



A MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS

When two design minds of the calibre of Glen Murcutt and George Freedman come together on a project the result is bound to be explosive. The new office premises for the interior design firm of George Freedman and Architects involved just such a collaboration; one in a long chain of previous design associations. To Glen Murcutt the importance of the architect/client relationship cannot be over emphasized. '..... with every good building there is a good client and when the client is also an architect, well ...'

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PHOTOGRAPHY: WILLEM RETHMEIER

RIGHT: FOR LATERAL STABILITY ONE CROSS WALL HAD TO REMAIN BUT IT HAS BEEN PIERCED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO PROVIDE CONTINUITY.

BELOW: BY FAR THE STRONGEST ELEMENT IN THE DRAWING OFFICE IS THE STRIKING USE OF COLOUR... UNEQUIVOCALLY THE WORK OF GEORGE FREEDMAN.

It was soon obvious that it was impossible to define which portion of the building was by Glen Murcutt and which came out of the office of George Freedman. What seemed at first glance to be characteristic of the work of one architect, on further examination proved to be by the other or, more often than not, the result of a collaboration - the idea of one being taken up and developed by the other. In fact, it can be said that the whole scheme was a truly collaborative effort, a real partnership. When talking to them about the project one might be forgiven for believing that they were each referring to a totally different building, but as Glen Murcutt put it, "... it is possible for each to have totally different perceptions of the result and still work well together . . . we were good friends before the project and



we are still good friends."

An uninformed visitor might be forgiven in noting what at first glance appears to be a series of historic references, in tune with the Post

Modern school of architecture; the kitchen which has strong similarities to Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, the design of the courtyard which alludes to the terraced

gardens of the Italian High Renaissance, the pool which has definite Islamic proportions. "Eclecticism", said George Freedman, a distinct gleam in his eye. "No", replied Glen Murcutt, "any eclectic references are extremely subconscious . . . there is no one more anti the Post Modern movement than I...."

All good architecture must have an idea as its basis and this idea is expressed initially in the form of the building and ultimately in the detail. If the work of Glen Murcutt and George Freedman has one major thing in common it is the rigorous attention to detail.

Ultimately the idea behind the building is expressed in the detail which delights and amuses the observer, presenting a complex array of visual images.



RIGHT: THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ALL THE CHIMNEY BREASTS HAVE BEEN EMPHASIZED BY THE USE OF A STRONG PALETTE OF COLOURS.

BELOW: THE ADDITION OF A SKYLIGHT IN THE ORIGINAL EDWARDIAN BUILDING NOT ONLY PROVIDED NECESSARY NATURAL LIGHT BUT ALSO ALLOWED FOR A LIBRARY GALLERY.

The project involved the conversion of an existing inner suburban complex comprising a sandstone cottage of the 1840s and a separate bedroom and kitchen wing of the Edwardian period. The result was to function both as a residence and design office. To Murcutt, architecture is not the designing of forms as such but a solution of problems as they arise. The essential idea behind the concept came from an obvious strong north-south axiality to the existing building which Murcutt decided not only to retain but to emphasize by placing any new elements at right angles to the original structures. This has effected a strong separation between what was existing and



what is new. The front door of the cottage faces a major road causing problems of noise and access. The solution was to divert the entrance to the rear of the building, providing a

more effective noise barrier and a solution to the problem of car parking and access. The problem of unacceptable noise levels also logically led to an introverted design solu-

tion around a courtyard. Introversion then meant it was essential to get as much light into the building as possible and this became a major consideration.

The client's requirements meant that additional space was needed but rather than extend the existing Edwardian building and destroy its form a completely separate building was designed at the south end of the complex, to house the reception area and kitchen. Expressed as an entirely separate steel and glass pavilion, the separateness of this structure is further emphasized by the change in its axis; east-west in opposition to the main axis of the existing structure.





LEFT: THE KITCHEN HAS STRONG SIMILARITIES TO MIES VAN DER ROHE'S FARNSWORTH HOUSE.

BELOW: THE RECEPTION PAVILION FEATURES A CANTILEVERED RECEPTION DESK THAT APPEARS TO FLOAT BENEATH A DRAMATIC CONCAVE CEILING.

Entering the building via a porch with a distinctly Edwardian feeling you find yourself inside the pavilion, an off-form concrete wall on the right. Moving forward the eye is lead along the entire north-south axis of the building and ultimately beyond to a view of the city when the cottage front door is open. The tendency would be to carry on straight ahead through the huge steel framed glass door, if it were not for the burst of light from the right drawing the visitor into the reception area. Here you are faced with George Freedman's marvelous, apparently floating, cantilevered reception desk and a rich Italian floral backdrop. "It makes you want to genuflect before the altar" said Freedman, another gleam in his eye. The light enters this space by a number of means. The glass brick wall on one side provides a scintillating play of translucent light but is



as much a noise barrier and a visual insulation from the cars parked outside. And then suddenly your eye is lead upward on each side, to the sky outside, via Glen Murcutt's dra-

matic concave ceiling. It was important for the receptionist to see the garden, so a visual link was also created between reception area and courtyard.

Emerging from the recep-

tion area into the courtyard, you pass the kitchen area, its meticulous detailing characteristic of the work of Mies van der Rohe. It is at once an indoor and outdoor space, the closure achieved by a huge, sliding steel and glass panel.

To the left is the original Edwardian building, approached by a concave iron roofed verandah. This was a long skillion roofed building comprising a series of rooms accessed by the verandah and its conversion to a drawing office presented a number of challenges. First, the space was very badly illuminated. The addition of a skylight, not only provided the necessary natural light, but also allowed for a library gallery and access to the storage area. On the other side of the room the natural light is augmented by reflected light from inverted industrial metal halide lamps, a simple and extremely economical solution.

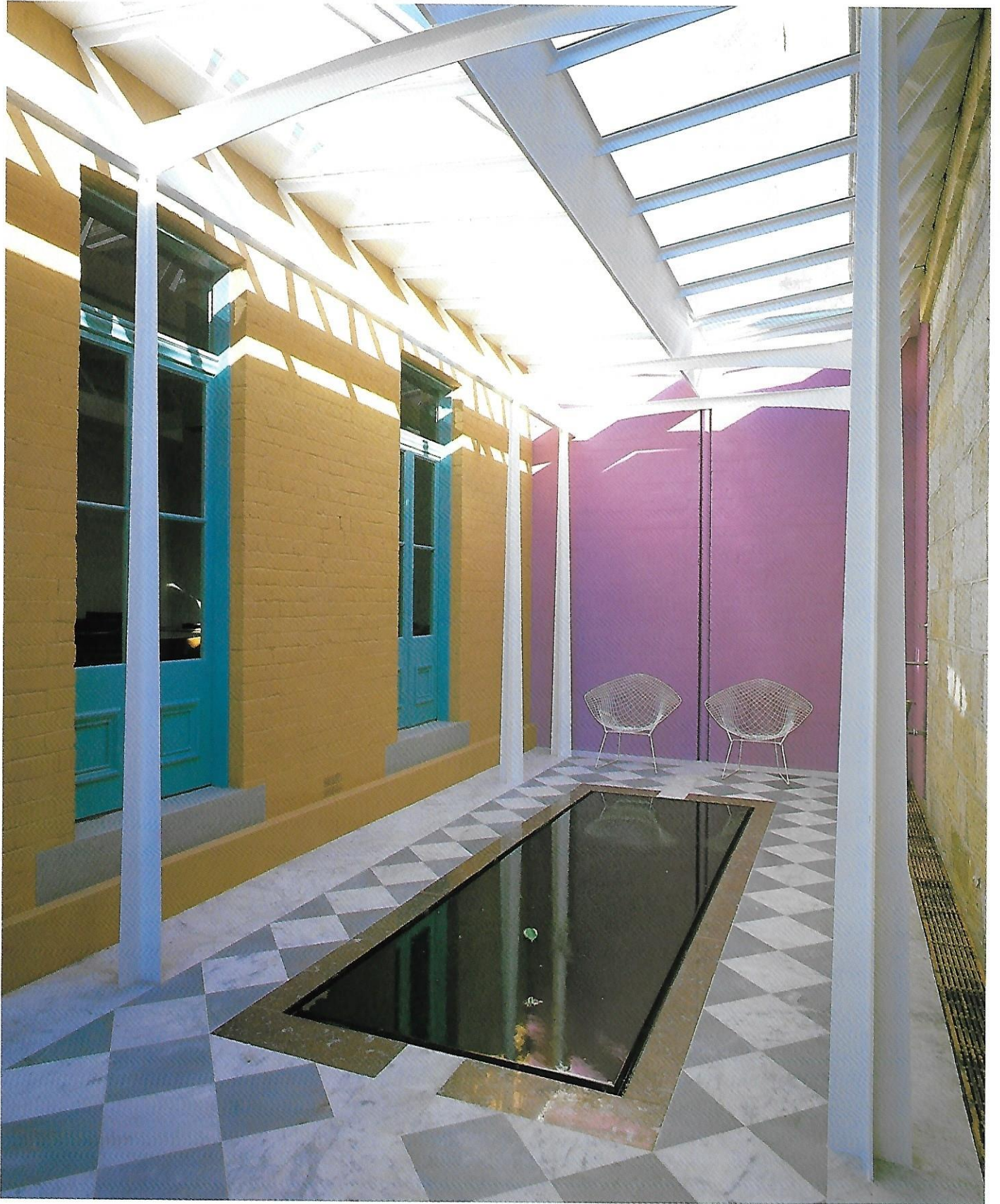
GEORGE FREEDMAN IS RENOWNED FOR HIS RIGOROUS AND METICULOUS ATTENTION TO DETAIL.

RIGHT: A TIMBER GRAIN IN THE CONCRETE RENDER OF ANOTHER WALL PROVIDES AN INTERESTING FOIL FOR THE BLONDE TIMBER CABINETY.

BELOW: CLOSE UP OF THE FAR WALL DEMONSTRATES THE SUCCESS OF THE COMBINATION OF RAW, GREY CONCRETE WITH THE DELICATE DETAIL AND COLOUR OF A FLORAL TAPESTRY.







LEFT: THE TRANSITION BETWEEN THE TWO ORIGINAL BUILDINGS HAS BEEN ACHIEVED BY A NEW STEEL AND GLASS STRUCTURE WHICH FEATURES AN ISLAMIC STYLE REFLECTIVE POOL.

BELOW: UNDER THE WINGED ROOF CANOPY THE MARBLE PAVING REFLECTS THE DESIGN OF THE VERANDAH PAVING IN FRONT OF THE SANDSTONE COTTAGE.

For lateral stability at least one cross wall had to remain but it has been pierced in such a way as to provide a continuity of space. The openings are subtly splayed on one side, a device initially used by Glen Murcutt in the doorway, to help effect the transition to the gallery space above. The device was then taken up by George Freedman for the window openings which are both square in overall form and Georgian in the proportion of the opening.

By far the strongest element in the drawing office is the striking use of colour. The colour is unequivocally the work of George Freedman; Glen Murcutt describes himself as "colour shy". The colours are "..... based on Victorian colourways . . . just rearranged in terms of intensity and value." But not only are the intensities and values rearranged, so is the application. The obvious so-



lution to what to do with all those different chimney breasts has been avoided and instead the differences have been emphasized by the use of a broad palette of colours. On

the other side of the drawing office the repetitive rhythm of the original windows and doors to the courtyard is emphasized by a single contrasting colour. The steel stair to

the gallery is supported by what George Freedman describes as ". . . the last of the yellow steel."

The transition between the two original buildings has been achieved by another new steel and glass structure, again placed across the main north-south axis of the complex. Forming a complete contrast to the existing masonry buildings, the wonderful winged roof exists in counterpoint with the sweep of the verandah roof. A building and yet not a building it is simultaneously a link and a separation. Under this canopy the marble paving reflects the design of the verandah paving in front of the cottage. A pool, eventually to be filled with lotus flowers, completes the feeling of tranquility.

The entire solution is a synthesis, a true collaboration, resulting in a working environment which is a haven from the inner city noise.