

Domain LIVING BY DESIGN CLARE HALLIDAY

LAND



A plot to call your own

PORTSEA may have egos delivered by helicopter and endless squabbling between old money and new, but the appeal of this seaside town, with its iconic pub, cliff-top mansions and rare combination of serene bay beach and dramatic surf breaks, never wanes.

When plans for the \$12 million redevelopment of the Portsea Golf Club got under way in 2009, 21 blocks of land were released for sale. They were a popular buy and now there are a few more available.

The blocks in Relph Avenue are on the market through Kay & Burton (5984 4744). Three double blocks, ranging in size from 1728 square metres to 2163 square metres, are priced from \$1.35 million to \$1.8 million and the single block of 973 square metres is \$975,000. They all look out over the golf course and Point Nepean National Park. Relph Avenue, a quiet cul-de-sac, is close to Weeroona Bay.

On the other side of the golf course, Buxton Portsea Sorrento (5984 4388) is selling 1548 square metres at 2/22 Robinson Place for \$995,000. Another quiet court with a large parcel of land is 25 Wildcoast Road, on the surf beach side, where Bennis Mackinnon (5984 0999) has 2816 square metres for \$1,195,000.



From chairs to fire pits, items bought on the hit TV show mean big business for retailers.

WHEN Brad Cranfield and Lara Welham were announced as the winners of Channel Nine's *The Block* last Sunday night, Australian audiences gave the event their enthusiastic attention, with 2,715,000 viewers tuning in.

Fortunes were won, tears were shed and the host dropped a promotional teaser about next year's series having "a twist".

But before everyone in their lounge rooms reaches for the remote control, some local retailers and designers are hoping the flow-on effects of *The Block's* 2012 success continues.

In late February, contestant Andrew Jones and his brother Mike telephoned Aussie Heatwave Outdoor Fireplaces, in Oakleigh.

"They were in the midst of the courtyard renovation challenge and wanted to get a fire pit," says the store manager, Liz Jackson.

The Rings fire pit, subsequently featured on *The Block*, is a 78-centimetre, heavy, cast-iron bowl with stand.

What led the show's contestants to her product?

"We were just lucky," she says.

With organisers making a point of not actively promoting a particular business unless they were a big sponsor, the only opportunity for official advertising spots came with a hefty price tag and an application for selective consideration.

"Unfortunately, small businesses such as ourselves just can't afford to be sponsors, so it's really the luck of the draw as to what the contestants are looking for to decorate their rooms, and whether you're lucky enough that they find your shop or business when they're out and about looking for things," Ms Jackson says.

The publicity has boosted sales of the store's fire-pit products.

"After each room reveal, there's a photo of the room on *The Block's* website and a list of suppliers for all the things in the room or courtyard," Ms Jackson says.

It is surprising what works. A personal compliment from judge



Aussie Heatwave's Liz Jackson says fire pits are selling fast; (left) 2012 winners Lara Welham and Brad Cranfield.

PICTURE: LUIS ENRIQUE ASCUI



and interior designer Shaynna Blaze Vaughan also made a difference, says Ms Jackson. "On the reveal night, Shaynna said 'Every house should have a fire pit', so that was a great endorsement," Ms Jackson says.

"Being featured on *The Block* has definitely boosted sales and we've had increased internet inquiry, both locally and interstate, so we're very grateful for the exposure."

For Oran Harel, the call to his Dingley Village furniture store from newlywed contestants Sophie and Dale Vine, to ask about the modern

fabric lounge — a large, three-seater couch with a chaise and cushions — was also unexpected.

"Sophie and Dale found directbuy.com.au on the internet while searching for their ideal furniture to fit out their living room," Mr Harel says.

Though the mention was brief, the impact, he says, was great.

"I think I underestimated the power of reality TV shows," he says.

The judges' feedback on the couch — that it was a large choice for the room Sophie and Dale were working with — caused a storm of comments on the show's website and Facebook page that only increased sales.

It's something Mr Harel sees as a positive. "From all the thousands of businesses and millions of products out there, we were chosen based on style, availability and price," he says.

On High Street, Prahran, at homewares and lifestyle products store Fenton & Fenton, Lucy Markey has had repeat business from the top-rating show. Last year some cushions chosen by contest-

ants Josh and Jenna brought a whole new audience to Fenton & Fenton and this year, products featured in the show's last two episodes also boosted sales.

"In the 'white room' challenge, they used an inlay chest of drawers and a French provincial-style wing chair," Ms Markey says. "Dani bought many items throughout the show, including cushions, artwork, linen sheets and quilts."

With last year's spike in sales figures giving her some experience in *The Block's* impact, Ms Markey was ready for this year's increased traffic but says picking which item would walk out the door the fastest still proved tricky.

"You never know what the viewers are going to focus on," she says.

CONTACTS

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- Fenton & Fenton
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