

# ADELAIDE

Issue 126 | September 2010

matters

THE  
MEN'S  
EDITION

FAST  
FOOD  
OUR BEST  
BURGERS

GREEN  
HOUSE  
AN ARCHITECT'S  
DREAM PROJECT

BOARD  
GAMES

SHAPER BEN WALLBRIDGE'S DESIGNS ARE  
MAKING WAVES IN SURFING CIRCLES

Ben Wallbridge  
says subtle  
changes to  
the shape of a  
surfboard can  
make all the  
difference

# WAVE OF SUCCESS

Memories of a family holiday in Noosa have stayed etched in Ben Wallbridge's mind since he was 13.

It was his first taste of surfing, igniting a passion that has stayed with him for more than two decades.

"I hired a board at first but by the end of the holiday I'd bought one of my own," he says.

It was the first of many for Ben who has gone on to chase waves all over the country, at the same time turning his love of the sport into a business.

It's an interest he shares with his wife and business partner, Penny, and their children Finn, 8, and Louella, 7, who all surf.

Ben is a surfboard shaper, customising boards to suit individual needs. At his small workshop at Somerton Park, he and his team turn out about four specialised boards a week. They also retail, repair and recycle boards.

A competitor by nature, he is constantly trying to make the boards better by experimenting with the shape and the weight of the materials used.

"We're always trying to find a better version of the polyurethane board," he says.

He has been using an EPS (expanded polystyrene) foam with a balsa wood shell and epoxy resin which creates a retro-looking board that is lighter and faster in the water.

"Timber veneer has been done before but the boards are heavy whereas the balsa shell is flexible and gives some spring," he says.

Ben says it is a win-win situation with the balsa sourced from eco-friendly renewable plantations and the epoxy resins much healthier for people to work on.

AM PEOPLE

"People think the materials haven't changed much but they have; they've become more refined and safer like the ultra-violet resin – we would have been among the first to use it here (SA)," he says.

His designs were recently acknowledged in *Surfing World* magazine's design issue and Ben was named a surfboard shaper to watch.

He says the difference between a good board and a great one is all about "subtleties" in shape and size.

Ben's design skills have been honed over years of practice; he made his first board at 16, although he didn't consider it a career option until several years later.

He studied the first three years of a Bachelor of Design before the lure of the surf took him to Queensland where he divided his time between chasing waves along the east coast and learning from traditional shapers.

He returned to Adelaide convinced he could make a business out of shaping boards and has been based at Somerton Park for the past 10 years.

"We established ourselves just before the mass production of boards really took hold," he says.

Ben says cheap, mass-produced boards have their place, making surfing accessible to more people.

For those who get the taste for it, the Wallbridge boards are waiting; a basic short board costs around \$675, while a nine-foot Malibu is \$900, and artwork and finishes are extra.

"I still love being able to surf and have the right board to do it, and I like to make boards for others to use and get their feedback."

Inquiries on 8376-4914, [www.wallbridge.com.au](http://www.wallbridge.com.au)