

# MONUMENT

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ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

## EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

KERRY HILL IN TAIPEI

### BATHING BEAUTY

LIPPMANN'S BOY CHARLTON

### OUT WITH THE OLD

RENZO IN ROME

### COUNTRY LIFE

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## URBAN PARASITE

TWO RECENTLY COMPLETED PROJECTS BY REINMUTH BLYTHE BALMFORTH TERROIR IN COLLABORATION WITH ARTIST/ARCHITECT RICHARD GOODWIN, EXPLORE THE NATURE OF THE 'EXTENSION' AND HOW THESE NEW FORMS MIGHT INTERACT WITH EXISTING SPACES TO CONCEPTUALLY FEED OFF THEIR HOST CONTEXT.

Text **Shelley Penn** Photography **Brett Boardman**

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ONE SUNNY DAY in Sydney, I visit two recent projects by *Goodwin/Reinmuth Blythe Balmforth TERROIR*. My introduction to the works is via a medium-long drive in the company of director and project architect Gerard Reinmuth, who talks intensely about how these projects began, what ideas drove them and where he places them in the context of Sydney architecture.

*RBBt* is a firm that originated in Tasmania and now has offices in both Hobart and Sydney. They are developing a body of work which conveys the depth of the 25 years practice experience the three directors share, but which is also a relatively young collection of work in the sense that they got together as recently as 1999. These are their first completed Sydney projects.

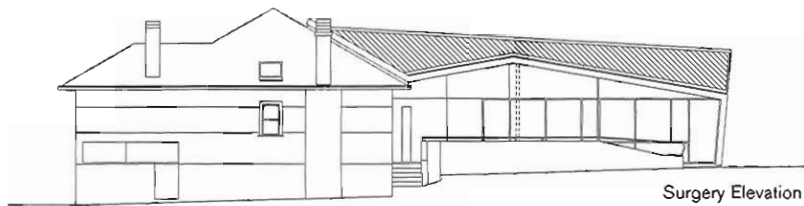
The buildings were conceived and designed by the collaborative team of *RBBt* and Sydney artist/architect Richard Goodwin. While working closely at the preliminary design stages, Goodwin's involvement tapered out as they moved from concept to construction, with a resurgent input on final design decisions such as colour selection.

The two buildings were designed, documented and constructed concurrently and there are many tangible

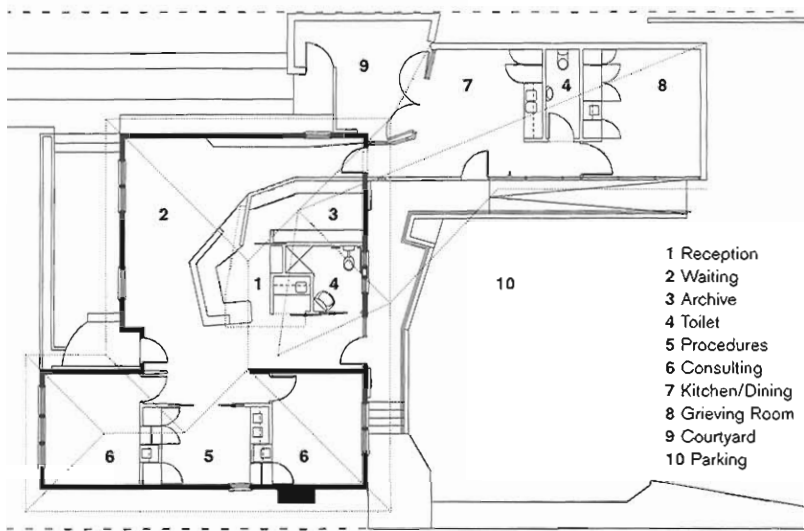
similarities which reveal this. They also share some underlying concepts, however, in my view, they are critically different from one another as architectural works.

Reinmuth talks about his preoccupation with ideas of "mass" and "touching the earth heavily", which relates to notions encapsulated in the word "terroir" which is explained on the company letterhead: "terroir - French term that describes the 'soul' of a particular site as resulting from the interplay between natural elements and that site and from the role played by human occupation and its transformation over time." In Goodwin's case, he says there is an ongoing interest in the idea of the "urban parasite" - the notion of new forms which interact with or attach to existing structures or spaces, and conceptually feed off the host context. In each of these two buildings, these concepts provided a way of thinking about how a new addition might relate to an existing building.

The *Goodwin-Murray Surgery* is located on a suburban street corner in Castle Hill, surrounded by over-developed, uninspired residential buildings. In this context, the cottage on the site probably appeared as fair game for demolition. Instead, *RBBt* brought together >>



Surgery Elevation



Surgery Floor Plan



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Opening spread, left: The leading edge of the new roof as it wraps up and over the existing house; right: The purity of the idea of the folded roof is expressed in the blunt end elevation. This page, left: The new form is grafted to the existing roof before dramatically folding down to form the new spaces; right: At night, the project takes on a more dramatic form.

**Project Name:** Castle Hill Surgery-“The Parasite”  
**Architects:** Reinmuth Blythe Balmforth terroir and Richard Goodwin Art/Architecture Pty Ltd  
**Project Team:** Gerard Reinmuth, Richard Blythe, Scott Balmforth, Richard Goodwin, Tamara Donnellan, Chris Exner, Jason Hammond  
**Engineer:** Simpson Design Associates (Andrew Simpson)  
**Quantity surveyor:** Currie and Brown (Chris Bylett)  
**Landscape Architect:** OCULUS  
**Time to complete:** 18 months  
**Council:** Baulkham Hills Shire Council  
**Client:** Cecil Avenue Medical Practice  
**External Walls:** Trimdeck Hi Ten (Heritage Red) and Capral 400 series glazing  
**Cladding:** Trimdeck Hi Ten (Heritage Red)  
**Roof:** Trimdeck Hi Ten (Heritage Red)  
**Guttering:** Custom Colorbond Guttering  
**Paint:** Dulux “chicon” and to match colorbond “heritage red” and colorbond “slate grey”  
**Paving:** Boral bluestone  
**Windows & Glazings:** Capral 400 series aluminium  
**Hardware:** Lockwood  
**Heating/cooling systems:** Airways Airconditioning  
**Ceiling:** Plasterboard and Tas Oak Veneer Panels  
**Internal walls:** Plasterboard  
**Paint:** Dulux “Berkshire White” and to match Colorbond “Heritage Red”  
**Flooring:** Carpet tiles - Interface ‘Tatami tile’ KUJI  
**Joinery & Wall Panelling:** Avant Constructions  
**Joinery finishes:** Tas Oak veneer and Laminex “Pewter” and “Willow”  
**Furniture:** Custom furniture by Avant Constructions  
**Bathroom fittings & fixtures:** Caroma  
**Miscellaneous fixtures and fittings:** Madinoz



This page, clockwise from left: The "snorkel" rises from the new extension to grab north light into the interior of the south facing extension; the extension "peeks" out from behind the existing house, its dramatic form disguised in part by its sympathetic material palette; the end elevation is sculpted by a flush window and the recess to the doors off the dining area.



>> considerations of programme and budget with an urge to preserve this remnant of Castle Hill's rural origins. The cottage stayed and the new work evolved in response to it.

From the major street front, the old house is set back substantially and shaded by a large tree. It appears familiar in an old-fashioned, reassuring way. On approaching from the side street however, an extension at the rear exerts a strong, almost aggressive presence, largely due to its scale and hard landscaping.

Where the original cottage is a classic double fronted detached fibro box, the addition is an open dynamic form. Essentially it appears as a folding not-quite-planar mass, less orthogonal and more organic than the cottage, and almost animal in the way it rears up from the ground to form two solid walls, then wraps over the old house as though to overtake it. The form appears to hover

just above the tiles, being offset via an exaggerated shadow-line. On its "open" north side, a wall of carefully composed infill glazing completes the enclosure and provides for light and ventilation. At ground level, a cement-rendered mass podium, ramp and balustrade addresses the fall of the site and ease of access, while also providing a solid 'earth' from which the form rises.

Internally, the connection is more insidious. The new form invades the old volume to create a dynamic reception space via skewed walls and joinery, and new panels of material are applied to 'old' (actually refurbished) wall and ceiling surfaces. In this merging of old and new, the interior of the building is more hybrid in nature than the external treatment suggests.

Externally, the old cottage is painted out in two colours - dark grey for everything below the eaves, and dark tile-red for everything above. Hard

ground and podium surfaces are concrete grey. The simple colour delineation reduces elements to earth, base and superstructure. Taking the dark red for its colour, and using lightweight metal sheet cladding, the new structure is more roof than anything else.

Along with its shape, this representation as roof suggests a tent or caravan's annex as formal references for the addition. But a more organic and conceptually rich reference is the aforementioned parasite, which is strongly evoked in this building. Richard Goodwin's preoccupation and *RBBt's* concern with fundamental formal elements are clearly evident in this project, and are brought together in a strong, singular gesture.

Whereas other *RBBt* projects have been noted for their careful detailing, this building lacks finesse at close range. In the context of a limited budget, the architects have made the bigger

idea the priority, and the clarity of the formal gesture is indeed the building's strength. The building is not about finish, and the finer details don't really matter.

While the *Goodwin-Murray* surgery is conceptually a single stroke, the *Ryde House* is more layered in both concept and realization.

In responding to the conventional problem of how to extend an existing Federation style house, *RBBt* with Goodwin have referred to the old building in less conventional ways. The relationship of new to old is often reduced to a simple contrast of styles between two forms, with or without a transitional zone between them. In this case, the old and new are clearly discernible from one another but the distinctions and connections are more subtle and equivocal.

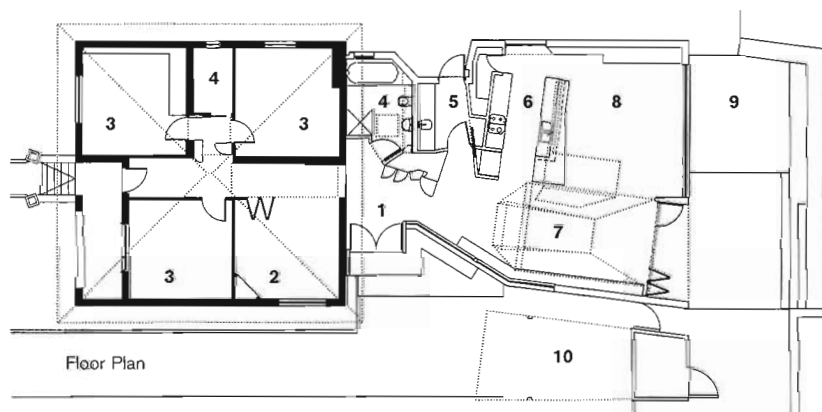
The original house is typical of its style, and is part of a consistent streetscape. The extension is located at the rear >>



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Elevation



Floor Plan

- 1 Entry
- 2 Sitting
- 3 Bedroom
- 4 Bathroom
- 5 Laundry
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Dining
- 8 Living
- 9 Courtyard
- 10 Carport

>> of the site, facing east. Again, the new work refers to the old house for formal and material clues.

The external walls of the extension are constructed from brown brick work which is virtually identical to that of the original house. While suggesting continuity in this way, they nevertheless deviate in plan - "wriggling", (to use Reinmuth's term), anti-orthogonal, out from the old box toward the expansive rear yard. As architectural elements they are ambiguous. On first glance at the plan, and indeed on arrival at the entry point between the old and new structures, they suggest a planar, open expression - walls as planes reaching out into the landscape. On further exploration of the building, this is undermined: wall surfaces are not continuous from inside to out; wall ends are bound back to contain spaces (not free to extend or end according to their own logic); and where these walls might have continued out independent of the roof, they are instead reigned in by it. These are ideas which Reinmuth talks

about - his interest in ambiguous similarities to and differences from the old house, and the idea of house as container.

Where the old house has a traditional, tiled, hipped roof, the new is clad with 'trimdeck' steel sheet roofing. Also, the roof is visually separated from the top edge of the external walls by an exaggerated recess. This detail and the material suggest wall-as-plane and roof-as-canopy or cap but there is no lightness to this roof. Instead it has an inordinate mass, due to the roof form and a very heavy fascia. The "snorkel" (*RBB's* word) appears from outside as a bulky, awkward protrusion from (or distortion of) the roof. It seems to relate to the hip form of the old roof, particularly in section, but in reality this undermines its scale, making it seem too small. The fascia tapers up from not-much to a huge one metre in height, and at one point it extends down to the ground to form a skinny wall end.

Internally, the potential for expansiveness suggested by the opening-out, "wriggling", walls is inverted.



Opposite page: The scale and materials of the extension relate to the existing house while providing new forms that connect the interior and exterior spaces. This page, clockwise from top left: The threshold between the interior and exterior is amplified and extended at the doors from the dining area; the complex interior spaces underneath the "snorkel"; the sleek, sculptural interior takes on a new character after dark.



Floor, wall and ceiling surfaces are truncated abruptly at thresholds or window frames. The space is dominated by a large kitchen joinery unit and contained by a huge fixed window that seems too close and too closed. The snorkel opens to the north-west to gain extra sun, lifting the ceiling and drawing the space skyward in an almost cathedral-like way. Again, there is an intentional contrast between the potential for openness and the reality of containment. The snorkel counters the contained space strongly and it almost feels oppressive on the ground with so much light and air above. Importantly though, neither the architects nor their clients seem to agree - the sense of containment was desired and the space is active with signs of living. They love it.

All of this is very considered and deliberate. *RBBt*'s and Goodwin's interests as described by Gerard Reinmuth are all there. The house is rich with ideas, layers of meaning and subtlety, but ultimately, as a building to move through, it feels to me like a too

contained place which is somewhat cut off from the larger site and environment.

Gerard Reinmuth discusses these buildings in the context of Sydney architecture, and as stepping outside of what he describes as a tradition of anti-intellectualism. Whether you agree with that or not, these buildings certainly seem to be more about exploring concepts than place-making for the senses. In the case of the *Goodwin-Murray* surgery, the building works on both levels - as place and as an expression of ideas. While the *Ryde House* is more conceptually ambitious and layered, I believe it is less successful as place. Together, though, and in the context of earlier works by *RBBt*, these are serious, considered, skillful projects by tenacious architects who care deeply about what they do. While there will always be disagreement as to what is good or appropriate or beautiful, we can never have enough buildings designed and executed with passion and integrity. M53

**Project Name:** Ryde House: "The Snorkel"  
**Architects:** Reinmuth Blythe Balmforth terroir and Richard Goodwin Art/Architecture Pty Ltd  
**Project Team:** Gerard Reinmuth, Richard Blythe, Scott Balmforth, Richard Goodwin, Tamara Donnellan, Jason Hammond  
**Engineer:** Simpson Design Associates (Andrew Simpson)  
**Quantity surveyor:** Currie and Brown (Chris Bylett)  
**Time to complete:** 18 months  
**Council:** Ryde City Council  
**Client:** Julie and Terry Kerim  
**External Walls:** Bowral Bricks "Gertrudis Brown"  
**Cladding:** Fibre-Cement Sheet Cladding  
**Roof:** Trimdeck Hi Ten (Heritage Red)  
**Guttering:** Custom Colorbond Guttering  
**Paint:** Dulux "New Hammersley Brown" and to match Colorbond "Heritage Red"  
**Paving:** Existing  
**Windows & Glazings:** To the Mill  
**Hardware:** Lockwood  
**Heating/cooling systems:** Floor heating by Devi-Heat  
**Ceiling:** Plasterboard and Jarrah Veneer Panels  
**Internal walls:** Plasterboard  
**Paint:** Dulux "Berkshire White", Colorbond "Heritage Red", Laminex "Stipple Seal"  
**Flooring:** Concrete sealed with Concretor's Warehouse proprietary sealant, custom-mixed  
**Joinery & Wall Panelling:** Custom Interiors Pty Ltd.  
**Joinery Finishes:** Jarrah veneer and Laminex "Stipple Seal"  
**Bathroom Fittings & fixtures:** Caroma  
**Miscellaneous Fixtures and Fittings:** Madinoz