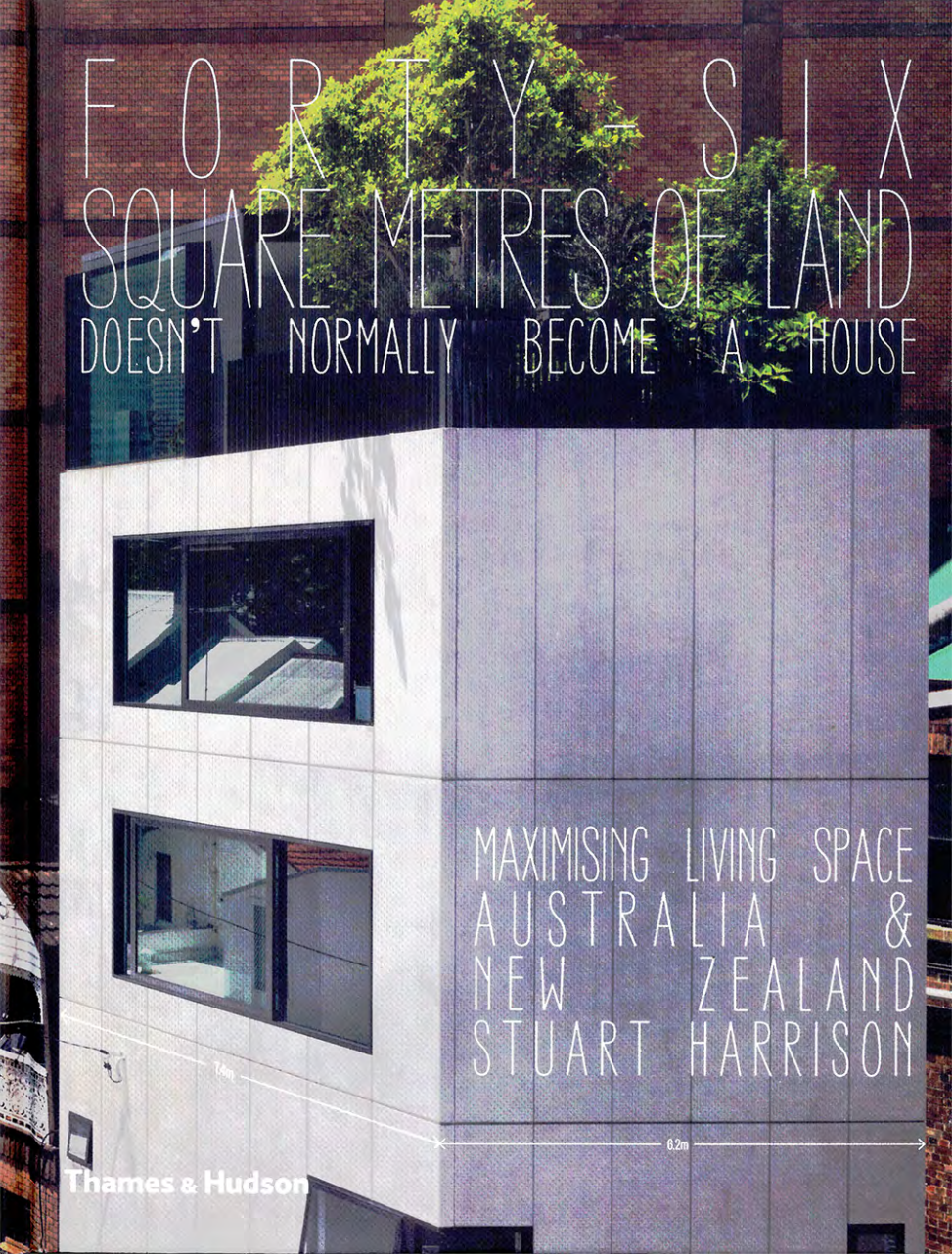
FORTY-SIX SQUARE METRES OF LAND DOESN'T NORMALLY BECOME A HOUSE



MAXIMISING LIVING SPACE AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

STUART HARRISON

Thames & Hudson

Balmoral House, Kieron Gait

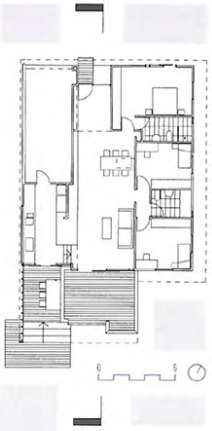
Photos: Scott Burrows

BALMORAL IS A SLEEPY INNER SUBURB OF BRISBANE, OLD ENOUGH TO BE RELAXED,

...but not so old as to be overly precious. It is about casualness, in a time before the fences went up and we became obsessed with security and strong definitions of boundaries. Sites are being wiped clean for far bigger houses that fill their sites, but don't house more people—no increase in density, but a decrease in amenity. The open quality of this suburb is lost, and the city is no better for it. This project shows a different path.

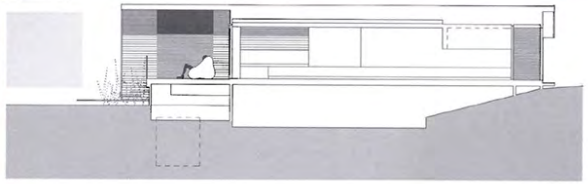
The streets in Balmoral rise and fall with the land, opening views up across the city. In this project, what hasn't been done is as important as what has—smart moves and a compact scale have remade a house but maintained and radically improved its outdoor space. The key move is the retention, rather than demolition, of the existing house. It has, however, been substantially reworked to create a more efficient use of the existing envelope, a weatherboard cottage that dates from not long after the Second World War. The shallow-pitched gable has been embraced, renewed and extended into the rear garden. Half of the gable juts out, transformed in unpainted timber to produce a skillion-roofed pergola that is at the heart of the concept of the house—to embrace the outside as part of it. This gesture is supported on an oversized ridge beam, which is poised on a thin steel post and cantilevered outwards.

The timber extends not only out but also in, as the connecting element between inside and outside. The silver ash boards are highly directional, running along the length of the house and again suggesting a link between interior and exterior. The main soffit, the underside of the canopy, angles down to become a fence near the western boundary. This angled plane of timber shades the first outdoor deck from harsh western sun and screens it from the elevated neighbouring house. The use of gaps and the variation in the width of timber boards subtly animate the screen, suggesting something beyond.



"LEVELS ARE TREATED PLAYFULLY AND THE EXAGGERATION OF EDGES INVITES ENGAGEMENT ON A MORE INTIMATE LEVEL. STEPS BECOME SEATS, BALUSTRADES BECOME TABLES."—KIERON GAIT

There are three deck areas on different levels, forming a giant staircase of timber that deals with the change of level across the site and connects the garden and the house. The lower deck is more exposed, providing an area to sit in winter when the sunlight is more welcome. The three bedrooms and living space are at a higher level than the kitchen areas, in a gesture that continues the 'giant steps' concept from outside. This causes the two decks immediately outside of these areas to also be at different levels, but close enough for the deck outside the kitchen to form a seat. Similarly, inside the kitchen bench extends to become a lower living space bench for books, television and the clutter of the modern family house.



Site area — 548m²

Dwellings on block — 1

Average dwelling area — 117m²

Residents — 3

Area per person — 39m²