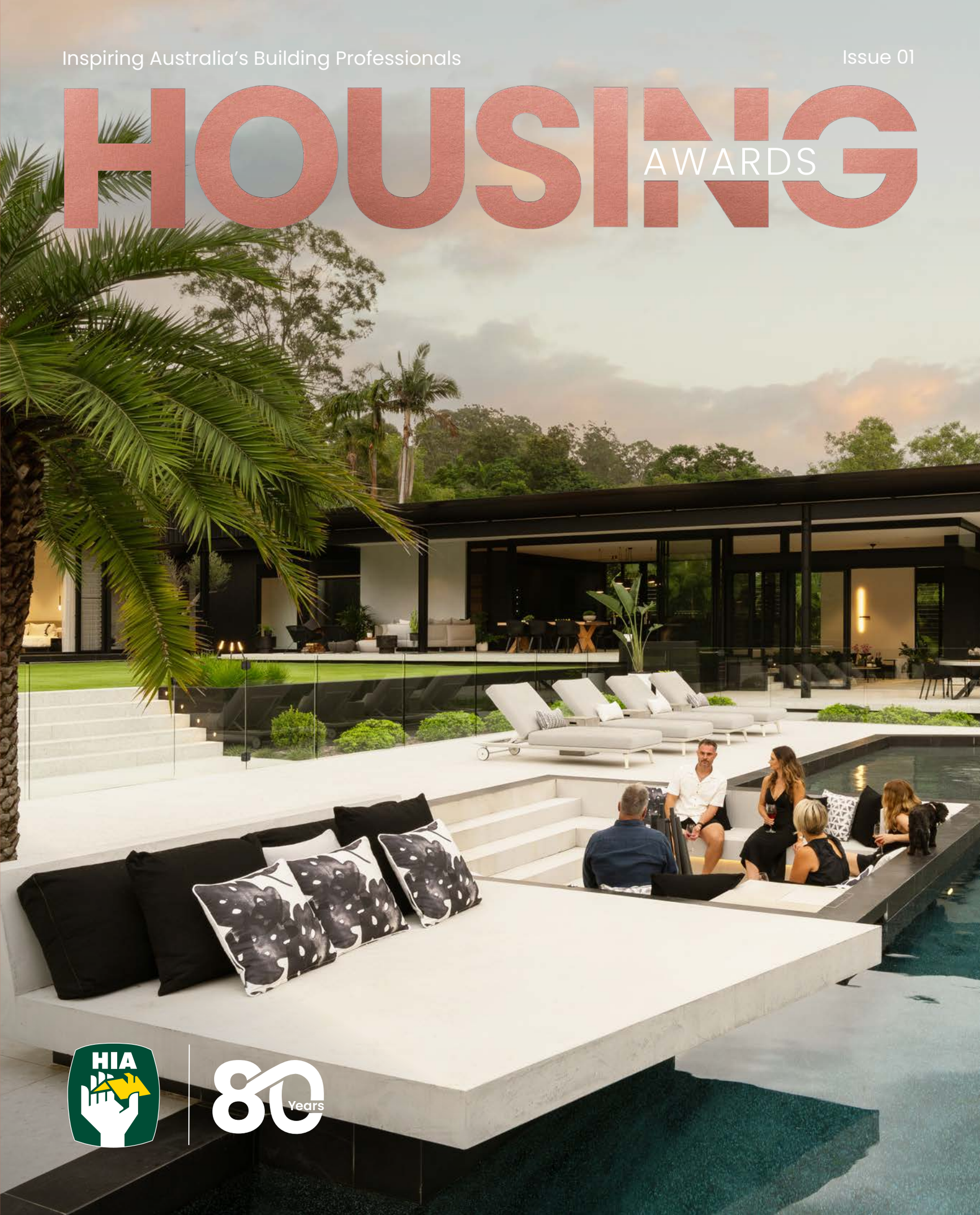
Inspiring Australia's Building Professionals

Issue 01

HOUSING AWARDS



HIA | 80 Years

Introducing 2025 HIA-CSR AUSTRALIAN HOME OF THE YEAR

Bold Blackwood

AWARD: **2025 HIA-CSR AUSTRALIAN HOME OF THE YEAR & HIA AUSTRALIAN CUSTOM BUILT HOME**

WINNER: **SARAH WALLER BUILDING**

Introducing *Blackwood Doonan,* winner of the 2025 HIA-CSR Australian Home of the Year and HIA Australian Custom Built Home – a pavilion-style build that masters indoor-outdoor contemporary living.

Opposite page and above: For Sarah Waller Building, designing *Blackwood Doonan* was about crafting a space that feels grounded and considered.

Sarah Waller is a builder by nature and by name. 'Our family are called "Wallers" – builders of walls,' she says, laughing, 'so, I guess it's in my blood.'

From a young age, Sarah would accompany her father to building sites in the United Kingdom. Although she studied architecture, she was also attracted to the construction side. 'When studying architecture, I did a building diploma covering everything from structural engineering to project management. It gave me a broader understanding. There's no point having beautiful designs that can't be built.'

Upon arriving in Queensland's Sunshine Coast with a young family, Sarah took on various architectural projects. Her masterstroke, however, was applying for a builder's licence. This began her successful foray into custom design and construct projects in the Noosa region. With her rare combination of being an architect and builder, she not only has a deep respect for craftsmanship, but it has become apparent that her stamina, calm confidence and eye for detail have also become her calling cards.

When Sarah happened upon a sloping rural block between Eumundi and Noosa, she immediately recognised the potential. While she knew she'd have to balance her time between running her own business and building her dream home, she turned to her husband, Paul, for help. While running his electrical business, he stepped in to provide hands-on support and expertise during all stages of the build. >

STORY: **ANNE-MAREE BROWN**
PHOTOS: **ALYNE MEDIA**

Sarah Waller is thrilled taking out the 2025 HIA-CSR Australian Home of the Year award in Melbourne.

From a design perspective, Sarah wanted to 'create something bold and robust' – a private black box from the street that opens at the back. The result is a secluded retreat, an enduring place of calm.

Sarah's forte as a builder is her agility. However, timing wasn't on her side during this build. 'We started at the tail-end of COVID, so we had supply issues. And the weather was unfavourable, so it took us six months to get the slab down.'

Once the build took hold, Sarah was onsite every day, solving complex situations as they arose. Unsurprisingly, the build was completed in 10 months. 'Being able to manage both the design and the build really gave me control over the detailing, which is something I care deeply about. Every junction, line and finish were resolved to support the broader architectural language of simplicity and precision. For me, those small, consistent decisions shape the home's feeling as a whole.'

The contemporary home, named *Blackwood Doonan*, incorporates off-form concrete and black timber cladding. Its sleek, sophisticated interior provides a functional indoor/outdoor living flow. The layout is visually and spatially anchored by a 21-metre pool, reflecting light and creating a tranquil ambience for the inhabitants.

The site orientation informed most of the decisions, so each space has a direct relationship to the outdoors. Some rooms provide pool views and reflective morning light or broad, uninterrupted views across the golf course, all while maintaining privacy.

The material palette of concrete, glass, terrazzo and Italian black oak flooring isn't just about the aesthetics for Sarah. 'I chose them not only for their beauty but for their honesty and integrity,' she says. 'Concrete brings cooling strength, while timber contrasts with warmth and texture. The glass allows for light, views and moments of reflection. I wanted the home to feel solid but soft, luxurious and grounded.'

Distinct zones provide areas for socialising, sleeping and working, plus a self-contained studio for multi-generational living. With abundant natural ventilation and light, the dwelling is an enduring modern Australian retreat.

The HIA Awards judges commented on the exceptional level of detail and tradesmanship, remarking that it's an architectural masterpiece. The layout – a playful balance of bold elements and structural precision – was key to its win.

'Designing *Blackwood* was about more

Site orientation informed many decisions, so each space has a direct relationship to the outdoors.

than creating something beautiful,' Sarah says. 'It was about crafting a lifestyle, a daily experience and a space that feels grounded and considered. *Blackwood* isn't just a home; for me, it's a milestone. I'm committed to Australian design – how our homes should respond to their environment with sensitivity and strength.'

Sarah's favourite spaces within the home are the alfresco areas that provide views of the nearby dam and golf course. And like many Brits, the bathroom with a luxurious bath is a must-have indulgence. 'There's no better way to finish the day than having a relaxing bath,' she says.

Sarah felt incredibly honoured when she won the 2025 HIA-CSR Australian Home of the Year and HIA Australian Custom Built Home at the recent HIA-CSR Australian Housing Awards in Melbourne. 'This recognition means so much to me. To be acknowledged at this level is incredibly special.

'It's such a full circle moment for me. I grew up on building sites, moved to Australia, led both design and construction projects and am now nationally recognised here. This is a proud reminder of how far this journey has taken me.

'I have an amazing team around me, including consultants, tradespeople and everyone who has helped bring *Blackwood Doonan* to life. This award is as much for them as it is for me. I couldn't do what I do without them.'

www.sarahwallerarchitecture.com.au

At a glance

Builder: Sarah Waller Building
Architect: Sarah Waller Architecture
Award: 2025 HIA-CSR Australian Home of the Year, HIA Australian Custom Built Home
Location: Sunshine Coast, Queensland
Materials:

- Roof sheeting: COLORBOND steel Klip-Lok roofing in Night Sky
- External timber/framed walls: James Hardie Axent Trim screwed and glued back to wall frames. Cement sheet mounted vertical; battens spaced and painted in Dulux Black Weathershield
- Glazing: Aluminium windows powder-coated Dulux Duretec in Black.
- External finishes: Marvel Gems terrazzo white matte finish 600 x 600mm from Jules Baxter
- Interior walls: Painted plasterboard in Dulux Lexicon Half Wash & Wear.

Partnered by: CSR (Home of the Year); Stegbar (Custom Built Home)