

residential08

The
Architect's
Home

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Architectural Review Australia 107

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contributing writers

Mark van den Eenden is a practising architect and urban designer, and Practice Design Manager at Suters Prior Cheney. **Peggy Deamer** is a Professor at the Yale School of Architecture and principal in the firm of Deamer Studio. She has written for *Assemblage*, *Praxis*, *Perspecta*, and *Drawing/Building/Text*. She is also the co-editor of *The Millennium House* and *Re-Reading Perspecta*. **Louise Noble** practises architecture and urban design in Brisbane and is a regular contributor to the national architecture media. **David Neustein** has regularly contributed to a number of Australian design publications and has studied architecture and industrial design at the University of Sydney, RMIT and Fabrica, Italy. He currently runs his own design studio and teaches in the Master of Architecture program at the University of Melbourne. **Geoffrey London** is the Victorian Government Architect and Professor in the School of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts at The University of Western Australia. **Simon Anderson** is Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts at The University of Western Australia. **Richard Goodwin** is a sculptor, artist and architect, and a Professor at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW. **Leigh Woolley** is Principal of Leigh Woolley Architect + Urban Design Consultant and Adjunct Professor at the School of Architecture and Design UTAS. **Peter Bickle** is a Senior Associate at Ashton Raggatt McDougall and a sessional teacher at RMIT. **Stephen Neille** is head of the Department of Architecture and Interior Architecture at Curtin University. **Paul Owen** is a principal of Brisbane architectural practice Owen + Vokes. **Peter Moran** is an architect in private practice in Perth. He has a Master of Architecture degree from UWA. **Shane Murray** is a practising architect and academic. His research interests include architectural design and contemporary housing. In November 2007 he was appointed Foundation Professor of Architecture and inaugural Head of Department for the new Department of Architecture in the Faculty of Art & Design at Monash University. **Angelo Candalepas** is Director of Sydney-based architectural practice Candalepas Associates.

The Architect's Home Design Notes

For architects, the design of their own home has historically served as a unique opportunity to test ideas; a laboratory of innovation that feeds a broader design philosophy. In curating this special issue on the architect's house, we asked those involved how the challenge of designing their own homes has enriched and informed the broader design development of their practice. Their responses follow, an insight not just into their methodologies and approach, but also into the pleasures, and perils, of designing for oneself.



Simon Pental, Rebecca Angus Fremantle House

The house seems like the end of one thing and the start of something else. It has marked a transitional phase for us as practitioners in this regard. It's the first of our projects that feels truly whole. We were able to make small experiments at our own risk, each of which seems to have paid off. It enabled us to define more fully our core concerns, process, working methods and our documentation practices.

Scott Balmforth, Terroir Balmforth Residence

The design of my home paralleled a period of intense scrutiny undertaken by fellow Terroir Director Gerard Reinmuth and myself into our design philosophy and methodology as part of a collaborative research program in the RMIT Invitational Masters program. In fact, our final presentation was in the same week that construction commenced! This project thus became for me a further magnification of the design processes we had adopted and that the Masters research highlighted.

Yet it also provided an interesting corollary – Gerard and I had developed from the outset of Terroir an apparent singularity and the Masters highlighted the criticality of the ongoing 'conversation' between us to our joint design philosophy and approach. In the case of this project, however, which was outside the oeuvre of typical office projects, my grasping for external comment from Gerard was spasmodic and the comments were more circumspect than normal. Rather than, "Let's do this", his tendency was to say, "Well, you could try that." That is, "I am giving you a suggestion but this is your own house." Thus I began to understand the comments of Melbourne architect Allan Powell at one of our Masters' panel presentations: he enviously noted the luxury Gerard and I enjoy of being able to have an ongoing conversation on design, whereas he had to have such a conversation in his own mind. I think I shared some of Allan's mind space in this project.

Yet it was far from a project in isolation. It developed as these projects find a way of developing without the tortuous client deadlines, or reluctance to experiment hanging overhead – via many ideas from past projects, while also providing a playground of sorts for the willful exploration of new ideas.

Perhaps the most poignant reflection I could make relates to the manner in which this project symbolises the development of our collaborative practice approach, where this intensely personal work can still sit comfortably within the body of work established by Terroir to date. If anything, this is a confirmation of the tightness with which we work through ideas as a collaborative group, regardless of location or type.

01.
Fremantle House, Simon Pental
and Rebecca Angus.

02.
Balmforth Residence, Scott
Balmforth.

architects

Scott Balmforth (Terroir)

photography

Jonathan Wherrett

text

Richard Goodwin

*The
Architect's
Home*
**Balmforth
Residence**

architect's statement

This house for my family is within a former warehouse in the inner suburb of north Hobart. The narrow street has a contrast of industrial and residential uses, yet this is the first house in the street within an industrial building.

The existing saw-tooth roof warehouse had a concrete floor area of 300 square metres and behind full height metal sliding doors along the rear was a land-locked yard adjoining another vacant lot. The net rear yard was around 600 square metres. This facilitated a joint purchase with another family member where a dividing wall through the existing warehouse space would deliver sufficient space for two dwellings.

The change of use has maintained much of the former street-front character. The street-front austerity is fully intended to dramatically contrast with the unexpected interior, a readymade exemplar of the counterpoint between a blunt external form and a rich interior common to many Terroir projects. Whereas in the past this was due to tight budgets, this project involved a definite choice.

The project developed on and off over a three-year period – a lengthy gestation which is attributed to both attending to the demands of a busy office and the struggle and opportunity that is designing one's own home. In the process one is confronted with many thoughts of past and present issues explored in the practice projects and the potential for innovation and exploration afforded by the opportunity to embark on a project where you are the client.

The new interior seeks to retain the character of the former use while meeting the demands for segregation and enclosure that come with providing a home for a family in a large, open shell that does not lend itself to fending off a cold Hobart winter.

Through-views from street to rear were crucial to maintaining the depth of space that was a privilege to inherit in the existing building. Most internal walls run parallel to the through views and establish a physical reverberation off the central wall dividing the two dwellings within the existing warehouse. Closed rooms such as the upper level bedrooms run along the dividing wall whereas in contrast the opposite side wall is relatively intact and runs alongside larger spaces which recall the openness of the warehouse.

The 'hands-on' approach during construction, with a builder who was familiar with our projects, enabled further development on-site. In particular, this enabled a degree of toying with various details that is generally not possible in projects. This toying is also a carry-over of the manner in which we approach design research at Terroir, using various mediums at hand, from CAD to cardboard. In this project, toying with cardboard in miniature was replaced with toying in full scale with things such as managing views and privacy through imperceptible changes in the 'grain' direction of expanded metal sheeting, fold out openings in existing metal clad doors like an advent calendar, right down to rock climbing grips as door handles.



01.
Originally a plumbers workshop, the conversion retains a raw quality that is rare in a family residence.

02.
The building's garage also serves as its foyer, a gesture that reads as an acknowledgment of the architectural rights of the car.

03.
The mezzanine level is veiled with expanded mesh, mediating views to the living area below.

balmforth residence

Driving down a quaint Hobart street of neat brick houses and mixed development, we pause as a roller door opens in the face of an otherwise ordinary factory, complete with painted plumbers sign. Scott Balmforth's suitably scuffed BMW glides into his home, narrowly missing the children's bikes and prams. The view through the windscreen is also a view through the windscreen of the house – the garage serving as the building's foyer.

The obvious advantage of such a device is to immediately increase the size of habitation, but it also appropriately acknowledges the architectural rights of the car. The car is, after all, a significant part of the built fabric of our lives, and its mute presence within the home serves as an interesting reminder of this condition.

We enter the Balmforth family home and factory conversion via the dark expanding wedge shaped corridors of the ground floor. The predominant colour is black, primarily dictated by the use of form-ply as a wall surface – but black is not black. Whether in the case of the form-ply, tiles, or cabinetry within the kitchen, the various types of black reveal reflections and colour trapped within. Upstairs, in a creamy contrast, limed plywood takes you to the light.

On entry, views instantly unfold through to the garden at the other end of the house and a huge, rust red wall that frames the outdoor space, rendering some reflections pink.

The central ground wedge holds toilets, kitchen, cellar storage and living retreat, all of which enjoy views of the yard.

The space then opens to full height beneath industrial sawtooth skylights and a huge block wall, complete with paint stains and scars. Unlike many such conversions the factory toughness remains. Materials used are precisely drawn, but also ready to be scarred with family memories. The huge kitchen bench in timber is testament to this potential.

The design doesn't feel too finished – a trap that most architects fall into with homes. Terroir is well known for its continuous design lines and labyrinthine spaces. Originally inspired by the works of such luminaries as Enric Miralles, its work now reflects an understanding of the flow of spaces from inside to outside, particularly in relation to the landscape of Tasmania. The mastery of Terroir's architects is evidenced here, especially when one moves upstairs and along a double wedge shaped corridor that culminates in a future study overlooking the lounge. Skylights illuminate the limed plywood, which opens to four bedrooms and bathrooms. The mezzanine is cleverly screened from the double height space with expanded mesh gently opening and closing views as one walks along its length. I only worried about the size of the master bedroom, perhaps shortened by the needs of three children.



**04.**

While the use of form ply as a surfacing material ensures the predominant colour within the house is black, its reflective qualities allow for a surprisingly rich chromatic variance.

05.

Incisions in the wall of the stairwell facilitate the passage of light.

06.

A view to the street, through the garage/foyer. Many of the building's features (triangular reveals, mesh cladding, portals at both ends of the building) combine to lend it a porous quality.

07. 08.

The residence in its lived-in, furnished state.



Simple materials are also given weight and style through attention to detail. The main central blade wall upstairs culminates in a laminated plywood edge of 150-millimetres of end-grain. The plywood stairs leading upstairs feature gill-like folded cuts to allow light through to the darker spaces below.

A second stair also leads you from the lounge to a generous space above the garage which forms the children's play area. It also employs a folding triangular panel to reveal or conceal the contents to the main space of the house.

As if in conversation with the building's front roller-door access, the lounge has retained the factory's original door. Slots have been cut within its galvanised steel panel cladding to give glimpses of the view, replete with the cut and folded remnants of steel plate acting as fixed shutters.

However, the entire wall can be moved over to open half the house to the elements. This is truly dramatic, especially when it reveals a tough outdoor space, not only held by a neighbouring rust coloured concrete wall but also the division between Scott and his brother's half of the factory, using basalt filled gabions as a mountainous barrier.

The final landscaping and decks are yet to be completed. This work will feature a sea of basalt rocks between timber decks and planting. The current environment features the usual toys, seats, dog enclosure and bits and pieces of family life. Gravel and bits of asphalt mixed with patches of turf make up a barren children's adventure playground, which looks like fun. Complete or not, this environment is full of the potential that any family needs in order to be adaptable to the ongoing flux of life. It's not overdone.

None of these realities takes away from the success of this adaptive re-use of a factory shell. Everything that could be re-used inventively has been harnessed. The rear elevation is the best example of this. The original folded Gal plate panels have been retained but sliced open for slot windows. The skylights are intact except for new windows to the bedrooms. It is possible to look through the entire house from the yard and see the car in the garage and even the street itself if the roller door is open.

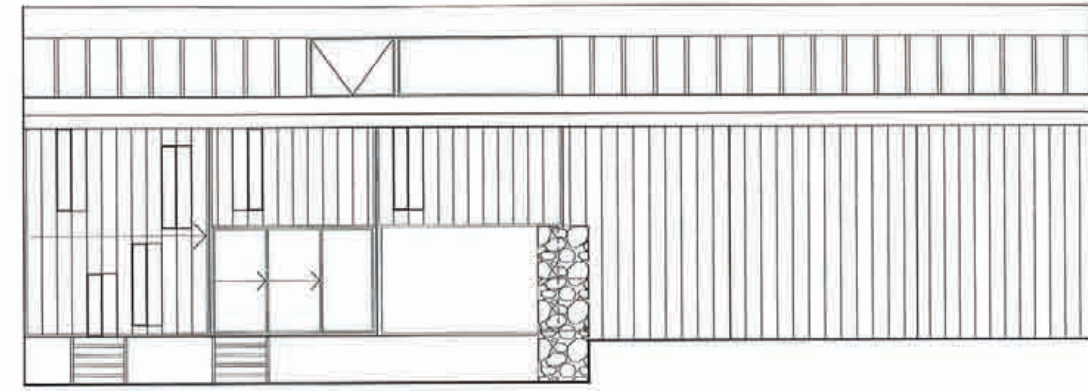
This project undoubtedly shows mastery and confidence of interpretation. Terroir and Balmforth have come of age. **ar**



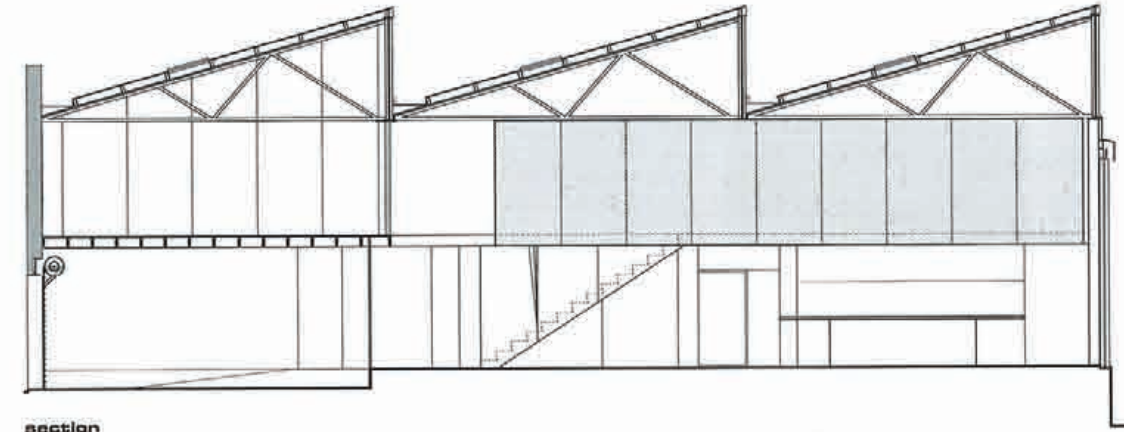


balmforth residence

principal architects Terroir Pty Ltd **project team** Scott Balmforth, Gerard Reinmuth, Richard Blythe, Paul Sayers, Nic Fabrizio, Cassandra Kiss, Bonnie Herring
project manager Scott Balmforth **engineer** Gandy and Roberts **builder** Tascon Constructions **other** Building Surveyor; Lee Tyers Building Surveyors
sub-contractors Electrical, Advanced Electrical, Plumbing, Applied Plumbing **size** 350 square metres **time to complete** Construction; 6 months **council** Hobart City Council **client** Scott and Fiona Balmforth **design tools** Autodesk AutoCad 2008, Autodesk 3DS Max 8 **internal wall lining** Upper-level: Arouca Ply (limewashed), Brewsters. Lower-level: Formply, Brewsters **internal steel cladding** Expanded metal Expamet, Perforated and Expanded Metal Company **roof** Zinalume Custom Orb, Bluescope **ceiling** Galvanised metal sheet, Hill Sheet Metal **ceiling** Expanded metal Expamet, Perforated and Expanded Metal Company **ceiling** 10mm Plasterboard, CSR **guttering** existing **windows** Vantage, Glass Supplies **rooftlights** Velux **doors** Solid laminated doors Arouca Ply and Formply, Custom Cabinets **hardware** Access Hardware **signage** existing **heating/cooling systems** Hydronic Biasi, Hunt Heating **paint** Antique White USA, Dulux **tiles** Bathroom and Ensuite Artic Nero 300x600, Rossetto-Tiles **lighting/lighting fittings** Southern Lighting **flooring** Concrete sealed finish **carpet** Carpet Company **plywood** Polyurethane with liming stain, Carpet Company **kitchen joinery** 2 pak on American veneer, Kingston Joinery **dining table** Laminated ply floor joists on original butchers block, Kingston Joinery **cooktop/ovens** Fisher & Paykel **rangehood** Quosair **dishwasher** Miele **window furnishings** Auto roller blinds, Boniwell Blinds **door handles** Climbing grip holds, Climbing Edge **roller door** Tom Moore and Son



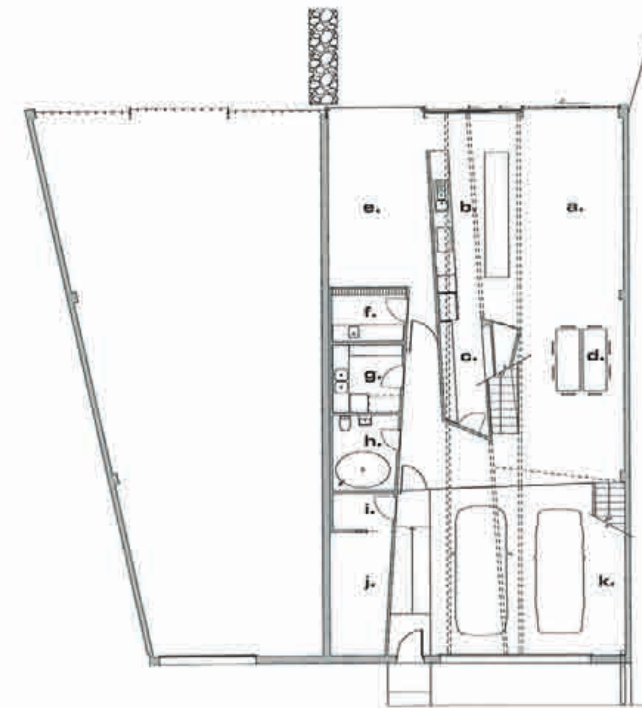
south elevation



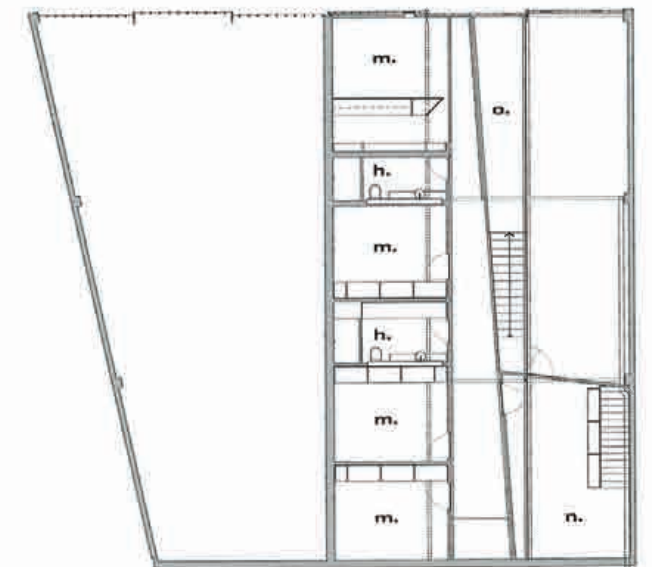
section

legend.

- a. living area 01
- b. kitchen
- c. pantry
- d. dining
- e. living area 02
- f. cellar
- g. laundry
- h. bathroom
- i. cloak room
- j. store
- k. garage
- l. garden
- m. bedroom
- n. playroom
- o. study



ground level plan



level 01 plan