

# HIGHGATE HILL RESIDENCE

The Highgate Hill Residence continues a thread of South East Queensland projects that offer valid alternatives to the Queensland domestic vernacular... a thread which has become an architectural progression in its own right.

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Perched to the east of a ravine running south from Dornoch Terrace, one of Brisbane's oldest ridgeline roads, the Highgate Hill Residence is an elegant example of climatically responsive contemporary modernism. Richard Kirk Architects – following on from the well-publicized recent houses by Australian architects Andresen O'Gorman, Kerry Hill and Sean Godsell – explore clean orthogonal geometries articulated by finely crafted timber screens and cladding systems. The nearby Rosebery House (1998) by Andresen O'Gorman can be seen as an entire screen-as-house, whilst the Ogilvie House (2003) by Kerry Hill at Sunshine Beach, north of Brisbane, is characterized by a choreographed spatial progression through forms clad at their edge by timber screens. These recent Southeast Queensland houses, as well as some by Donovan Hill, suggest the existence of a distinct local strategy, but the Highgate Hill Residence also pays homage to the modernist houses designed by Hayes and Scott in 1950s Brisbane, which were in turn influenced by Breuer, Niemeyer and Gropius. The Highgate Residence's profile of a butterfly roof atop a wall of vertical timber strips can also be seen, albeit in a much simpler form, in the Graham House (1959) by Hayes and Scott in Indooroopilly: a house which also betrays the influences of Harry Seidler's 1950s Sydney houses.

Internally, the spaces are highly choreographed responses to the various requirements for flexible engagement with the outdoors, for social gatherings and for privacy. Sited on a steeply sloping block with an existing lush and mature landscape, this five-bedroom house for a young family has been designed with two distinct identities – to the north and east, and to the south and west – that respond alternatively to the conditions and the context. On the northern side, where the site drops away into the landscape, the façade of the house breaks down into a series of moments and openings that embrace the landscape, whilst on the eastern street elevation, the building presents as a more diminutive veiled series of elements. All timbers were selected for their weathering qualities and for the manner in which they will alter and change, given their particular orientation and placement. The significant size of the house on such a steep slope and its relationship to the distant views can be seen on the western and southern elevations, but the monumentality is softened by timber battens and detailing.

The rectangular form of the building is arranged over three levels with living and dining spaces on the middle entry level, which integrates with the gardens and the swimming pool to become one luxurious indoor-outdoor space. All bedrooms are located on the upper level, whilst the lower floor holds a guest bedroom and media spaces. The internal void space, glazed on the northern side, operates in two ways: as a spatial response to the tall trees on the north of the site, and to separate the children's bedrooms from the parents'. Uniting all three floors, the staircase becomes a sculptural element in its own right, and works as an organizational reference between the levels. The Highgate Hill Residence continues a thread of South East Queensland projects that offer tangible alternatives to the Queensland domestic vernacular... a thread which has become an architectural progression in its own right.















