

home | Stephen Lacey

Every which way

The unique S shape of this RAIA winner has created harbour views from every room.





There can't be many houses in the world, let alone Sydney, that capture a view in such an innovative fashion as the Spry House, which took out an RIAA award for residential housing this month.

The home's architects, Neil Durbach and Camilla Block, have a well-earned reputation for their quirky twist on modernism. Their design for Commonwealth Place, on the shores of Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin, is a case in point.

The Spry House, set on a narrow block in Point Piper, is defined by a snaking S-shaped

The second, preferred approach ran perpendicular to the site. "The S-shape meant the depth of the site was oriented to the view," Block says. "You had these strips of house, terrace, pool and everything went backwards and forwards towards the view and away from it."

The home's other notable features are irregularly shaped slices – or fissures – that have been taken out of the ceiling, allowing shafts of natural light to flood through. These fissures are vented, to allow warm air to be drawn up and out of the interior. The result

Irregularly shaped slices – or fissures – have been taken out of the ceiling, allowing shafts of light to flood through.

pavilion that "floats" on slender steel columns above a stone podium. The sleeping areas are confined to the lightweight pavilion, while the living areas and kitchen are on the podium and within its core. Nearly every room has a harbour view.

"It's not a big site but it has an incredibly beautiful aspect," Block says. "Every strategy had to be explored relative to that view."

The architects came up with two schemes. The first, more conventional design would have seen the house situated parallel with the harbour. However, the rooms towards the rear would have been marginalised.

is a house that needs no air-conditioning.

Block says the fissures have an aesthetic appeal in the way they cut through the depth of the pavilion, "which is a way of making the pavilion feel more like a thick roof that just happens to have rooms in it".

Looking up at these fissures is rather like looking through a crevasse into the greeny-blue heart of a glacier. Similarly wonderful is the way the architects have cut slivers through the exterior walls and filled them with green glass to allow more light to filter through, washing the interior walls with beams of emerald.

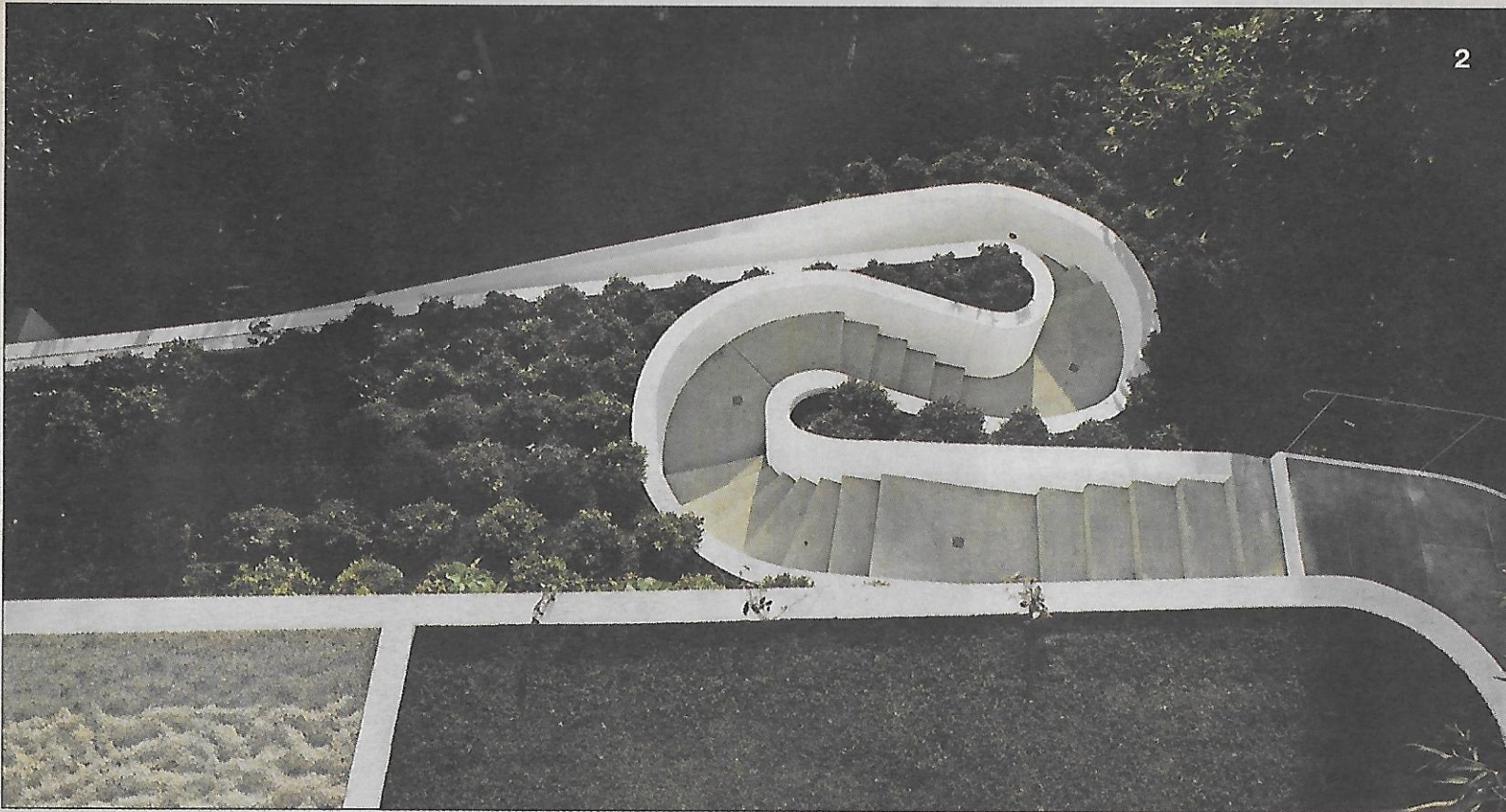
Kota Blue stone from India has been used

throughout the podium level. It covers the floor, flowing from the interior to the outside. Block says they were determined not to finish the level in limestone or something similarly white. "We didn't want an incredibly glary terrace," she says. "It's not a particularly big site. The pool and Kota Blue are as close as possible to the green/blue tones of the garden, to make the whole area drift together and feel spacious."

The architects' garden design was completed with soft landscaping by Tom Sitta. Simple materials have been used for the construction of the house itself. The framework is steel, with the exposed sections painted in Dulux Ferrador natural steel grey. Tung-oiled timber flooring features in the pavilion. Japanese Sen timber veneer has been used to clad the kitchen and the rear interior wall, while exterior walls are Canadian cedar.

Durbach says that the sinuous quality of the building reflects the site itself: "It has a much more delicate, fluid quality than some of our other sites. This had a kind of softness to it. That gave rise to the very delicate skin as well, it's quite ephemeral."

Clients Helen and Malcolm Spry bought the Federation house on the site in 1986 and renovated. But they felt it didn't make the most of the location. They moved into their new house in March. The couple's bedroom is at the front, with views across Shark Island to Manly. "I'm over minimalism," says Helen Spry. "We wanted something comfortable."



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THE OWNERS' FAVOURITE FEATURES

That every single room has a view of the harbour.

INSIDERS' TIP

Really understand the detail of the building contract.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE?

22 months.

ARCHITECTS

Durbach Block, 8297 3500.

INTERIORS

George Freedman, Freedman Rembel, 9360 2600.



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DETAILS

Kota Blue stone
from Bisanna Tiles, Surry Hills, 9310 2500.

Joinery by Dallas Industries, Milperra, 9771 4200.



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Canadian cedar
 from Harper Timber,
 Pendle Hill, 9896 1000.

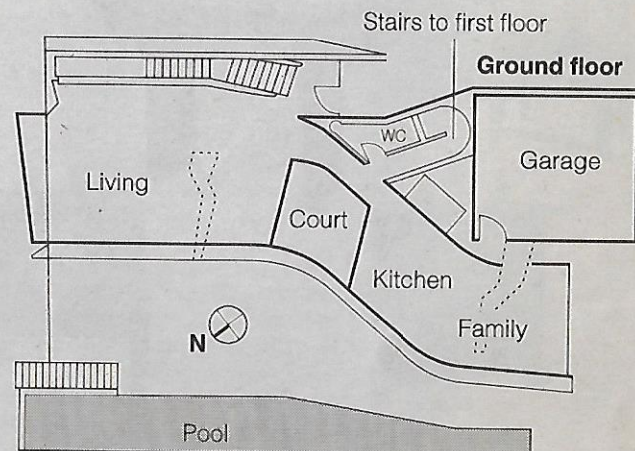
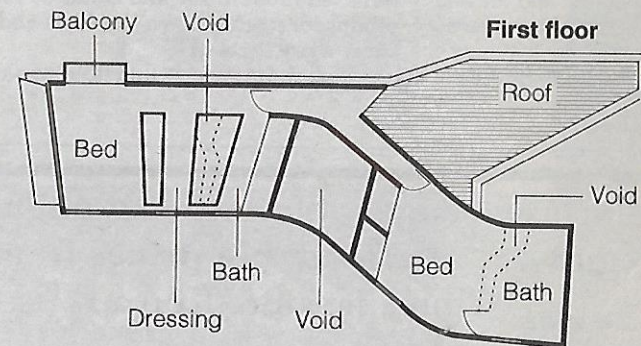


1 The S-shaped pavilion floats on slender steel columns.

2 The garden area was designed in green/blue tones.

3 Green glass slivers are cut into the walls to filter emerald beams of light.

4 The steel framework has exposed sections painted in natural grey.



Photos: Anthony Browell,
 Brett Boardman
 Plans adapted by
 Robert Parkinson