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THE HOUSES ARCHITECTS DESIGN FOR THEMSELVES

By Dr Deborah Dearing, President, RAIA NSW

THESE HOUSES PROVIDE A MIRROR OF
THE PERSONAL DESIGN PHILOSOPHIES
AND VALUES OF THEIR AUTHORS

AS AN ARCHITECTURE STUDENT, one of my first jobs was in the office of Edwards Madigan Torzillo and Briggs. We were working on the High Court and the National Gallery of Australia buildings in Canberra. The lead architect and director of the projects was Col Madigan, a wonderful man with a down-to-earth disposition. He was regarded as an architectural icon. His wife Ruby was friendly and cheerful. It was she who told me that while architects devote enormous attention to the design, detail and construction of their clients' houses, their own homes are seldom finished. In fact, Ruby Madigan said that in the many years she had waited to have the handles fitted to her kitchen cupboards, she had become expert in using a knife to pry them open!

A decade later, I discovered that the alterations to my own home in Cammeray were also slow-going. The work program was tailored to suit other (paying) clients' priorities, we worked on site on weekends to reduce costs and we delayed stages until the money was there. As an architect, designing one's own home can be the most rewarding but also the most challenging. Concepts are worked and reworked, every decision revisited, and every detail resolved painstakingly. These houses provide a mirror of the personal design philosophies and values of their author/s.

The first home that Kerry and Lindsay Clare, directors of Architectus, designed for themselves was in Buderim on Queensland's Sunshine Coast and completed in 1991. It was a beautiful, brightly coloured pavilion that they created as a low-cost alternative to the fully tailor-made houses of their clients. It was clad with corrugated sheet steel and fibre cement sheeting. They had a young family of five children and spaces were designed for maximum flexibility.

It was highly published and acclaimed. In the late 1990s, the family →



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1 & 2 KERRY AND LINDSAY CLARE, DIRECTORS OF ARCHITECTUS' MAROUBRA APARTMENTS 3 THE KENNEDY HOUSE DINING AREA AND LIVING AREA TOWARDS COURTYARD, WHICH HAS BI-FOLD AND SLIDING DOORS WHICH OPEN UP COMPLETELY TO MAKE A SEAMLESS CONNECTION BETWEEN INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR SPACES 4 THE KENNEDY HOUSE HAS A FIVE-METRE-HIGH STAIR VOID WHICH DROPS SUNLIGHT DEEP INTO THE HOME



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moved to Sydney when Kerry and Lindsay accepted the role of design directors within the NSW Government Architect's Design Directorate. By this time, their children were almost adults and finding suitable accommodation wasn't easy. For a while they rented two large apartments adjacent to each other in an inner-city area of Sydney, so that children and adults could share time as well as have privacy and independence.

When Kerry and Lindsay were asked to collaborate with Bligh Voller Nield in the design of a housing project at Maroubra, it provided the ideal opportunity for them to tailor one of the apartments to their own special needs. It also enabled Lindsay to resume his regular early-morning surf that had been part of his Queensland past.

The Maroubra housing project comprises 20 apartments (two- and three-storey) and is located only 300 metres from the beach. The apartments have been designed specifically to respond to their coastal location. They have 'through' plans that assist in capturing cool sea breezes in the summer and northern winter sun. Generous balconies and courtyards, a variety of sun-shading devices, aluminium shutters and large roof overhangs create enjoyable and effective living spaces. A conscious decision was made to relate materials and colours to this coastal landscape and experience.

The passive solar design principles employed in the design and construction of this project have delivered high comfort levels not just for the Clare family, but for all of the occupants, and low energy usage. In terms of design philosophy, the Clares speak of an architecture that evolves from their concern for siting and orientation, respect for the essence and character of place, of comfort, sustainability and simplicity. →







5 THE INTERNAL LIVING SPACE EXTENDS SEAMLESSLY THROUGH TO EXTERIOR DECK CANTILEVERED OUT INTO THE TREES IN THE HOME OF LISA SAVILLE AND STEVEN ISAACS BY THE LANE COVE RIVER IN SYDNEY 6 THE SIDE VIEW OF BUILDING EXPRESSES THE CONSTRUCTION AND MATERIALS 7 A DUSK VIEW OF THE INTERIOR 8 THE DOUBLE-HEIGHT GLAZED NORTH WALL AND VOID IN THE EGAN STREET APARTMENT PROJECT IN NEWTOWN 9 THE LIVING SPACES OF THE EGAN STREET PROJECT IN SYDNEY'S NEWTOWN



Steve Kennedy, of Kennedy Associates, also had the challenge of designing for a large family. Steve and his partner Gael purchased a small weatherboard cottage opposite a local park in Annandale. At the time, Leichhardt Council had just released some new planning controls and Steve was determined to design a house that would meet the needs of his active family of six. He was also determined to demonstrate that it was possible to work within council controls. Neighbours either side were concerned about privacy and overshadowing and from the street, the house had to retain its heritage cottage look. Nevertheless, Steve wanted to create a marked contrast between the old house and the new.

While the original cottage is weatherboard, the new rear section is glass and steel. Steve focused not so much on providing a flexible open plan, but instead a sequence of open spaces that overlapped and flowed one into the other: from living area to eating/dining and out into the courtyard. A blockwork wall encloses the backyard and then flows into the house to create rooms. It is a 'wandering thread' that creates links, both philosophically and physically, between inside and out. The original house extended from east to west and it was important to turn the living areas to the north in order for the rooms to be sunny and bright. A large two-storey stairwell drops light right in the centre of the house while protecting solar access to neighbours.

As is common when designing for families, flexibility in use of spaces is paramount. The Kennedy house provides five bedrooms and a study, but

As is common when designing for families, flexibility in use of spaces is paramount. The Kennedy house provides five bedrooms and a study, but the rooms are designed to work equally well for other uses as family members come and go.

the rooms are designed to work equally well for other uses as family members come and go. Steve admits to being his own hardest critic and designing the house involved a lot of discussion with Gael and family in order to craft a design specifically to meet their needs. For example, Gael decided on a kitchen with no overhead cupboards as she found them too hard to reach. And in terms of completion, well, the kitchen was installed on December 24 2004, just in time for a 30-person Christmas dinner the following day. When asked if the house is now finished, Steve replied ... "Well, almost."

Lisa Saville of Brian Meyerson Architects and Steven Isaacs of Marchese Partners arrived in Sydney six years ago with plans for a family. They had been working as architects in South Africa and Hong Kong and decided to make

Sydney home. They were captivated by the city's delicate waterways and parklands and finally found a piece of land on the shores of Lane Cove River. The site's difficult topography and access had deterred other prospective purchasers but with their architectural design skills they understood the opportunities. The design for a single residence had already been approved by council and provided the general building envelopes for future development. The budget was tight so Lisa and Steven decided to create two houses within the given envelope.

This was the first home they had designed and built for themselves. As designers and parents, Lisa and Steven felt it was important to respond responsibly to the impact of construction on such an untouched →





natural setting. Their aim was to create a peaceful and healthy environment nestled amongst the trees where their young family could grow. The overall layout and design of the house needed to be practical and compact, yet flexible to accommodate their changing needs. The natural setting was an inspiration to carefully frame the views of the trees, as well as to explore the differing spatial relationships between internal living areas and the varying topography and greenery. Clean, white internal planes form a backdrop to nature.

They were also keen to demonstrate that it is possible to achieve beautiful design using ESD principles and sustainable, low-toxic and cost-effective materials. To ensure a healthy living environment for children to play and grow, all materials and finishes needed to be non-hazardous. Laminates were employed on cupboard doors, carcasses, glues and paints were chosen for low-toxic emissions, and a natural, food-grade oil was used to seal the floorboards. When I visited recently the house was relaxed but vibrant, with a two-year-old's colourful toys and tents enlivening the spaces. The lush, green bush views were framed and counterpoised against the clean white lines of the structure. All in all, an ideal setting for a growing family.

Several years ago, a group of five talented young students and graduates met while working together in the offices of Tonkin Zulaikha Greer. Most have now moved on to form their own architectural practices. They are Julie Mackenzie, Neil Mackenzie (Julie's brother), Heidi Pronk, Jason Veale and Kieran McInerney. Faced with the very real challenge most young adults confront today — that of finding affordable housing and not wanting to rent — the young architects explored all the alternatives. They decided to design and build some apartments for themselves as a collective, pooling skills and resources to gain access to the housing market.

After a two-year search and countless sketch designs, they found and

purchased a robust and characterful warehouse in Egan Street, Newtown. It offered a simple architectural form, utilitarian finishes, original timber trusses, colourful painted signs and artefacts of industrial archaeology. The original building was built in 1923 and had been used as a metal workshop, panel beater's and mechanic's workshop for 77 years. That history remains etched on the building façades.

The architects wanted to create three apartments for themselves and one shared commercial studio space fronting the street while retaining substantial evidence of the working history of the building. One of their greatest challenges was convincing the banks to fund the construction until the apartments could be strata titled. After much negotiation they succeeded. The design, layout and details of the apartments needed to be simple and common. Costs were strictly controlled. Materials were recycled on site, including bricks, original trusses and timbers. The new work was built by a friend at 'mate's rates' and all helped on site by cleaning bricks, sanding and sweeping.

The building presented an ideal opportunity for adaptive re-use, with the new studio and apartments housed within the walls of the former building. The roof has been raised by 600mm to create two storeys and walls removed locally to create north-east-facing courtyards and void spaces. This allows maximum penetration of sunlight without compromising the privacy or solar access of neighbouring properties.

Design for energy efficiency also underpins the project with the incorporation of solar heating, appropriate sunshading and stack ventilation. In realising this project the architects have not only demonstrated how to create a rich urban environment through the re-use of an industrial heritage building, but they have delivered a model of affordable housing. The apartments and the studio are now home to Julie, Neil, Heidi and Jason ... well done! —CHD—