and control over the decisions that shape it. That mattered more to them than the purchase itself.

83% of homepage enquirers asked to design or "play"	54% asked to buy	3rd control's rank among what people wanted most in a home
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Building their own home was “not accessible even to folks with our expertise”.

A couple who work in architecture and construction

WHAT WE HEARD

Rules before dreams. People in Canada and the US had land and a design in mind, then hit narrow lots, zoning and nowhere legal to place a small home. Their problem was permission, not design.

Starting now. Many who could not buy for years still wanted to begin choosing and shaping their home today.

WHY IT MATTERS

Pattern books are the key. A library of pre-approved designs that people can adapt gives them real choice, within rules that are clear before they start. Control stops being a fight with the system and becomes the starting point.

INSIGHT 03

Play makes design feel possible

03

A generation that grew up building houses in video games wants a real-life version. "Play" was the word most homepage enquirers used for what they wanted to do.

~39

messages cited creativity or play as the reason they wrote

20s–30s

the age group that most often described growing up with home-building games

“A real life version for adults.”

A recurring wish from people who spent their childhood building homes in games

WHAT WE HEARD

The game generation. Many writers in their twenties and thirties said they had spent their childhood building houses in video games. They wanted the same freedom, with a real home at the end.

What play does. Play lowers the fear of a large, unfamiliar decision. It lets people try ideas, change their minds and see the result before they commit to anything.

WHY IT MATTERS

The lesson is not to turn housing into a game. It is to make taking part in design as easy and inviting as a game.

INSIGHT 04

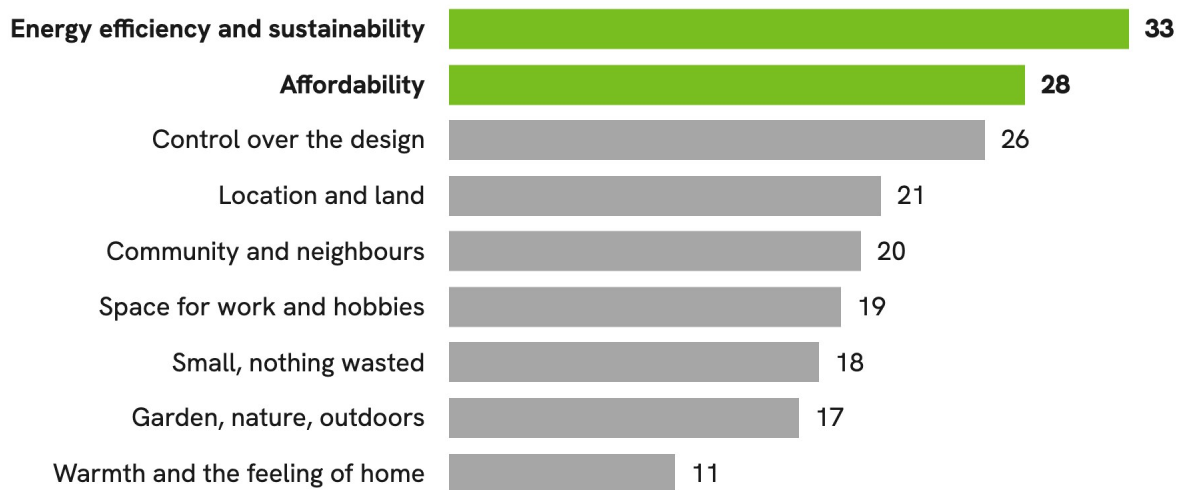
Sustainable and affordable, together

04

People refused to choose between a green home and an affordable one. When we asked what mattered most, sustainability came first and affordability second, and many named both in the same sentence.

What matters most to you in a home?

Mentions in 78 replies. People could name several.



Space for family, quality and speed each drew 10-11 mentions. Source: PLACE outreach replies, 2018-2020.

The industry often treats sustainability as a premium and affordability as a compromise. The people who wrote to us saw them as the same goal: a home that costs less to build, less to run and less to the planet.

WHY IT MATTERS

Factory-built housing can deliver both at once, because precision manufacturing cuts waste, time and cost together.

INSIGHT 05

A home with purpose and connection

05

People wanted their home to connect them to others, and to mean something beyond themselves. Purpose and community ran through the messages, from first-home buyers to retirees.

~55 homepage enquiries cited social purpose	24 mentions of belonging as the feeling behind what people wanted
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Residents should have “a voice in design”, not just a roof.

A small community builder in the US Midwest, making very low-cost tiny homes for people experiencing homelessness

WHAT WE HEARD

Room for a stranger. A landowner with a small block and a tight budget wanted a second, independent space for whoever needed a temporary roof.

Time, not money. A retiree who had once lived without power or running water offered unpaid hours each week to help.

WHY IT MATTERS

People don't only want a home. They want to belong somewhere, and many want their home to do some good beyond its own walls. Housing that makes room for neighbours, shared space and helping others gives them that.

INSIGHT 06

A sense of place is a life, not a building

06

Asked what mattered, people described a life rather than a building. Beneath the features, four feelings drove what they wanted.

44	31	24	23
Hope	Legacy	Belonging	Wellbeing

Mentions of each underlying driver across the messages we coded.

THE QUESTION THAT CHANGED THE ANSWERS

We first asked for the three most important things in a build, and got lists of features. When we asked instead *what do you love to do at home?*, the answers became stories: cooking for friends, making things, growing food, resting, growing old well.

WHAT WE HEARD

Growing old together. A designer in their fifties, retraining in carpentry, imagined small homes around a shared space where friends could age “with dignity”.

Warm in the cold. A family in a far-northern climate asked for a home that stays warm through extreme winters.

Room to host. Several people said the kitchen, or friends around a fire, mattered more than floor area. For others, natural light was essential to how they felt each day.

WHY IT MATTERS

Ageing with dignity, rebuilding after disaster, accessibility and wellbeing came up again and again. None of them is solved by square metres alone.

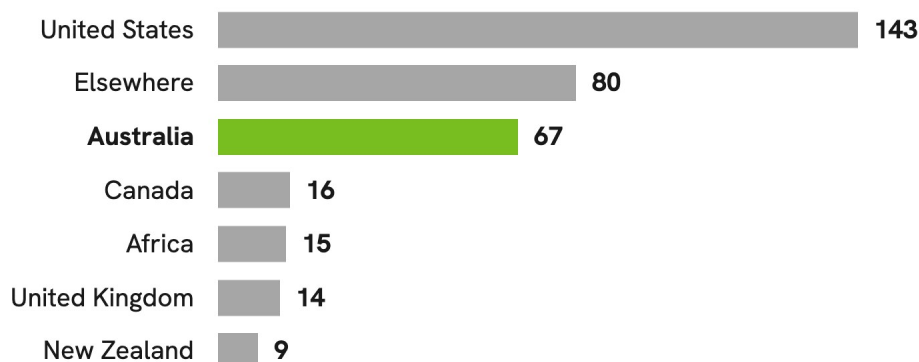
INSIGHT 07

The need is local, everywhere

07

"Is it available where I live?" was the single most common question we received. People wrote from at least 19 countries on five continents.

Where people wrote from



Enquiries with a stated location. Africa includes Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, Mauritius and South Africa. Elsewhere includes India, China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, the UAE, Switzerland, Brazil and the Caribbean. About 300 more gave no location.

WHAT WE HEARD

After disaster. A community that had lost hundreds of homes to a natural disaster asked whether a town could be rebuilt within months.

Partners abroad. Housing entrepreneurs in Africa wrote that the model “would really help move housing in Africa too”, and offered to lead it locally.

WHY IT MATTERS

Every answer to housing has to work on a specific block, under specific rules, in a specific climate. That is why it can't be solved by one global product.

THE TENSIONS WE HEARD

What people wanted often pulled in two directions at once

Any housing model that ignores these tensions will disappoint the people it is meant to serve.

Budget and quality

Low cost and high performance, in the same home.

Big and small

Room to host, alongside a wish for no wasted space.

Privacy and community

Quiet, and also neighbours and gatherings.

Freedom and rules

Free design, until lot sizes, zoning and parking rules for small homes got in the way.

Belief and readiness

Many believed in the idea, but few had land, finance and a timeline at the same time.

Design and the designer

Some architects asked whether this would displace them. We think it creates more work for good designers, not less.

What we learned

We tried to go global from day one. The response showed us why that doesn't work: housing is local, so the tools have to be too.

WHAT THIS MEANS

People are ready to take part, if someone gives them a way in

For governments and councils

Make the rules clear before people design: pattern books, pre-approved designs and certified factory-built homes.

Build community participation in from the start, not as consultation at the end.

Use public land and fast approvals to make attainable housing viable.

For developers, builders and factories

Lead with sustainable and affordable together. It is what buyers asked for most.

Ask people what they love to do at home, not just which features they want.

Give buyers a sense of purpose and community, and customers become supporters.

For architects and designers

Make taking part in design feel approachable. People who are invited in become your strongest advocates.

Design for life stages: ageing in place, multi-generational living, working from home.

For PLACE

PLACE is a small, open framework: a set of automated, off-the-shelf tools that developers can use locally to connect people to a sense of place. It is available wherever you are, so everyone who asked "is it available where I live?" can now use it.

**The need is local everywhere, so
the answer has to be local too.**

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This paper reflects what people told us between 2018 and 2021. It is a snapshot of public sentiment at that time, not a representative survey.

What we read. Every genuine message sent to PLACE through our homepage enquiry form, expression-of-interest forms, contact forms, direct email and LinkedIn, plus replies to our follow-up question "what matters most to you?": 774 messages in all, 668 first contacts and 106 replies. About 350 spam messages were excluded.

How we analysed it. Each message was coded for themes, drivers and location, with manual checks. A message could carry several themes, so counts do not add to a total. Treat them as directional.

Privacy. All data was de-identified and aggregated. No names or contact details were kept, and working files were deleted after analysis, leaving only category counts with groups under five suppressed. Stories are anonymised: ages in bands, places at country or region level, identifying details changed or blended, and quotes kept short.

What it isn't. The people who wrote to us chose to. They are not a random sample of any population.

ABOUT PLACE

PLACE Technologies is an Australian company founded on the belief that sustainable housing should be available for all. PLACE is a small, open framework: a set of automated, off-the-shelf tools that developers, architects and factories can use locally to engage communities, show homes in 3D and connect people to a sense of place.

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