With a focus on “living in location,” this site has been infused with landscape from front to back to suggest a continuation of the national park at the rear of the property.

Words by Sheona Thompson
Photography by Jon Linkins

There has been a prevailing preference to architecturally clothe the benign subtropical climate of coastal south-east Queensland in lightweight constructions that merge with beach and bush settings. In a location as lush and beautiful as can be imagined in this part of the world, a partiality for solidity and reductive restraint has produced a house that eschews the lightweight and embraces its opposite with confident poise.

Little Cove House sits a little way inland above Laguna Bay at Noosa Heads, in the last wedge of development to infiltrate Noosa National Park before the steepening rise of Noosa Hill. With a street at the north-east side, the site is part of a neighbourhood with a beachy, suburban feel: wide, grassy nature strips abundant with trees filter to single family homes and low-density multiple residences in a mix of 70s and 80s brick-and-tile and newer constructions. The area is quiet until the surf is up, when, says architect David Teeland, who lives in the same street, “It’s gridlock from 4 am until dusk!” But it is a peaceful spot in the south-west, where the property bounds the quiet seclusion of the national park.
The clients, a couple nearing retirement, lived close by in a masonry apartment that was furnished with high spaces and generous openings to the outdoors. The changeable mood and activity of the street, flipping between parking frenzy and seashore sleepy, steered the design towards a defensively walled form. To temper this fortification, the site was infused from front to back with landscape that suggests continuity with the national park.

The clients wanted a house for themselves, visiting family and guests, with mass and low maintenance of utmost importance - they prefer surfing and golfing to gardening and building repairs. They were drawn to images of Japanese off-form concrete houses, such as those by architect Tadao Ando. The decision to go this way was exciting for David, but also involved some risk in crossing a threshold of learning, since neither architect nor builder had any prior experience with the exacting material.

The use of concrete has been judicious. The material is formed as a deep portal of intersecting volumes that frames the public presence of the house and structures a heightened experience of transition from street to interior. The pristine elements of concrete and glass give the house, inside and out, a quality of untroubled stability that sets the scene for the introduction of other beautifully finished materials, particularly American oak. Abutting the portal, walls of blockwork enclose the remainder of the house, finely rendered on the exterior and plastered on the interior.

The house is formed around a "rainforest courtyard," an experiential green pause that opens the house to the north. The portal spans the width of the site and contains the entry stair and a slice of the main living zone, including a tall, enclosed deck. The living space stretches out within the clearly dominant volume that is set one level above ground, reaching serenely from the street to the national park forest. Circulation is efficiently contained to an L shape, which includes the entry stair and a passage that runs through the centre of the house, past the captured landscape volume of the court. The central circulation passage is connected between the levels only by the front stair. On the upper, living level this passage leads down four steps to the clients' private quarters, and on the ground level it leads through to two bedrooms with ensuites, a laundry and drying court. The two decks, which bookend the main volume and open to views of green, are different in character and are each tuned to particular experiences of the site. The street-side deck is...
The living space features a large window with views into the "rainforest courtyard" that opens the house to the north.

The L-shaped circulation passage leads past a view of the forested and down to the main bedroom.

Artwork: Bunnil Paangelhoo.

suited to mornings as the sun rises over a framed view of Noosa Hill, while the forest side, as if truly amongst the trees, is suited to the late afternoon, celebrating a contiguous relationship with the deepening green. From the main bedroom and bathroom, this connection to the forest is through full-height glass. The two bedrooms downstairs are closer to the forest floor and the mood here is fully imbued with a sense of this proximity. The ensuites to these rooms are the only interior spaces in the house to receive applied colour in tiny mosaics of blue-greens, recalling a multitude of coastal inspirations, from the hues of a wintry ocean to sunlight-dappled forests.

The focus of this house is "living in location." The architectural setting withdrawn, while the essential space in relation to nature is celebrated. Great effort on the part of the architect and the builder has wrought the breathtakingly fine aesthetic orchestration of very few materials and finishes, and spare but characterful furnishings, giving full presence to the life within and around the dwelling. The organisation of spaces and the transparency and opacity of the building have been painstakingly mapped to harness cooling breezes and capture and exclude the sun as the seasons dictate. A complex simplicity reverberates, drawing delight from subtle things, such as the way the roof over the main volume falls from two directions towards the south-west corner of the building, creating interest within the interior and functionally simplifying rainwater collection.

This house is built to endure. As time passes it will be further enfolded by the designed and natural landscape within which it sits, its restrained architectural refrain quietly complementing the peaceable green.

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Practice profile
A small practice specialising in residential and small-scale commercial work.

Project team
David Teeland, Chris Klein,
Mick Nolfke

Builder
AV Constructions

Consultants
Engineer: Ad structure
Landscape: Steven Clegg Design, with Teeland Architects

Products
Roofing: Lyonsight Colorbond Ultra
External walls: Boral off-form concrete with Rockcote clear penetrating sealer. Internal walls: Boral off-form concrete with Rockcote clear penetrating sealer; plasterboard with finishes of paint.

Windows: Architectural Glass Solutions frameless glasses
Doors: North Coast Joinery timber-framed doors with clear Sikkens sealer; Barka stainless double-hung windows.

Lighting: Brightgreen LED lighting
Kitchen: Miele appliances; Geode tapware; American oak joinery; stone and stainless steel benchtops

Bathroom: Aeg sloppy fittings; Geode tapware; Villeroy and Boch sanitaryware

Exterior elements: Eco Outdoor cobbled stones

Other: Space furniture; furniture; Schutt grid-connected 3kW solar electricity system; 20100 litre underground rainwater tank

Floor area
400 m²

Time schedule
Design, documentation: 8 months
Construction: 12 months

Houses • Issue 85