

BEAUMARIS
HOUSE

BY CLARE
COUSINS
ARCHITECTS



Continuing the legacy of mid-century architects, whose designs have shaped the Melbourne suburb of Beaumaris, this monolithic yet sensitive house embodies the modernist spirit.

Words by Michael Macleod
Photography by Sharyn Cairns

The beachside suburb of Beaumaris has long been a significant place in the story of Melbourne architecture. The postwar expansion of suburban living in this area resulted in innovative designs by some of Australia’s most recognized modernist architects. The recent publication *Beaumaris Modern* (Melbourne Books, 2018) recalls that visitors to the 1956 Summer Olympics were told, in a guide written by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, that “Beaumaris has the greatest concentration of interesting houses in the metropolitan area.” In his 1960 book *The Australian Ugliness*, Robin Boyd characterized the typical Australian suburb as a treeless and generic bastion of artificial neatness. In contrast, he recognized Beaumaris as one of the few areas in which “gum trees prosper among the houses and a countrified air is not discouraged.”

Today, local activist groups work to promote and preserve this atmosphere, focusing on mid-century architecture in particular, making the suburb an exciting but challenging setting for the design of a large new family house. In Beaumaris House, Clare Cousins Architects (CCA) has demonstrated a nuanced understanding of this context: the house is respectful of the place but does not fetishize the aesthetics of the mid-century, instead drawing on the optimistic principles that underpinned the modernist quest for better living.

The heavily modified existing house was removed to leave an empty corner site overlooking a dirt road that winds through tea-tree to the beach. It still feels like the very edge of the city, although today Melbourne’s newer suburbs sprawl far beyond here. The site planning for the new home is clear and rational: the sheer two-storey mass has been pushed toward the southern

01 The sheer facade provides privacy while allowing glimpses of activity to activate the street.

Beaumaris House is built on the land of the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation	 Melbourne, Vic	 New house	 6 Family	 5	 3 + 1 powder room	 M² Site Floor721 m²478 m²	 Design 1 y Build 1 y 4 m
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street boundary in order to create a private garden to the north. Considerable effort has gone into making a gesture this determinedly simple, including a commitment to embed and conceal the pragmatics of carparking and services. The brick walls are then strategically eroded to reveal exaggerated depth to thresholds and openings that provide solar protection to the north and privacy from the street to the south.

Privacy from the public realm enables complete relaxation for the home’s residents. However, CCA director Clare Cousins recognizes that the visible occupation of houses is an essential component of neighbourhoods and so carefully protected moments, such as a crow’s nest balcony and a walled courtyard, permit light and activity to spill outside.

The entry is evidence of these considerations. The deep-set timber recess on the street facade is warm and inviting yet prevents views to the interior. A prominent coloured door to the left opens into the main living room while a secondary entry is hidden in the timber panelling to the right, allowing the family direct access to the kitchen at the heart of the house. A crisp white grille slides out of a concealed pocket to secure the entire recess, retaining visibility but also allowing both doors to be left open.

The need for privacy within a home is also understood and the design provides the family of six with places in which to gather as well as spaces for repose. The plan is intentionally segmented and distinct spaces are carved from the monolithic form, creating different moods and encouraging use at different times of the day. Upstairs, the sunlit circulation takes a privileged northerly position, with large sliding doors encouraging the children to spill out of bedrooms and into this shared space. An unexpected bridge distances the parents’ suite from the hubbub. The restrained material palette of bagged brickwork walls, travertine flooring and blackbutt timber unifies the disparate rooms, always allowing the garden to take centre stage.

A connection to landscape was a priority and a long working relationship between CCA and Eckersley Garden Architecture has been successfully continued in this project. The lounge, evocatively named the “boat room,” takes full advantage of this connection, breaking free of the rational plan to become a playfully rounded promontory in the garden. A built-in leather lounge sweeps around the perimeter of the room, a technique CCA has tested and refined in many projects. In this case it allows one to sit right beside the glazing and feel fully immersed in the planting, and enables views east and west along the length of the garden while avoiding the looming neighbour to the north.

Beaumaris House represents a consistent approach to practice for Clare Cousins Architects. The studio’s residential work is calm and considered, eschewing a need for shock or attention for a thorough investigation into the essentials of domestic life. Each project tests and refines these critical ingredients, always adjusting them to suit the nuances of a particular client. This house is a study in balancing the individual need for privacy with the responsibilities of a wider contribution to the neighbourhood. The project respectfully builds on the legacy of local modernist forebears to create a generous Australian home that is attuned to light, landscape, the life of its occupants and the specifics of its place. ©

Products
Roofing: Lysaght Trimdek cladding in Zinalume steel
Walls: Recycled bricks in bagged finish; Mortlock Trendplank blackbutt cladding
Windows: AWS Architectural Window Systems thermally broken aluminium windows powdercoated in Dulux ‘Surfmist’; blackbutt timber windows; Alucobond window reveals
Doors: Lockwood Ovation Series door hardware
Flooring: Tait Flooring solid blackbutt timber floors; RMS Natural Stone Bianco Navona Vein Cut travertine tiles
Lighting: Rakumba Highline pendant by Archier; Michael Anastassiades Ball Light pendant; Anna Charlesworth brass wall sconce; Lambert and Fils Waldorf Triple light; Flos Mini Glo-Ball from Euroluce; Gubi Cobra wall lamp
Kitchen: Corian solid surface in ‘Glacier White’; G-Lux stone; Laminex laminate in ‘Parchment’; blackbutt battens and timber veneer; Astra Walker Icon sink mixer in ‘Polished Chrome’
Bathroom: Agape Ottocento freestanding bath; Brodware Yokato wall set in ‘Durobrite Chrome’; Hydrotherm Milan heated towel rail in ‘Satin White’; Inax glazed wall tiles from Artedomus
Heating and cooling: Earthwool insulation; Cheminees Philippe Radiante fireplace from Wignells; in-slab hydronic heating; electric under-tile heating; ducted reverse-cycle airconditioning
External elements: Laguna Pools swimming pool; Eco Outdoor Split Stone paving
Other: Grazia and Co Ivy coffee table by Clare Cousins, Dita stools and custom built-in sofa; Loom Rugs rug; Gubi Paper table, and Massproductions Tio chairs and table from In Good Company



02



03

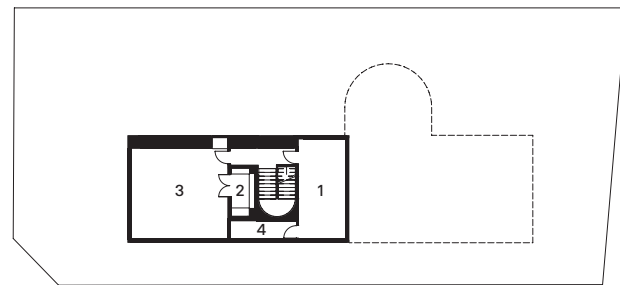


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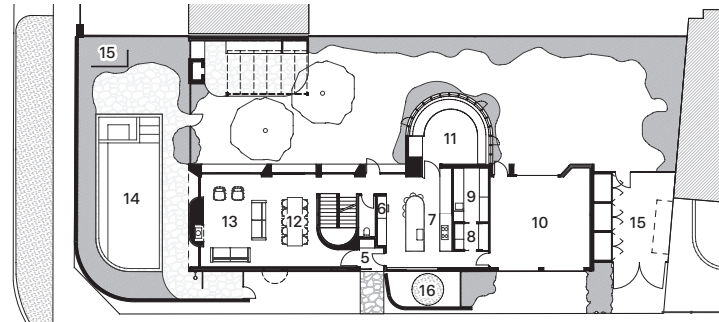


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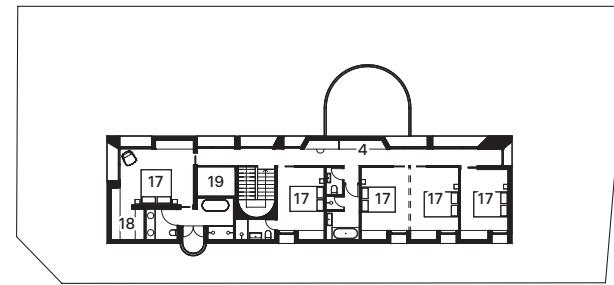
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|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1 Gym | 8 Pantry | 15 Services |
| 2 Cellar | 9 Laundry | 16 Courtyard |
| 3 Theatre | 10 Garage | 17 Bedroom |
| 4 Store | 11 Lounge | 18 Walk-in robe |
| 5 Entry | 12 Dining | 19 Void |
| 6 Study | 13 Living | |
| 7 Kitchen | 14 Pool | |



Basement 1:500



Ground floor 1:500



First floor 1:500

02 A sliding grille can be used to secure the entrance while the front door remains open.

03 The interior is carefully segmented to provide family members with places for personal privacy.

04 The distinct spaces are unified by a material palette of bagged brick walls, travertine flooring and blackbutt timber.

05 This palette also references the natural stratification of the surrounding coastal landscape.



06 The building's solid mass is eroded at points appropriate to the external and internal environments.

07 The lounge breaks free from the rational plan by protruding into the garden.

08 Referred to as the "boat room," the lounge represents an Australian take on the British garden conservatory.



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