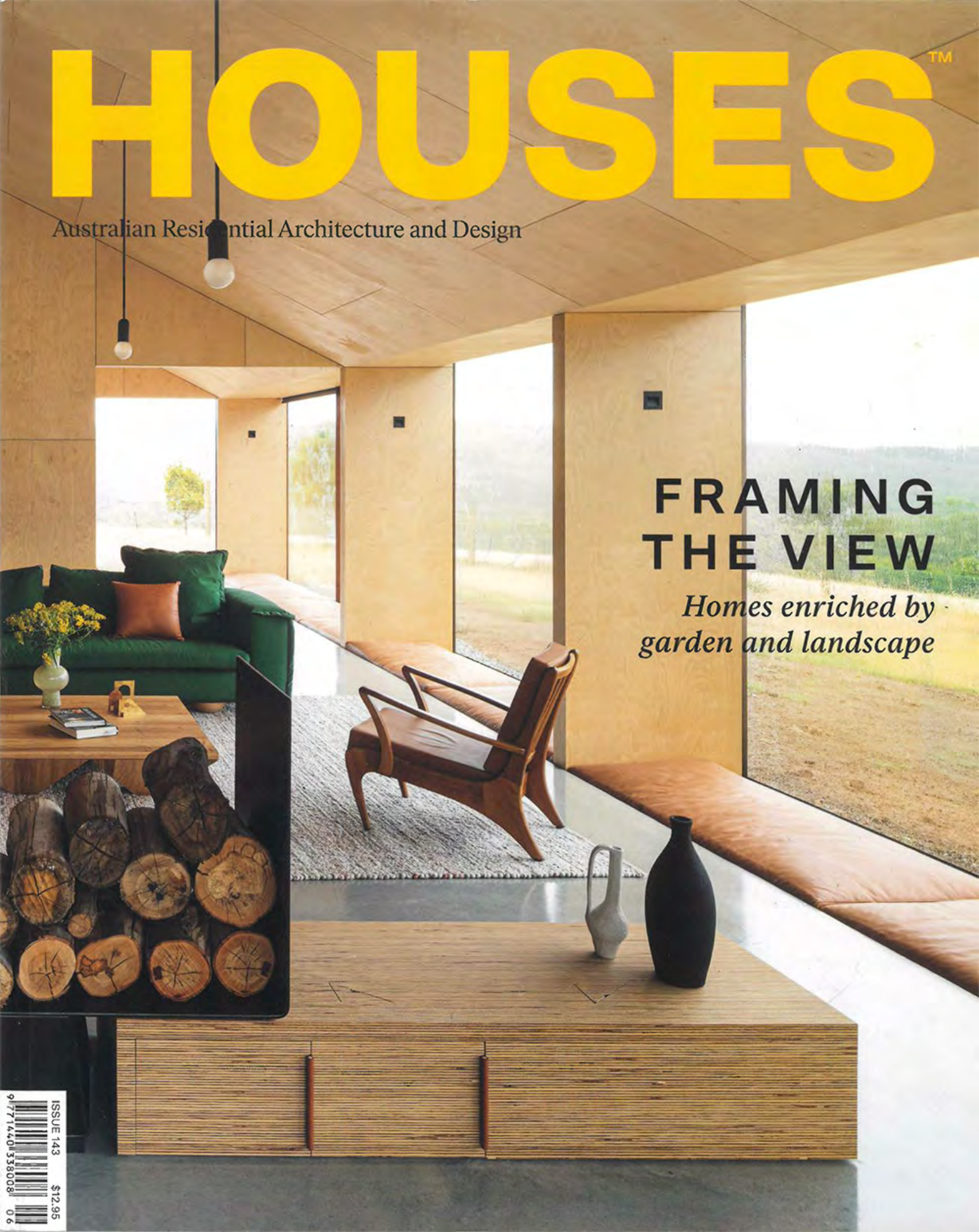
HOUSES™

Australian Residential Architecture and Design



FRAMING THE VIEW

Homes enriched by garden and landscape

ISSUE 143 $12.95
9 771440 338008 06

01

ASHGROVE HILLSIDE HOUSE

BY KIERON GAIT ARCHITECTS

Capitalizing on an elevated site with enviable prospect, this cleverly planned addition to a Brisbane home culminates in a surprising and spatially rich treetop eyrie.

Words by Shoona Thomson
Photography by Christopher Frederick Jones

In Ashgrove in Brisbane's inner west, Kieron Gait Architects (KGA) has achieved a genuinely surprising transformation of an existing house that occupies an arrestingly unusual site. Nestled into the southern base of Taylor Range, it's part of a unique subdivision created in the early 1990s on a hillside initially intended as a quarry. With sites organically arrayed off a vertiginous easement, negotiation of terrain and outlook is idiosyncratic. In the absence of regular boundary geometries, houses splay and jostle as any sense of typical suburban order gives way to the dominance of the topography.

Since taking up residence in 2013, homeowners Arne and Sandra had not altered their home significantly. Their brief to KGA was to create a more flexible space for them and their three children, while also making room for many fine furniture and lighting pieces that Arne had inherited from his father, much of which had been passed down through generations. They also needed guest accommodation for when Arne's family visits from Denmark.

After KGA's intervention, the original house remains largely intact, yet its experience is hugely improved. "In terms of the outcome, you can still see the old house. Kieron hasn't tried to hide it. We've just worked out how to use it more effectively and made it better," says Arne. Sandra adds, "From a sustainability perspective, we didn't want to demolish. We wanted to use as much as we could and retain the embodied carbon. So, we didn't demolish the walls – we kept them, and Kieron made them a feature. Even the roof beams removed to construct the new level were reused for stairs and internal joinery."

Kieron describes dealing with the existing layout as "a bit of a head spin." Arne and Sandra's irregular block falls about ten metres. The site is wider at the northern high point and narrower at the bottom. To fit the site boundaries, the original house had been organized in an L-shape, which offered good cross-ventilation and access to natural light and views, but which created a plan that was full of twists and turns over three half levels. "We'd never done a project like it," says Kieron. "We had to draw it out as we went along, and we really needed the 3D model to solve the brief." In the end, the key to finding more space was to build up one more level on the western side, with the design team seeing the opportunity for spatial interest that lay in the established geometry.

On the ground floor, the old main bedroom has been reworked to create a multipurpose family area, which is complemented by an off-form concrete terrace with an elevated native garden, inserted above the sloping driveway. "While it was a bold move to set this concrete terrace up here," notes Kieron, "it gives the house a setting it didn't have before." The terrace offers a direct and intimate landscape experience not available anywhere else in the dwelling. Embracing the glazed corner of the family room, the garden terrace also provides a gentle buffer against the western sun while amplifying the connection to broader nature. As a result, the space feels almost pavilion-like as it relishes the incredible views to Mt Coot-Tha and the D'Aguilar Range.

Perched above this room is a new level for Arne and Sandra, comprising a bedroom, bathroom and study. This new level is accessed by climbing up through the house, past the original study, now refashioned into a reading corner. The couple's space is a breathtaking private realm that opens onto a delicate deck of mesh grating, which gently shades the terrace below. Space flows easily as functions are subtly differentiated beneath the new roofline, which rakes up to the north, inviting in natural light and drawing through breezes. This eyrie also offers three distinctive corner experiences: the intimate prospect of a deep, south-facing window seat, lined with oak; a private study with stunning views to the west and south up the range; and, accessed by a hidden stairway, a shower "turret" with a view to the east and glimpses of the city skyline and the nightly delight of the rising moon.

Kieron says that his practice aims to "make places that feel inevitable, that belong." Achieving that congruence in this house, while simultaneously conserving most of the existing fabric, involved complementing and counter-pointing the home's complex "grain." Neighbours remark that the house seems less intrusive, despite being one level higher than before, thanks to the recessive quality of the charred timber cladding. "We didn't want the house to be a 'one-liner'," concludes Kieron. Instead, with so many places to enjoy different aspects of the distinctive setting, the home is now enriched with possibilities. ⊖

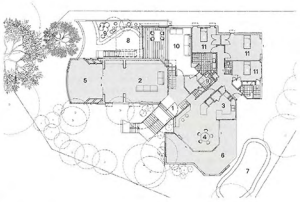
Products
Roofing: Lysaght Trimdek in 'Surfmist'
External walls: Eco Timber charred shiplap in crackled finish with Cutek Black Ash coating; board-formed concrete
Internal walls: Plasterboard in Dulux 'Whisper White'; oak veneer panels
Windows and doors: Finlayson's timber windows in Dulux 'Whisper White'
Flooring: Blackbutt timber flooring
Lighting: Mega Bulb SR2 by Sofie Refer from &tradition; Louis Poulsen PH 4 and PH 5 pendants
Bathroom: Fibonacci Stone Flannel Flower tiles; Alape Unisono basins in white; Brodware City Stik tapware and showerhead in 'Durobrite Chrome'; Madinoz bathroom accessories in stainless steel
External elements: Endicott crazy paving from Eco Outdoor; Rhino Grating Heelguard metal decking in 'Hot Dip Galvanized'; Heka Hoods powdercoated metal awnings; custom hoods in powdercoated aluminium

01 A series of new spaces are perched on top of the existing house, their gradual climb informed by the terrain.

02

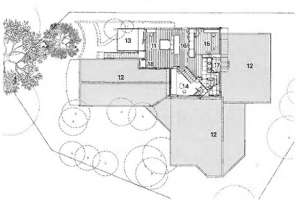
03

04



Ground floor 1:400

1 Entry
2 Living
3 Kitchen
4 Dining
5 Living terrace
6 Pool terrace
7 Pool
8 Garden terrace
9 Laundry
10 Rumpus
11 Bedroom
12 Roof
13 Deck
14 Reading corner
15 Study
16 Walk-in robe
17 Garden planter
18 Window seat

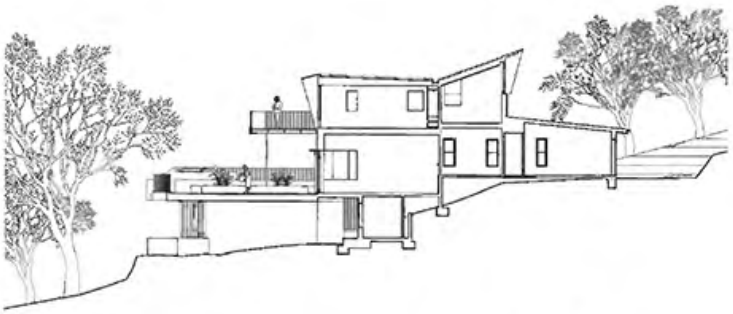


First floor 1:400

02 Timber shutters in the main bedroom can be adjusted for privacy, outlook and ventilation.

03 Fine timber detailing complements the clients' Danish furniture collection.

04 Arne and Sandra's new level features connected spaces that unfold from one another, rather than distinct rooms.



Section 1:400

0 5m

05 An off-form concrete terrace at the home's western edge connects to the reconfigured family room.

06 The terrace provides a direct and intimate landscape experience.

Architect
Kieron Gait Architects
+61 7 3399 5446
mail@kierongait.com.au
kierongait.com.au

Project team Kieron Gait , Kristian Meredith, Lyle Frazer Builder A. H. Done Builders Engineer Lynskey Structural Consultants Landscape architect Steven Clegg Design