



Great heights: Building designer Peter Downes loves Northern Beaches sites Picture: Bob Barker

# Designing makes job a winning one

FOR MOST people getting fired from a job is a career low-point. For building designer Peter Downes it was the best thing ever.

"I was fired from my job as a draftsman with a mining engineering company 15 years ago," Downes says.

"That day I decided to set up my business and it's the best thing I have ever done."

Downes began his career as a cadet engineer for UK company Simon Carves. He soon discovered a talent for drafting.

"I moved away from traditional engineering and focused on drafting," he says.

"I have no formal design training but my engineering background has helped me."

His company Peter Downes Designs was listed under "draftsman" in the phone book, providing him with residential inquiries.

"I started out with the idea of servicing the mining industry, which was my background, but I soon got inquiries for smaller jobs like pergolas and additions," Downes says.

"Then I had a lucky break. A wealthy friend of mine asked me to design a house for him at Bilgola beach. He said if he liked the design he would build it and pay me for my services. He did and now here I am."

A third of Downes' day is spent designing, the rest is liaising with clients and landscape architects, surveyors, arborists and engineers.

"We co-ordinate and organise the whole process," Downes says.

Downes enjoys the variety that comes with different sites and client expectations.

"I mainly work in the Northern Beaches area so there are challenging sites, with rocky outcrops and steep slopes. I keep designing

## trades & services

### Peter Downes

**How did you get your job:** I started as a cadet engineer and discovered I had a talent for draftsman work.

**Upside:** Most of the time I'm designing someone's dream home. It's extremely satisfying to help achieve their dream.

**Downside:** Dealing with neighbours.

until I come to the perfect design. I try to give a first-class service the whole way."

Downes has 33 awards, including five from the 2008 Building Design Awards of NSW.

"Last year I won best new dwelling in the 250-350sqm category for a house at Avalon. It also won best use of timber and the premier award for design excellence," he says.

"I won best new house in the 35-450sqm category and best use of a sponsor's material."

Winning awards is satisfying to Downes, yet it is the client satisfaction that wins him over.

"At the end of most projects I wind up having a drink on the balcony with the clients, enjoying the end result is special," he says.

**Jenny Ringland**