

HAVEN

money+lifestyle+home

summer 09

 **TOP GEAR**
FINANCE

Super Fast Home Loans & Expert Advice

reach for the
**GREEN
STARS**

**BORROWING
BASICS
THAT WILL**
save you money



**COUNTDOWN
TO CHRISTMAS**

win
\$1,000
CASH

ISSN 1836-9871

REACH FOR THE GREEN STARS



With the economy steadying, the national water cooler conversation has turned back to the environment – and all home owners, builders and buyers should have their ears pricked.

From May 2011, all new homes in Australia will need to score a lofty six stars for energy efficiency, while all homes being sold or leased will need to disclose the building's green-star rating. The star rating measures a home's energy, water and greenhouse efficiency.

In short, it's time for all home owners to pop on their green-tinted glasses if they want to keep pace with environmental and buyer expectations into the future.

While some housing industry experts predict the new green-star rating system will add about \$10,000 to the cost of building a new home, there are signs that energy efficiency creates tangible value. Australian Bureau of Statistics research indicates each green star adds about 3% to a property's value.

Many of the new home requirements are a return to common sense: north-facing windows, well-sealed windows and doors and smart designs that reduce the need for artificial cooling and heating. Other features that earn a green tick include wall and floor insulation, double-glazing, water tanks and efficient hot water systems, including solar.

What does this mean for older homes? With their electric hot water systems and traditional, energy-heavy heating and cooling methods, they are likely to be at a distinct disadvantage when put up for sale or lease in the near future.

Stay cool. There are plenty of ways you can invest in your home's green appeal.

CEILING INSULATION

It may be less generous than it was but the Federal Government's Home Insulation Program is still great value. It offers a \$1200 rebate on ceiling insulation for existing homes with little or no existing insulation. Not only will your home be more comfortable but you should also save about \$200 a year in heating and cooling costs. Some conditions do apply. Find out more at www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency

HOT WATER

Heating water accounts for nearly a third of the average household's energy output so if you can find a cheaper way to do so, you stand to slash your energy bills considerably. Gas, solar and heat pump hot water systems are all more energy efficient than traditional pure electric hot water systems.

In the sunniest country in the world, solar energy makes the most sense. Energy from the sun can provide 50 to 90% of your hot water at zero ongoing costs. But the upfront costs for solar

– ranging from \$4,000 to \$10,000 – are steeper than those for electric or gas hot water systems and it can take several years of energy savings to recoup the outlay. But there are some good rebates on offer and solar hot water is likely to be sought highly by environmentally conscious home buyers in future.

If you don't qualify for the insulation rebate (see above), you may be eligible for the Federal Government's Solar Hot Water Rebate of \$1600 towards installation.

Most State Governments also offer some sort of financial incentive but you will probably find that you can benefit from either the federal or your State program, not both.

A diagram with arrows is probably required to explain how a heat pump hot water system works. Let's just say it collects 'free' energy like a solar hot water system and uses the same air transfer principles as reverse-cycle air-conditioning or refrigeration.

Fairly new on the market, heat pump hot water systems cost from around \$3,000 installed and save about \$400 a year on energy bills. Federal and State incentives apply here too but, as with the solar rebates, you usually can't double dip.

Gas hot water systems are also greener and cheaper than electrical systems and may attract rebates in some States.

Before you invest in a new hot water system, check with your State Government web site to find out what incentives are on offer. It's also worth a visit to www.hotwaterrebate.com.au – created by Dux Hot Water – to simplify the rebate maze.

WATER TANKS

With drought and water restrictions continuing to impact much of Australia, water tanks are likely to remain high on home buyers' wish lists.

In fact, in a recent survey by realestate.com.au, water tanks were voted as the environmental feature most likely to add value to a property.

A labyrinth of national, state and council rebates and incentives are on offer, so do your homework.

Visit www.savewater.com.au/products/rebates-incentives for a snapshot of the various schemes available. Rebates and incentives change regularly so take the time to verify any offer with the relevant authority.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

With these incentives on offer, there has never been a better time to green your home or get that investment property rent-ready. If you need to borrow to invest in reducing your home's carbon footprint and boost its green appeal, contact your broker to explore your refinancing options.

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS*

Get organised so that the silly season doesn't have you running around like a headless turkey!

10. * Like the idea of letting someone else cook Christmas lunch? Make a reservation at your favourite restaurant.
- * Going away? Make pet sitting arrangements for your furry friends.
9. * Shop for presents. You don't want to be doing any desperation buying on Christmas Eve! (And don't forget to allow time for those that need to be sent overseas).
- * Post Christmas cards.
- * Book in any home maintenance that needs to be done - many small businesses take holidays over Christmas and New Year.
8. * Contact Australia Post to arrange for your mail to be put on hold if you're going away (see 'Burglars' Christmas Wish List', page 5).
- * If Christmas lunch is at your place, plan the menu.
- * Book in babysitters if you plan on heading out without the kids on Christmas and/or New Year's Eve.
7. * Order ham and turkey with your local butcher.
- * Think about how your festive table will be set. Have a colour scheme in mind and work your decorations from there.
6. * Start gift wrapping.
- * If you like your tree real, investigate where to source it from.
- * Check the Ph levels in your pool - if Christmas is at your place you don't want to send everyone home with green hair.
5. * Buy supplies of Christmas cheer: wine, sparkling, beer etc. Not sure how much to order? Visit www.danmurphys.com.au for their interactive event planner that calculates how much alcohol you will need based on your number of guests.
- * Install and decorate the tree.
4. * Dust off the Weber or barbeque and make sure you have enough heat beads and firelighters or a full gas bottle.
3. * Pick up the turkey, ham, fresh fruit and vegetables.
2. * If you've forgotten a present, jump online to buy a magazine subscription. An instant gift purchase without leaving the house, and a gift that lasts all year.
- * If you are planning a true Aussie Christmas lunch - pick up your fresh seafood feast.
1. * **HAVE A FABULOUS CHRISTMAS DAY!**



BABY LOVE

Nicole Kidman has the Cherry Blossom and Rachael Griffiths the Bamboo Forest. Shinwa Organics baby wraps are the ultimate eco friendly luxury when wrapped around a baby's sensitive skin. Designed and made in Australia, the wraps are made from unbleached, woven 100% certified organic bamboo that has the feel of cashmere. Each wrap is hand painted and hand printed with oriental watercolour inspired images, using natural organic herbal dyes and pigments. All are gift boxed in recycled cardboard and handmade Japanese rice paper.

VISIT www.shinwaorganics.com



LE MAGNIFIQUE DECKCHAIR

Bring a little piece of the French Riviera to your backyard with this classic striped canvas deckchair. Its dark wood frame is slung with a piece of vibrant French canvas, woven by craftsmen from pure first quality cotton thread.

VISIT www.icietla.com.au



STEAK YOUR CLAIM

Here's a gadget for the person who has everything, guaranteed to end the argument about whose steak is whose on the barbie. The BBQ branding iron sears your customised word or message onto your meat. Made from steel and timber, the iron comes with 52 changeable letters.

VISIT www.latestbuy.com.au



Seasons

The best of donna hay magazine

'Seasons' is a celebration of the most beautiful seasonal stories that have appeared in 'donna hay magazine'. A compilation of the magazine's location stories, 'Seasons' is a visual delight featuring recipes of spring, summer, autumn and winter. This luxurious, evocative book takes you out of the kitchen and into the great outdoors. 'Seasons' is a visually rich and stunning book that will inspire and delight. It's sure to take pride of place on your coffee table. This read is for those who love to cook – and love to look.

HarperCollins RRP \$49.99

splashing safely this summer

With the summer holidays around the corner, now is the perfect time to make sure you and your loved ones are safe around the water.

Australia is blessed with one of the best climates and arguably the best beaches in the world. When the weather heats up, so too do the number of people who wish to cool off. Summer signals visits to the beach or river, or time spent in the backyard pool. Unfortunately, this increased time spent in the water means an increase in water-related injuries and drowning deaths.

Last year, 302 people drowned in Australian waterways. This is 41 more than the previous year and a 10% increase on the five-year average. Preventing aquatic deaths and injuries around the country is a constant battle.

Most, if not all drowning deaths can be prevented with a few simple safety measures. These measures apply to everyone and are common sense techniques that when used appropriately can mean the difference between saving a life or losing someone you love.

THE BEACH & RIVER

1 Swim between the flags

The red and yellow flags represent the safest section of water on the beach. The flags signify that this stretch of ocean contains no rips, in-shore holes or dangerous rocks. Even more importantly, this area is under close surveillance by surf lifesavers. Observe other warning signs such as Dangerous Rip and Swimming Prohibited.

2 If you get into trouble, don't panic

Panic is a prime cause of drowning deaths. Signal for help by raising your arm. Float on your back to conserve energy. If caught in a rip, don't panic. Ride the rip out from the beach and swim parallel to the shore for 30-40m before returning to the shore through where the waves are breaking. When the lifesaver reaches you, do exactly as he or she tells you.

3 Follow instructions

If the beach or river you are swimming at is unfamiliar, check with someone who knows the area. Prevent being swept along by the current by picking out a landmark on the shore and periodically checking your position. If you've drifted off course, leave the water and walk back to your mark.

THE HOME

1 You can only save them if you can see them

Drowning is the second leading cause of preventable death in children under five, with the majority of these incidences occurring at home. Supervision is one of the most important actions a parent can take to keep their child safe. Parents must carry out constant adequate supervision when their children are near water. You must be within arms' reach when your child is around any depth of water. Watching TV, reading or quickly answering the phone while your child is outside is not considered adequate supervision, as you may not be able to react to a situation in time to save your child.

2 Is your pool gate compliant?

If you have a back yard pool it's critical to make sure your pool fence is working properly and legally compliant. Prevent a drowning tragedy from occurring at your place by checking your gate and fence regularly for wear and tear and ensuring that the gate is self closing and self latching. Don't put any objects up against the fence that children could use to reach the pool latch or climb the pool fence.

3 Swimming lessons and your family

Parents are encouraged to enrol their children in water familiarisation lessons, which can start from the age of six months and then follow on with swimming lessons, which can begin at five years of age. Water familiarisation is not a 'learn to swim program' but encourages confidence and awareness in the water. Involving children in water activities from a young age provides them with the opportunity to become comfortable in an aquatic environment and provides the basis for future skills as they progress to learning how to swim.



WIN a \$1,000 eASYSaver account from AMP Banking

Like the idea of \$1,000 in the bank? We'd like to hear what you could do with \$1,000.

How to enter: email your answer in 25 words or less, telling us what you could do with \$1,000.

Email: havencompetitions@afgonline.com.au including your name, address, email address and daytime phone number.

Dates: competition opens on November 27, 2009 and closes on January 29, 2010.

The winner will be drawn on: February 3, 2010 and notified by telephone.

Terms & conditions: email havencompetitions@afgonline.com.au to request competition terms and conditions.



IN GENERAL

1 Enjoying a few drinks by the water this summer?

Research shows that a third of drowning deaths by 15-29 year olds is due to alcohol. The majority of these incidents are males at play at the beach or river. Research also shows that an increasing number of middle-aged men drown due to intoxication. When you are in the water, alcohol triggers a reflex closure of the windpipe, meaning you may not be able to call for help if in trouble. Alcohol can also affect your balance and coordination, meaning that you can't tell up from down while in the water. The key here is swim before you drink, not after. Eating a substantial meal, spacing your drinks with non-alcoholic beverages, and looking out for one another will ensure everyone has a great time in the safest possible way.

2 Do you and your family know CPR?

Imagine you have agreed to take care of a child for the day. All of a sudden they stop breathing and start to turn blue. How do you react? Do you know what to do? It is every parent and carer's nightmare but you can prepare yourself. Research shows that in times of emergency our brains automatically switch to our previous learning or training. It is important to learn the correct resuscitation techniques at a first aid course. These skills can be forgotten over time, so it is equally important to annually undertake a refresher course.

Article kindly provided by Royal Life Saving Society

HOW TO RECOGNISE a rip

- Sandy coloured water running out to sea.
- Rippled appearance on the surface, even when the water is generally calm.
- Waves breaking larger and further out on both sides.
- Debris and rubbish floating seaward.
- Sandbars adjacent to a darker channel of water.



Websites we love

www.blurb.com

Make your own book. An online publishing service simple and smart enough to make anyone an author – every cook, photographer, parent, traveller, poet and pet owner! Just add your text and images to their professionally designed templates, then customise and publish.

www.hollows.org.au/donate_now

With the gift giving season upon us, imagine being able to give the gift of sight. Millions of people in developing countries go blind due to lack of access to straightforward surgery. Often all it takes is a simple \$25 operation. Gift sight and independence to those living with avoidable blindness.



BURGLARS' CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

You might have a wish list for Christmas, but you're not the only one. The holiday season is an opportune time for burglars to be on the prowl, with many of your treasures on the top of their list. Try these nine simple tips to help burglar-proof your home while you're away:

1. Don't leave tell-tale empty boxes anywhere visible (bins, driveways etc). Goods with their boxes can be returned or resold.
2. Know your neighbours and give them your mobile number. Ask them to park one of their cars on your driveway and to use your bin, put it out and bring it in.
3. Ask your neighbours to collect your mail. If you're away for longer than a week, use Australia Post's Mail Hold Service. For \$12.50 for the first week and \$4 for every subsequent week, they will stop delivering your mail and hold it until your return.
4. Suspend newspaper delivery service.
5. Keep unopened presents out of sight.
6. Turn down your answering machine.
7. Ensure your doors and windows are locked.
8. Install sensor lights on your home's exterior.
9. Make sure your home looks lived in by installing timers on a radio and lights.

In the last edition of *Haven*, we ran a competition asking for your best Christmas gift ever. We promised to list some of the best responses in this edition, in time to give you some Christmas gift selecting inspiration. Here are just a few of the many we received. Thank you to everyone who sent in their ideas.

THE WINNER

Congratulations, Vladana from Perth who has won \$1,000 for her winning answer.

The best Christmas gift was given to me by my parents last Christmas, and was a handwritten collection of our family recipes, spanning a century.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

I broke both arms when I was eight. Christmas morning I fell off my swing, my present from Santa. Christmas Day was spent in hospital. Merry Christmas Mum and Dad!

Tricia, NSW

My partner made me a book and tape of my mother's life story. I was overwhelmed and tears ran down my face as I read it.

Geoff, SA

My first computer, which I used the Internet to find and contact a lost love, and finally meeting her after 30 years apart.

Steve, NT

One Christmas I met my birth parents for the first time, they gave me a Simpson's chess set. It really is the thought that counts.

Anthony, QLD

A box of second hand dinky cars and trucks from Good Sammy's. 35 years on, never forgotten and forever thankful.

Kerry, WA

11pm stood my parents (from Tasmania) at the door with big red bows around their necks and a card "Merry Christmas love from Nathan" (husband).

Amanda, QLD



For the summer competition and a chance to win a \$1,000 AMP eASYSaver account, see page 4.

BORROWING BASICS

that will save you money

Let's face it, your home loan is probably the largest financial transaction you will undertake so you should spend time making sure you're getting the best deal for your situation.

Right now, if you're looking to refinance or take out a mortgage, you're probably spending most of your energy working out whether to go with a fixed or variable rate or a combination of both. But there are some other mortgage basics you should consider to cut the cost of borrowing.

The amount borrowed, fees charged by the lender, the duration of the loan and the frequency of repayments are just some of the factors that can quietly add considerable cost to your loan.

Here are some simple mortgage tips to help you keep more money in your pocket over the life of your home loan.

Borrow less

It's common for lenders to tell you that you can afford to borrow more than you originally planned. But don't get carried away with the news. The more you borrow, the more money the lender makes from your loan.

Lenders have their own formulas to assess what you can afford to borrow, but you need to be armed with your own thorough and honest budget to work out how much you can genuinely afford to borrow and repay. Keep in mind your day-to-day lifestyle, holidays, any plans to start or have a bigger family and the ongoing costs of raising children.

Only borrow what you need. Your broker, unlike a bank, is working for you and can be a good buffer between you and the lender to help resist temptation.



Make more frequent repayments

Do the maths. If your loan repayment is \$1000 a month and you opt for monthly repayments, you will repay \$12,000 every year. If you split that same repayment into 26 fortnightly payments, you will repay \$13,000 a year. That means paying your loan off faster and reducing the amount of interest paid to the lender.

Any steps you can take to cut the lifespan of the loan will save you in the long run. Check with your broker about what options you may have to make more frequent home loan repayments without breaching loan conditions or incurring other charges.

Get the big picture

It can be quite difficult to compare apples with apples in the home loan market and to calculate the full, true costs over the life of a 25-year loan.

For example, a low interest rate may look enticing on the surface but could carry hefty set up or early exit charges that erode any of your planned savings. Here's where your broker can help. They have the tools to extrapolate the costs for you and explore whether a quick win upfront is going to cost or save you in the long run.

Do your maths before you package your debt

It's often savvy to consolidate as much debt as possible on as low an interest rate as possible. If you have personal or credit card debts at high interest rates and some equity in your home to borrow against, this could be worth considering. But do the long-term maths. Take, for example, a \$10,000 credit card debt. You will fork out less over the long haul if you pay off your plastic at 15% over five years than if you move the \$10,000 into your home loan at 5% over 20 years.

The New Year is often a great time to check the pulse on your mortgage. Contact your broker to make sure your home loan is as healthy as possible and not costing you more than it should.



Chilli and kaffir lime beef skewers

Serves 4

- 1 small red chilli, chopped
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- ¼ cup (60ml) peanut oil
- 700g rump steak, cut into pieces
- 6 kaffir lime leaves, blanched

NOODLE SALAD

- 150g dried rice vermicelli noodles
- ¼ cup coriander leaves
- 100g snow peas, sliced and blanched
- Basil leaves, to serve

Place the chilli, fish sauce, lime juice and peanut oil in a bowl and stir to combine. Place the steak in a bowl, pour over half the lime marinade and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

To make the noodle salad, place the noodles in a bowl, cover with boiling water and soak for 6–8 minutes or until tender. Drain and rinse under cold water. Place the noodles, coriander, snow peas and reserved marinade in a bowl and toss to combine.

Heat a char-grill pan or barbecue over high heat. Thread the steak and lime leaves onto skewers and char-grill or barbecue for 3–4 minutes each side for medium rare or until cooked to your liking.

Divide the noodle salad among plates, sprinkle with the basil leaves and serve with the skewers.

Recipe from donna hay's Seasons (see Haven Review)



hello

Summer is here and unfortunately for those of us with a mortgage, as the temperature has been rising, so have interest rates. Although you can't control the movement of rates, it is important to remember that there are some mortgage basics you can control to cut the cost of borrowing. Take a look at the 'Borrowing Basics' article for some simple mortgage tips to help you keep more money in your pocket over the life of your home loan.

The climate for home building is also changing. A star rating system is being introduced to measure a home's energy, water and greenhouse efficiency. From May 2011, all new homes in Australia will need to score six stars for energy efficiency and all homes being sold or leased will need to disclose the building's green-star rating. We take a look at some cost-saving ways to help meet the new requirements in our 'Reach for the Green Stars' article.

And if you are planning a summer holiday at the beach, river or just around the backyard pool, make sure you take a look at the 'Splashing Safely' article. Every year it's the Royal Life Saving Society's job to encourage people to stay safe around water so we have asked them for some water safety advice.

Christmas is just around the corner and if your home is anything like mine, the 'to do' list is getting longer. We've jotted down a 'Countdown to Christmas' to help you get organised. And to help with some of those inevitable festive season bills, we have a \$1000 AMP eASYSaver account to be won, so make sure you enter our competition.

A safe and happy festive season to you and your family and I look forward to being in touch soon.

Damien Burl
Top Gear Finance

3 Dover Place
Parkdale VIC 3195
Tel: 03 9580 0369 | Mob: 0413 480 740 | Fax: 03 9580 0389
Email: dburl@optusnet.com.au
Web: www.topgearfinance.com.au

