

TASTE

Occupying most of its inner-city site, this new house in Richmond boasts generous, light-filled spaces that stretch right to the boundaries.

SPACE INVADER





PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT: The limestone-topped island bench in the kitchen becomes a convivial spot for friends to gather while the meal is being prepared. **RIGHT:** A steel grille suspended over a fish pond at the front door forms part of an unusual and engaging arrival sequence. **THESE PAGES, OPPOSITE TOP:** Conceived as several cubic forms, the house's facade combines timber, rendered walls and honed bluestone. **OPPOSITE, BELOW:** On the top floor, the party room affords spectacular views of the surrounds, enhanced by the rooftop terrace and barbeque area.

ALTHOUGH A 170-SQUARE-METRE site is quite small by some suburban standards, in inner-city Melbourne it is comparatively generous. And this house makes the most of the situation by occupying about 80 percent of the site. "Similar sites often accommodate two townhouses," says architect Jane McDougall, a director of Alsocan Architecture. "We could have done the same, but my client wanted a large house that he could use as a home and office."

Like its neighbours, the 350-square-metre three-storey house is built to the footpath. However, rather than emulate the somewhat dated ten-year-old period-style townhouses next door, this dwelling presents a contemporary facade to the street. Conceived as several cubic forms in a variety of materials including timber, rendered walls and honed bluestone, the building invigorates the streetscape. "I didn't want a blank wall to the street, I wanted a house with presence, as well as one with a wide entrance," says owner-builder Garth Euvrard. "And I didn't want to follow the Victorian typology, with the long central corridor that's often poorly lit," he adds.

Besides providing Garth with a generously proportioned entrance and facade, the architects also created an impressive sense of arrival – a steel grille suspended over a fish pond leads to the front door, with water flowing below the front entrance to form a feature pond inside. Just as memorable is the five-metre-high ceiling in the main corridor, creating a two-storey void. Within this void, the rear elevation takes in the double-height wall of a split-face bluestone fireplace, while the front elevation frames the city skyline. "One of the most crucial aspects of the design was bringing light into the core of the house. It wasn't easy, given how close the neighbours are," says Jane.

The ground floor houses the main kitchen, living and dining areas, together with sheltered off-street parking for two vehicles. The dining area presents an expansive picture window to the street, with privacy provided by a mesh blind. "Originally I was keen to have almost a shopfront to the street. But as you can see, it's used as a dining room, with a study on the side," says Euvrard, indicating the built-in spotted gum desk along one wall. The opposite wall is bluestone. Instead of using mortar, each brick is separated by an aluminium T-section. "It avoids the problem of cracking mortar. It's also a more contemporary way of using bluestone," he explains.

The kitchen has also been approached in a contemporary way. A large island bench, measuring 2.4 metres by 2.4 metres, dominates the space. Comprising a limestone benchtop, hotplates and sink, the bench is framed by spotted-gum-veneer cupboards on all four sides. A built-in central light in the island bench illuminates objects such as teapots. "The design was almost conceived as a non-kitchen. Friends come over

and simply gather around the bench and chat while a meal is being prepared. And when it's not being used, it serves to define the kitchen space," says Jane.

To define the open-plan living areas on the ground floor, Jane modulated the ceiling heights and used materials such as spotted gum. The timber, for example, appears as a bulkhead in the lounge area and continues to form the edge of the balustrade of the main bedroom on the first floor. "I didn't want the house to feel cavernous. Your eye is immediately drawn to a further point," says the architect.

As the house occupies almost the entire site, there was insufficient space to create usable courtyards. Instead, small pockets of leftover outdoor space were filled with water and transformed into ponds. "Garth trained as a plumber, so he feels quite comfortable being surrounded by so much water," says Jane. The architect also found sufficient space for a covered outdoor deck and splash pool leading from the lounge. The surrounding water enhances the Venturi effect that's created when the low-level windows are opened in the living room. "The cool air is drawn up to the higher levels when the upstairs windows and doors are left open," Jane explains.

The staircase to the upper levels features bluestone treads, creating a continuity in the materials used throughout the house. On the first floor are the main bedroom and ensuite, two additional bedrooms and a second bathroom (the first, a powder room, is cleverly tucked away off the dining area). While the two additional bedrooms are spacious, the main is lavish by comparison. Featuring an open bathroom and walk-in dressing area, the bedroom is filled with northern light from frosted glass walls and highlight windows. "We angled the roof to allow light to enter into the main bedroom through the void," says Jane.

While views to the city can be seen from most vantage points on the first floor, the full and uninterrupted vista is best appreciated from the second floor. This level, referred to as the party room, includes a kitchenette and limestone bench that wraps around the space. Complete with an outdoor deck and barbeque, it becomes the spot for entertaining friends and family, especially in summer. "You get to see all the landmark buildings in Richmond," says Jane, pointing out the Dimmey's (department store) tower and the Punt Road silos.

By means of courtyards and thoughtfully placed windows this house has been allowed to breathe. For those contemplating building on a landlocked site this project suggests some good strategies – and shows how a considered approach might achieve a balance between embracing light and views on the one hand, and providing inner-city privacy and security on the other. **STEPHEN CRAFTI**





THESE PAGES, ABOVE: Low-lying windows in the living room draw breezes into the house during summer, while a split-face bluestone fireplace ensures comfort in the cooler months. OPPOSITE: Recurring materials – bluestone and spotted gum – give a sense of continuity between the dwelling's levels.



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PRACTICE PROFILE
The practice specializes in contemporary residential design, including individual houses, extensions and developments.

PROJECT TEAM
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CONSULTANTS
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Interiors alsoCAN architecture
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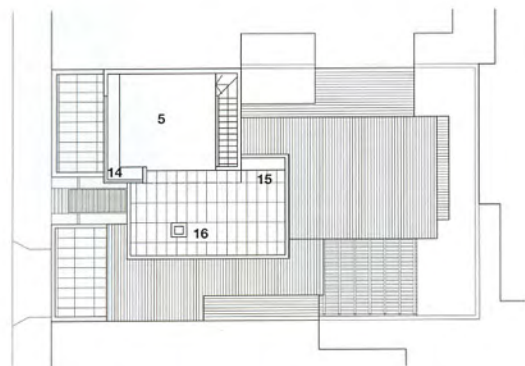
PRODUCTS
Roofing BHP Zincalume Klip-Lok
External walls Port Fairy bluestone; spotted gum shiplap cladding; anodized aluminium edging; Watty 'Winter Sky' render
Internal walls Port Fairy bluestone; spotted gum; Watty 'Winter Sky' render; plasterboard
Windows Anodized aluminium; galvanized steel
Doors Spotted gum veneer, whitewashed with two-pack polyurethane; Daico Architectural Series handles
Flooring Polished concrete; spotted gum 1 & g; Port Fairy bluestone stair treads
Lighting Beacon Lighting brushed al downlights and 'Barbados' square pendants
Kitchen Luna limestone benchtop, rangehood shaft and kick rail; spotted gum veneer cupboards and bulkhead; Asko appliances; Reece 'Teknobill' flick mixer
Bathroom Luna limestone benchtops; spotted gum veneer; Philippe Starck 3 bath; Caroma 'Liano' tapware and basins; Caroma 'Leda' toilet suite
Heating Hunt Heating hydronic with Blasa panels; Hitachi split system ac
External elements Spotted gum decking, pergola and entry canopy; ss custom-made waterfall water spouts, concrete ponds and pool by Neil Hocking; Eco Concepts stacked stone walls
Other Glass and tension wire shelving

TIME SCHEDULE
Design, documentation 13 months
Construction 12 months

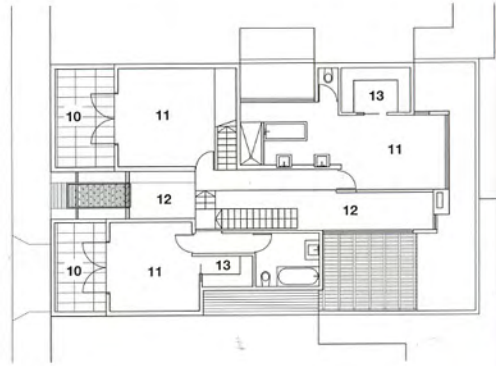
SITE SIZE
172 m²

PROJECT COST
\$700,000

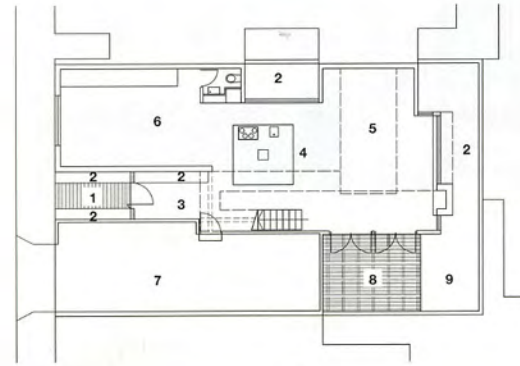
PHOTOGRAPHY
Jules Tahan @ Urban Images



Second floor



First floor



Ground floor



- 1 Walkway
- 2 Pond
- 3 Entry
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Living
- 6 Dining
- 7 Garage
- 8 Deck
- 9 Plunge pool
- 10 Balcony
- 11 Bedroom
- 12 Void
- 13 Walk-in robe
- 14 Bar
- 15 Barbeque
- 16 Roof terrace