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PROJECT N°

10

Kew HOUSE by Bent Architecture

• MELBOURNE, VIC •

01 The ceiling, along with material and colour choices in the open-plan living area, define the different spatial zones and thresholds.



This new home in the leafy Melbourne suburb of Kew engages with the surrounding landscape and provides a balance between protection and prospect.

Words by Toby Horrocks
Photography by Trevor Mein

On a steep hill in leafy Kew, an inner suburb of Melbourne, views to the north overlook a valley filled with large houses and lush gardens. The importance of prospect on this site was obvious to Bent Architecture from the beginning. “I think the magic of architecture is in defining that balance between protection and prospect,” explains director Paul Porjazoski. “The balance between the home as a shelter and cocoon, and allowing its inhabitants to look out ... that’s what we’ve tried to do here, create that balance.” The architects have attempted to create better engagement between what was a “very static object plonked in the middle of the site” and the surrounding landscape.

Kew House was designed for a couple with two young children. Bent Architecture grouped the functional areas into zones and then fragmented the plan, making the living areas “revolve around the courtyard,” as Paul puts it. This strategy of fragmentation is illustrated in the front entry experience. You enter a fissure in the stony base of the ground floor, and the protective mass gives way to glass and light when the door opens at the top of the stairs. The initial views are of the courtyard – the east and west wings of the house create privacy from the neighbours. You are then led to the living areas by an axis of bluestone flooring, emphasized above your head by an unusual ceiling of seagrass matting, and from here the views of the valley open up.


What I have described as an “axis” is more correctly a “gallery,” as Paul calls it, because it wraps two sides of the courtyard. Its materials are intentionally natural in feel, and blend with the garden outside its glass walls. The courtyard is paved in a similar bluestone tile. The boundary between inside and outside is further blurred by a concrete block retaining wall-cum-barbecue bench that penetrates the glass to form an internal bench in the kids’ play area. In the living area the gallery does become an axis by continuing through the space, literally dividing an open plan into separate spatial zones. The spaces each side have higher ceilings that rake in different directions. On one side a clerestory is opened up above the seagrass strip, allowing additional northern light into the dining area. The materials and colours shift at this threshold, too.

This play with scale and material is key to Bent Architecture’s work. Paul recalls studying Steven Holl at university, in particular the renowned architect’s notion of the three scales of design, from large to middle to small (detail). “These things might seem really

trivial, just playing with form, but it is actually quite critical to understand those different scales and how space is experienced,” Paul says. The large and small scales are easy to spot in the Kew House: the large scale is the massing of the building, for instance the way the two upper wings split off from each other and hang above the ground floor without being supported by columns; and the small scale includes the junctions between materials, like the transition between concrete block and black zinc, or between timber and bluestone. And in between? One example of a middle-scale design element could be what Paul describes as a “peephole” in the otherwise solid balustrade to the upper deck. The timber and zinc-clad balustrade provides privacy, but a small glass panel in it allows a framed view down to the driveway and the street. The scenario is a microcosm of the broader themes of the house, striking a balance between protection and prospect.

Paul is less interested in form-making for its own sake, preferring to emphasize a specific response to a brief and site. “The house doesn’t look like anything we’ve done before but that’s the point of our work,” he says. The decision to make the first floor overhang the ground floor resulted from the need to fit a car turning circle below, and to provide adequate backyard space above. “The cantilever is not the kind of a formal gesture that we typically rely on,” Paul says. Other functional triumphs include a parental surveillance spot in the kitchen, from which the children’s play area can be viewed across the glazed courtyard. The family’s future has also been considered – the downstairs area has been designed to operate independently for teenaged children, or perhaps to house aged parents if needed.

Kew contains many modernist houses built in the 1950s and 60s, a period that Paul loves. “Those architects were really breaking new ground when it came to the relationship between architecture and landscape,” he says. Bent Architecture’s choice of black for the external cladding was initially controversial, as the clients had stipulated their dislike for the colour in their brief. However, it was a calculated choice in relation to the leafy surrounds – the dark tone recedes, bringing greenery to the fore. The house presents to the street a dynamic, asymmetrical form that sits well with Kew’s experimental architectural history.

This project works on a number of scales, and demonstrates a keen sensitivity to materials and their textural effects. And to family life; if you ever visit, it’s likely the kids will be watching through their balcony peephole. 

02 The two upper wings of the house split off from each other and hang above the ground floor without the support of columns.

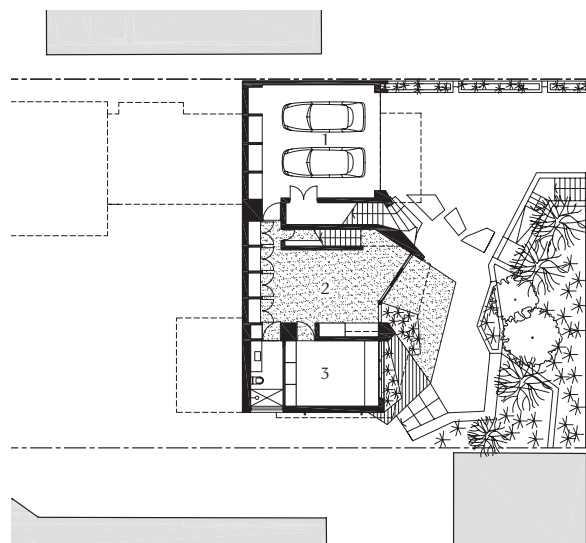
03 The placement of the pool helps to define the corner of the central courtyard.



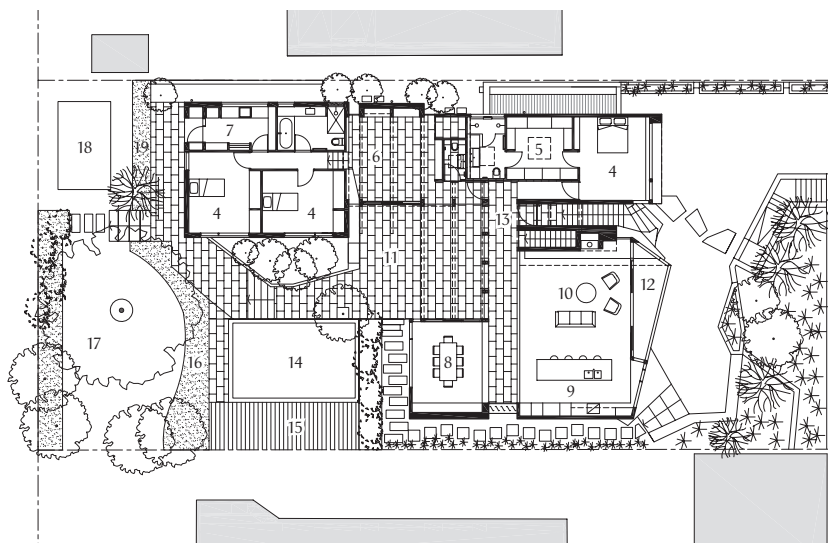


04 The dark tones of the exterior cladding recede, bringing the surrounding greenery to the fore.

05 The northern edge of the living area opens up to views of the valley.



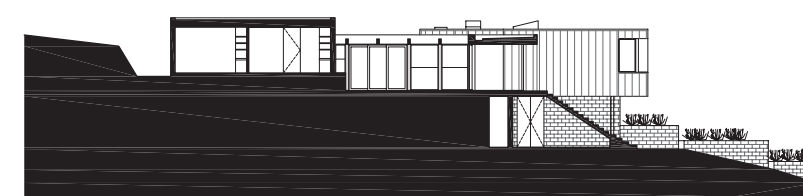
Ground floor 1:400



First floor 1:400

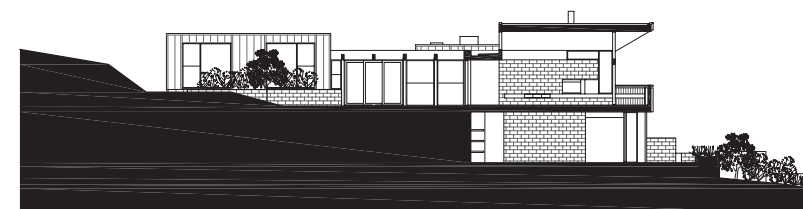


Section A 1:400



Section B 1:400

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1 Garage | 11 Courtyard |
| 2 Rumpus | 12 Deck |
| 3 Study | 13 Entry |
| 4 Bedroom | 14 Pool |
| 5 Walk-in robe | 15 Pool deck |
| 6 Playroom | 16 Battered lawn |
| 7 Laundry | 17 Lawn |
| 8 Dining | 18 Trampoline |
| 9 Kitchen | 19 Vegetable garden |
| 10 Living | |



Section C 1:400



Architect

Bent Architecture

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Practice profile

A design practice that works across the disciplines of architecture, interiors and landscape.

Project team

Paul Porjazoski, Merran Porjazoski, Fiona Lew, Louisa Macleod, Rocio Sorzano

Builder

JCM Builders

Consultants

Engineer: Clive Steele Partners

Landscaping: Eckersley Garden Architecture

Products

Roofing: Lysaght Klip-lok roof decking with Zinalume finish

External walls: VM Zinc flat-lock recessed-seam zinc cladding; Boral Concrete Designer Block in 'Alabaster'

Internal walls: Boral Designer Block in 'Alabaster'; blackbutt timber cladding; plasterboard

Windows: Rylock thermally improved aluminium window frames; Aneeta double-glazed sashless sliding windows

Doors: Capral sliding door track; Dorma pivot door mechanisms; kiln-dried hardwood internal frames

Flooring: Blackbutt flooring;

Perini rectified porcelain tiles; Supertuft carpet; Hanson Construction Materials

Terracrete polished concrete

Lighting: Moooi pendant; Artemide Talo Suspensione 180 pendant; Beacon Lighting Ledlux downlights

Kitchen: Miele oven and rangehood; De Dietrich induction cooktop; Liebherr fridge; Bosch dishwasher; Abey undermount sink; Quantum Quartz reconstituted stone benchtop; Gessi tapware; 2-pac polyurethane joinery finish

Bathroom: Hansgrohe showers; Caroma toilet suite and basin; Dorf Arc tapware; Signorino ceramic wall tiles in white; Sics Waterglass mosaic wall tiles in 'Mocha'

Heating/cooling: Hydronic heating

External elements: Anston Paving Stones pavers and stair copings; Solar Shop Australia solar panels; underground water tank

Floor area

820 m² site
390 m² floor

Time schedule

Design, documentation:

12 months

Construction:

12 months

06 Playing with scale and material is key to Bent Architecture's work.