

MODERN QUEENSLANDER

TEXT ALICE HAMPSON AND SARAH FOLEY PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN LINKINS, SCOTT BURROWS



Richard Kirk's Highgate Hill House takes the Queenslander into new territory. Trademark stilts are there to straddle the site, and timber is the driving material, but connection to the landscape is more finely tuned, as is all the detailing.

BRISBANE'S LUSH GULLIES are quintessentially apt for architectural exploration and the ambition of making such places liveable. And the success of the Queenslander—that ubiquitous 'house on stilts' of the inner suburbs—has not curbed the enthusiasm of adventurous architects to find new, and perhaps better, responses to the challenging climate and topography.

Arguably Australia's only indigenous architectural style, the Queenslander offers practical solutions for building in the subtropics, with its timbered structure and stumps providing natural ventilation and a simple way to build on uneven sites. Like a dinosaur's fossilised backbone, Brisbane's natural landscape is a series of knobs and protrusions, while steep 'fingers' of gullies carved out of schist and lined with verdant foliage snake their way to the river. It's on such a site, in inner-suburban Highgate Hill, that architect Richard Kirk has created a house responding to the potent environment.

Domestic architecture has always been a testing ground for broader architectural ideas, especially when young practices are faced with difficult sites. Architect Rick Lepastrier proposes camping on a site as the essential first step to good design. And for three years, Kirk lived on this site in a worker's cottage. He then sold the property to his neighbours, who commissioned him for their new house. Kirk's intimate knowledge of the site revealed its true essence: the textures, play of light and experience of moving through living spaces to landscape.

Directing visitors from the street, Kirk adopted an architectural signifier of resounding subtlety: merely a deep reveal in the battened fence. One next skirts the garage towards the front door, where the building's intricacy and openness is disclosed. The interstices are first revealed through a veiled facade of spotted gum, chosen to age over time; its surface manipulated and animated, allowing light to play and soften the dominance of the two-storey street presence.

Spatial relationships attest to Kirk's intimate understanding of the site. Vertically, the house is divided between entry at mid level, the upper level comprising more enclosed protected spaces for sleeping—both oriented to established neighbouring trees—and a lower level containing the informal family domain. Horizontally, two separate identities are achieved. North and east, the living level embraces the gully landscape, while the southern and western facades are more solid.

Wrapping down the side walls, the roof becomes a 'shell', an accomplished structural device, focusing the house to the north and framing the windows to this favoured aspect. To the south and west, climate and future neighbourhood developments are buffered by blade walls and a skin of almost solid timber. Light filters through the stairwell from the south perimeter down through three levels; an important organisational link.

The mid-level lounge opens completely through sliding, stacking doors to built-up outdoor platforms of grass and decking, bounded by a pool at the street frontage, while the fence allows glimpses back to the street. It also extends vertically to a void above the dining room, between the respective domains of the parents and their children.

Interiors are characterised by crisp and lucid detailing. American white oak joinery is exquisite in its plainness. The kitchen benchtop with square dovetail joints, the select veneer wall panels, and the solid treads of the stairs all exemplify deliberately restrained detailing.

The steep site is addressed by setting the house on high steel posts, a clear reference to the grand old timber Queenslanders, with their battened sleep-outs and verandahs, lining the ridge-line roads. Like its ancestors, Kirk's 21st century Queenslander can be shut or completely open to the elements. Both are identifiable by a slatted evening glow, as familiar and oddly reassuring on a still summer's night as the ever-present chiming of cicadas. **M**



Previous pages The new built landscapes of decking and grass, and the lush gully beyond, embrace the living level, while a shroud of spotted gum battens encase the sleeping quarters. 01 Wall panels of American white oak veneer and solid stair treads exemplify restrained detailing. 02 Light filters through the stairwell from the south perimeter, down through three levels. 03 The living level embraces the gully through a mix of apertures, open and partially screened.





04 Living and kitchen open completely to platforms of grass and decking through sliding, stacking doors 05 A veiled facade of spotted gum allows light to play, its surface manipulated and animated by battening 06 The living area is bounded by a pool, while the fence allows glimpses back to the street 07 Kitchen bench of American white oak with square dovetail joints

“ The living level embraces the gully, while the south and west facades are more solid. ”





MATERIALS & FINISHES—EXTERNAL WALLS

Western red cedar, New Guinea rosewood, spotted gum, Austral external plywood with hoop pine veneer, preweathered Reihnzinc cladding

ROOFING Lysaght Spandek and Alysrite Ultra Polycarb

INTERNAL WALLS American Rock Maple, plasterboard painted Dulux China White

CEILING Plasterboard and timber batten screen with Dulux White Swan

STAIRS American Rock Maple

FLOORING Blackbutt hardwood strip flooring

WINDOWS/DOORS Custom New Guinea rosewood

JOINERY Queensland maple veneer, solid-edged

ARCHITECT Richard Kirk Architect **PROJECT**

TEAM Richard Kirk, Keiron Gait, Andrew Drummond

BUILDING CERTIFICATION Napier Blakely

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER TOD Consulting

HYDRAULIC AND ELECTRICAL ENGINEER

Norman Disney & Young **GEOTECHNICAL**

ENGINEER Morrison **BUILDER** Charlie Woodward



Upper floor

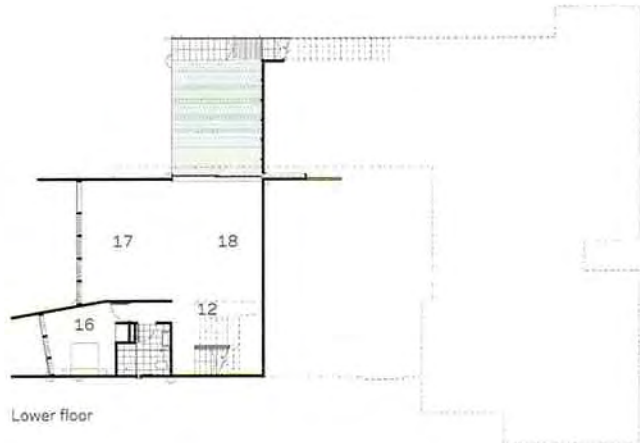


Eastern elevation

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 01 Entry | 10 Pool |
| 02 Kitchen | 11 Bedroom |
| 03 Dining room | 12 Void |
| 04 Living room | 13 Ensuite |
| 05 Study | 14 Walk-in robe |
| 06 Laundry | 15 Bathroom |
| 07 Store | 16 Guest room |
| 08 Garage | 17 Media room |
| 09 Lawn | 18 Playroom |



Ground floor



Lower floor