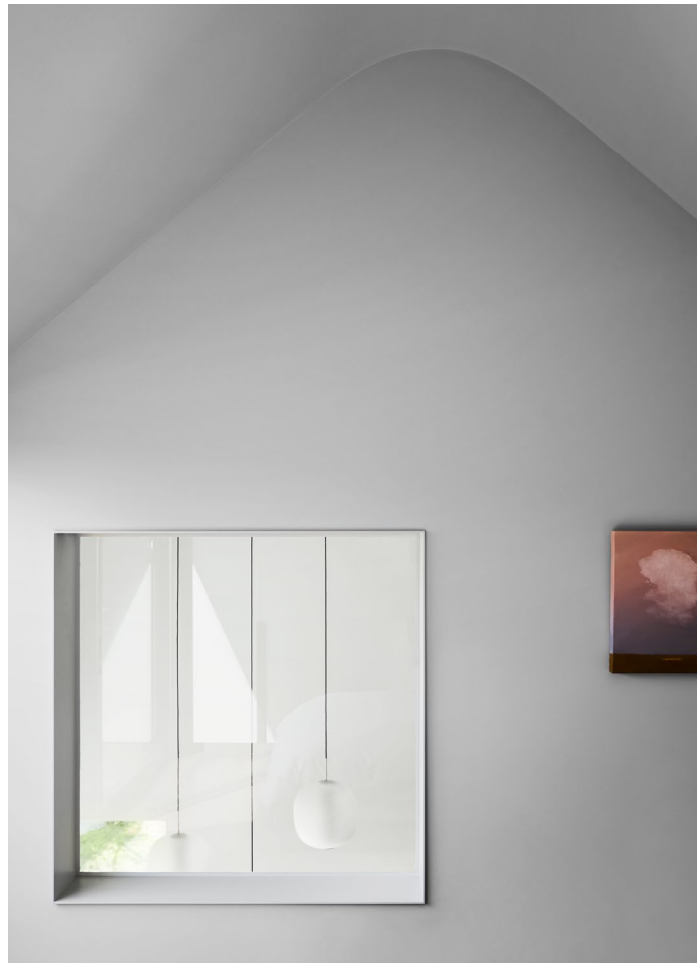


CAMBERWELL HOUSE

CLARE COUSINS ARCHITECTS



Words by Bronwyn Marshall • Photography by Sharyn Cairns

Architecture and Interior Design by Clare Cousins Architects • Build by ProvanBuilt

Landscape by Eckersley Garden Architecture



A respectful, agile insertion within an established and historically rich setting, Camberwell House is carefully crafted for its inhabitants – a mother and daughter – in response to how they engage with one another and the site. Clare Cousins Architects takes a pragmatic yet poetic approach in balancing old and new to create a home that is immersed within both its immediate landscaped setting and the broader heritage context.

Located in Melbourne’s east, and surrounded by significant architectural heritage gems, Camberwell House offers itself as a respectful and elemental addition to its milieu. Replacing an existing house on the site, the new acts as a modern and considered interpretation of the surrounding context. Referencing the silhouettes of pitched gable roof forms, the home sits comfortably and congenially in its context, and through a simplifying of form and its primary components, the use of brickwork is as much a sculptural expression as it is a statement of craft.

As a home for a woman and her elderly mother, Camberwell House is measured and deliberate in response to its unconventional brief for an ageing-in-place residence. Open and closed elements that create moments of connection and withdrawal reference a Chinese sensibility for balance, enabling the building to expand and contract in a number of ways. Clare Cousins, Director of Clare Cousins Architects, explains that “the home is imagined in a way that allows the upper level to be sectioned off for when the daughter is travelling, allowing the mother to occupy the lower level as a single

level residence, engaging with the various outdoor rooms. The integration of cavity sliders allows this separation to be deliberate, while glazed openings allow for an intentional visual connectedness between the levels, sharing light from the upper level as it enters the home.”

Working within such a strong heritage context, Clare Cousins Architects’ approach was one of observing and responding. “Sitting on an arterial road, as a starting point we needed to ensure the home fit within its context, was comfortable, and also mediated the need for sound attenuation,” Clare says. “The focus was on replacing a house that had passed its functional life and was quite set back on the allotment.” Equal consideration of how the home was read from the street and also how it felt internally was key. Externally, the tapering roof form is sympathetic to the neighbours and sited to maximise a north-facing garden. Similarly, a layered approach ensures the home does not impose or stand too bold against the adjacent houses and also creates a sense of intimacy within the interior.





Camberwell House is a realisation of considered and deliberate design.





The second floor visually engages with the space below, playing with the notions of connectedness and operation.



While many new builds and extensions focus primarily on increasing the footprint of the dwelling on the site, there is a more intuitive approach at play here, with emphasis not only on the architecture but on the landscape design by Eckersley Garden Architecture. Clare Cousins Architects believes that landscape has an integral role in placemaking and, consequently, how the home engages with its natural elements. “Landscape is an important part of our design process, where we see it as being as important as the interior experience,” Clare reflects. “A large part of the year in Melbourne has cooler temperatures, therefore, we create spaces where the garden can be enjoyed from the comfort of the interior.” Through a controlled use of glass and diversifying a sequence of garden spaces that one moves through, screens conceal and reveal to create a journey through both built form and landscape. “It was important as you move through the house interior [that] there are regular vistas to various garden rooms, both intimate and large,” she describes.

Connection underpins the principles of Camberwell House – both in the sense of its owners’

relationship and of how the site participates in a broader conversation of urban density and preservation. “We wanted to explore how the house would engage with the site. Rather than fence off the front garden to retreat from the road, the front garden has been designed to be enjoyed by the occupants and the broader community,” Clare explains. Meanwhile, brick was an appropriate choice, not only as an echo of the heritage materiality of the area but also for its robustness, texture, and inherent qualities. “We drew on more traditional building materials through a restrained approach. The colour variation and texture of the bricks change through the day as light and shadow hits the building,” she says.

Navigating its site by a series of connecting and elemental gestures, the home’s relationship to its garden and wider context is a key part of the lived experience for its inhabitants. Conceived as a complementary addition to the neighbourhood that simultaneously expresses its own unique identity, Camberwell House does all that is asked of it with both confidence and restraint.