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The shape of roofs to come

Stephen Crafti

The Australian Financial Review | 10 Nov 2006 | Page: 25 | Life & Leisure

Modern roof designs can complement their surroundings and enhance the space we live in, writes Stephen Crafti.

A pitched tiled roof is typical of most houses, but occasionally you will see skillion-shaped or even curved roofs. Sometimes a specific site influences the shape of a roof. Alternatively, it's conceived as a way of creating unusual spaces within a house.

Alex Popov & Associates designed an unusual roof for a house at Northbridge, on Sydney's north shore. Overlooking Middle Cove, the harbourside house features four vault-shapes made of Colorbond across its roofline.

"We were presented with quite an unusual site. It's relatively wide for a harbour site (about 30 metres). Normally you'd find quite long steep blocks that tumble down to the water's edge," says architect Brian Bass, an associate with the practice.

As the Northbridge site is quite gentle, the architects saw the new house as sitting on a plateau. The kitchen and living areas, together with the main bedroom and ensuite, are all on one level, with the children's wing below.

"We wanted to keep the roofline fairly low, so neighbours could also benefit from the water views," says Bass, who located services and structural components between each six-metre-wide vault.

The roof vaults also define the open-plan living spaces. One vaulted ceiling extends over the kitchen and dining area. A separate vault encompasses the living area and continues out to form a protective lip over the terrace and swimming pool.

And, although the heights of the vaulted ceilings do not vary throughout the ground level, the volumes of the spaces change with floor levels. The entry lobby, for example, is at a slightly higher level than the main living room.

"It's like stepping down and finding shade under a tree canopy," says Bass, who included highlight windows at the end of every vault for filtered light.

To accentuate the curved ceilings at night, there is track lighting across the living areas.

Architect Dale Jones-Evans designed a striking roof for the addition to an The shape of the roof was partially

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driven to eliminate the view of eight-storey apartments next door. But the design was also chosen to protect the living and outdoor areas from harsher sunlight.

Italianate-Victorian home in Bronte, Sydney.

The copper roof appears like origami, folding to catch the light. Jones-Evans carefully tracked the path of the sun across the site.

"The shape of the roof was partially driven to eliminate the view of eight-storey apartments next door. But the design was also chosen to protect the living and outdoor areas from harsher sunlight," he says. The roof almost touches the ground on the west side, extending two metres below the roofline. "It was designed as a shield," says Jones-Evans.

The effect of the folded roof is equally dramatic from the kitchen and living areas. It folds to its lowest point over the kitchen and soars above the living areas, framed by floor-to-ceiling glass Your eye is drawn towards the sky. The ceiling creates a softer light. There aren't any shadows in the corners of the bedroom.

windows/doors. For the owners, creating transparency in the home was also important. With small children and a pool, there needed to be rigorous surveillance.

Alsocan Architects used an alternative shape for the pitched roof of a townhouse in Richmond, Melbourne, which was built behind a worker's cottage.

The architects renovated the cottage that backed onto a laneway and built a new three-storey home in the backyard that was able to have its own street frontage.

On the ground floor of the Richmond home are a carport, two bedrooms and a bathroom. The middle level is taken up with the kitchen and living areas. And on the top level is the main bedroom and bathroom with curved ceiling. "The shape of the roof (made of Zincalume custom orb) was partially determined by council height restrictions. But we also didn't want to overshadow neighbouring properties," says architect Jane McDougall, a director of the practice.

Although the ceiling heights in the bedroom are relatively low, starting at 2.4 metres, Alsocan were keen to amplify the volume with a curved ceiling.

As McDougall says: "Your eye is drawn towards the sky. The ceiling creates a softer light. There aren't any shadows in the corners of the bedroom".

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Deck the halls, deck the house

Stephen Crafti

The Australian Financial Review | 26 Oct 2007 | Page: 25 | Life & Leisure

There's something quintessentially Australian about the outdoor deck. Casual and robust, there's a lack of pretension. Functioning as an outdoor room, the deck offers either a quiet outdoor space or an ideal place for entertaining.

"You don't need a large backyard for entertaining. A deck off a main living space can be as pleasurable," says architect Jane McDougall, a director of Alsocan Architecture.

Alsocan Architecture included two decks in a three-storey house in Richmond, Melbourne. Located on a compact site, there was just sufficient room for a deck and plunge pool in the back garden. The timber deck, measuring about three by four metres, is connected to the main kitchen and living area via floor-to-ceiling glass doors. With a three-storey building to the north, the south-facing deck is a welcome private outdoor space.

Featuring spotted gum flooring and a timber pergola, it provides a quiet place for reading or relaxing by the pool.
One of the most used spaces in the Richmond townhouse is the roof deck, on the third level. Leading from a bar/study, this deck provides views of the city skyline, with spotted gum floor and external wall, which acts as a windbreak as well as creating privacy. "It's worth the climb up the stairs," says McDougall, pointing out the dramatic vista.

Alsocan regularly incorporates timber decks in designs. "Unlike tiles, timber provides a sense of warmth. It's wonderful to walk on in bare feet," says McDougall, hailing the versatility of a deck. "It's a great way of creating outdoor spaces, particularly on steep sites."

Architect Ian Perkins also included timber decks in his own home, at Armadale, Melbourne. He extended the timber Victorian home by adding an open-plan kitchen, living and dining area.

A main bedroom and ensuite also form part of this wing. Large glass sliding doors connect both the living areas and main bedroom to a 17-metre-long deck. Even though Perkins used different types of timber, there's a sense of continuity.

"The living areas feel considerably larger. They don't appear to stop at the doors," Perkins says.

Architect Stephen Guthrie, co-director of Bark Design, regularly includes timber decks in his designs.

Ideal for the Queensland climate, these decks are used almost year-round.

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Bark Design designed a large deck for a house in Hervey Bay, a three-hour drive north of Noosa.

Made of steel and timber, the long single-storey house is designed in the shape of a crucifix. On one side of the "cross" are the kitchen and living areas. On the other side is a study. Between the two areas is a covered timber deck with a polycarbonate roof.

"It can get fairly windy here, so I wanted to include a protected outdoor deck," says Guthrie, who linked the deck to an internal courtyard.

Spotted gum was used for the deck as well as for the floors in the house.

"You're not conscious of walking from indoors to outdoors," says Guthrie, who framed the deck with stackable glass doors. While the deck is protected from the wind, light filters from above via a translucent roof.
"You get all the refracted light in summer as well as the deep moody shadows in winter," says Guthrie. "And you enjoy the view over Hervey Bay at all times of the year."

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