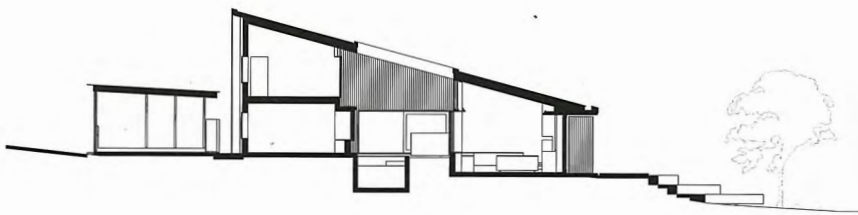


BRAMSTON
RESIDENCE
BY RICHARD
KIRK
ARCHITECT



Section 1:400

0 5m





In the leafy Brisbane suburb of Tarragindi, this house wraps around a generous central courtyard to strike a delicate balance between nurturing family life and responding to its natural setting.

Words by Sheona Thomson
Photography by Scott Burrows

After a decade of living “either upstairs or downstairs” in their old Federation-style Queenslander home, clients Anwen and Michael Batchelor – both keen gardeners – wanted change for themselves and their two children. While life at the level of the tree canopy was enjoyable, they didn’t want to be there all the time and began to imagine a lifestyle more directly connected with a garden.

Early searches for a new home with ground-floor living areas were met by houses with dispiriting little lawns and no trees. “This was out of the question for us; we knew we couldn’t live our lives without trees,” says Anwen. They decided to build afresh on their site within the landscape that they loved, on a tree-lined street in Tarragindi, one of Brisbane’s inner green belt suburbs at the northern base of Toohey Mountain.

However, this approach also brought a challenge: “It was difficult to find a ‘spec’ builder who was willing to work around our trees,” muses Anwen. So she and Michael decided to enlist the expertise of an architect. Published photos of the Arbour House (see *Houses 77*) attracted them to Richard Kirk Architect, and they engaged Richard to help navigate their quest for sustainable, connected living and landscape preservation. With the old house removed, they began the task of calibrating a new lifestyle pattern to the gently sloping topography and existing flora.

As much as the clients sought connection to place and to live sustainably, they also wished for their new home to support and nurture real relationship within the family. “Very quickly, a courtyard form emerged as the best way to achieve these goals,” says Richard.

“We travelled in Mexico years ago and loved the courtyards there, as private outdoor spaces that connect the rest of the house together,” says Anwen. Richard also notes the use of the form in Asian cities and its relevance to defending against increasing density and building more sustainably in Australian suburban settings.

Bramston Residence’s courtyard volume, which also contains a pool, is wrapped on three sides by a compact “C” form that opens to the east. The street-side wing includes the children’s sleeping rooms and shared play and study spaces on the ground level, with parents’ rooms above. Set a little lower, the northern wing contains a flexible living, dining and kitchen space that opens wide onto a garden terrace and the verdant landscape stepping down beyond. The space has a low centre of gravity, creating an interior grandeur that sits between the sky views of the courtyard and the glorious green world of the garden.

The formal entry is at the south-western corner; all spaces of the dwelling are connected by a circulation spine and unified beneath a single roof plane that slopes steeply from the front to the back, punched through by the courtyard void. The disciplined unity of form is further reinforced through material expression, with the exterior clad in dark-stained plywood. While the new house sits closer to the front boundary than its predecessor, its darkened skin screened by a stand of king ferns and a full-height wire trellis loaded with climbing herald’s trumpet vines is experienced as a kind of recessive, solid shadow. The species were selected by the clients for their size and tendency to shield and “scale down” the building while buffering the interiors.

01 A disciplined unity of form is reinforced through material expression, with the exterior clad in dark-stained plywood.

02 Contrasting with the dark exterior, the courtyard and garden terrace glow with a rich lining of tallowwood.

03 A northern wing with an open living, dining and kitchen space opens onto a garden terrace and verdant landscape.



Brisbane,
Qld



New
house



Family

4



+1 Study

3



2



Site 720 m²
Floor 220 m²



Design 1 y
Build 1 y 6 m

Contrasting with the dark exterior, the courtyard and garden terrace glow with a rich lining of tallowwood. Built-in joinery elements shoulder the functions of domestic life, and the floors are in finished concrete. Underfloor heating is embedded in the ground-level slabs, but the system is rarely needed. The courtyard strategy allows all internal spaces to receive light from both the north and the south. In winter, the floors absorb the heat of direct sunlight and reradiate this warmth. In the steamy Brisbane summer, the passive cooling effect achieved by tuning wide timber-framed openings within the efficient courtyard design guarantees interior comfort on all but the most extreme days.

Within flexible spaces that commune across the courtyard, the family inhabits the home with a sense of togetherness, even as individuals engage in separate activities. While each zone is articulated by thresholds and distinct transitions, the visual fusion of spaces is remarkable. Looking back at the house from the garden, sight lines reach through the courtyard and into the depths of the southern wing. “Wherever I am, I can see the kids and what they’re doing,” says Anwen. A tensile mesh that stretches the full length and height of openings to the courtyard cleverly meets pool enclosure safety standards.

While Bramston Residence may be “a house about a garden,” there is a public value underpinning the private interests of Michael and Anwen in making their home as they have. Backyard gardens are habitats for biodiversity, but as they disappear through the razing tendencies of bloated home building, much is lost from our shared cities.

Had the family left this block to find their garden lifestyle somewhere else, who knows what would have become of the grand old jacaranda tree at the bottom of the garden, which by nightfall becomes “a highway for wildlife.” Now, and into the foreseeable future, this plot in Tarragindi will thrive in the care of people who saw an important alternative to maximizing buildable area on a block. Bramston Residence demonstrates inventive architectural restraint in delivering a generous and connected home while preserving the landscape values of the larger site, which will continue to yield outcomes well beyond the joys of a single family. ©

Products

Roofing: Lysaght Spandek in Colorbond ‘Dune’
External walls: Shadowclad Natural Groove stained plywood cladding
Internal walls: Austral Plywood hoop pine with tallowwood veneer
Flooring: Excel Concrete decorative concrete in ‘Raven,’ satin/matt
Lighting: Inlite Deep Starr II adjustable lights; Ambience Lighting Pitch rotating spotlight; Lumen 8 Architectural Lighting wide diffused batten; Nocturnal Lighting Dunnart wall light in aged brass from Light and Design Group
Kitchen: Stainless steel bench; Sussex Scala pull-out mixer; Zip HydroTap water filter; Smeg induction cooktop; Fisher and Paykel pyrolytic built-in oven; Miele integrated dishwasher
Bathroom: Classic Ceramics matt white tiles; Stonebaths Bertina freestanding natural stone bath and solid-surface stone basin in matt white; Caroma Urbane Invisi wall-hung toilet; Villeroy and Boch Oberon rectangular bath and Astra Walker Icon tapware from Bretts Timber and Hardware
Heating and cooling: Bosch solar panels
External elements: Eco Outdoor bluestone pavers

04 A luxurious bathtub on the upper level affords views across the courtyard to the nearby parklands.

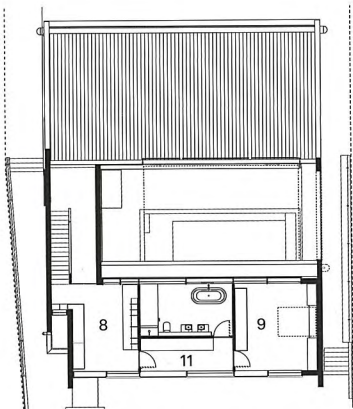
05 A tensile mesh that stretches across openings to the courtyard cleverly meets pool enclosure safety standards.



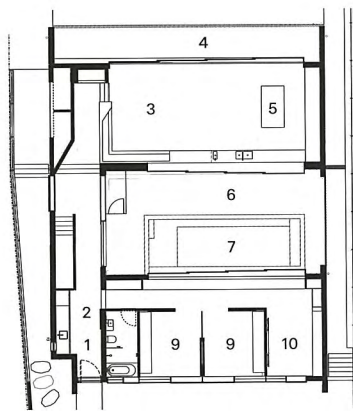
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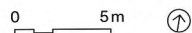
05



First floor 1:400



Ground floor 1:400



- 1 Entry
- 2 Laundry
- 3 Living
- 4 Terrace
- 5 Kitchen
- 6 Courtyard
- 7 Pool
- 8 Study
- 9 Bedroom
- 10 Media
- 11 Robe

While each zone is articulated by thresholds and distinct transitions, the visual fusion of spaces is remarkable.

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Hydraulic design and fire service: NBA