

architecture

inspired by Australia



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Tasmania

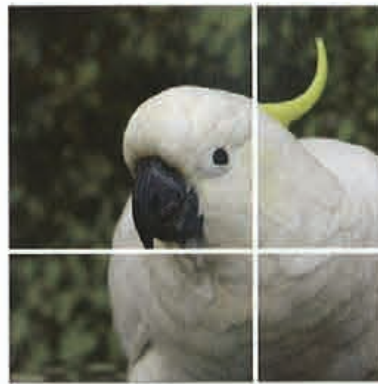


Mt Rumney

Mt Rumney is part of the Meehan Range, the dominant geographical feature of Hobart's eastern shore. At 378m high, the mountain affords expansive views eastwards to Frederick Henry Bay and the Tasman Peninsula, southwards to South Arm and Storm Bay as well as westward to the Derwent River and Mt Wellington. Mt Rumney is a 15-minute drive from the Hobart CBD encircled by farmland and human habitation, yet it remains an intact woodland of mainly blue gum, white gum and white peppermint.

The mountain was named after William Rumney, a pound keeper and constable in the area in the 1820s, and who by 1828 was the major landowner in the area to the south and east of the peak. Today, the settlements on Hobart's eastern shore are among the fastest growing on Tasmania with subdivision opening up farmland into semi-rural lifestyle blocks. The area is close to both the city as well as the bush, but perhaps what draws most to Mt Rumney is the region's rich bounty of fine swimming beaches, golf courses and vineyards.

Mt Rumney has a high concentration of dry country mainland flora species at the southern limit of their distributional range. These include a canopy of gum and peppermint trees and an under-storey of native grasses, herbs and various orchids. During the cooler times of the day, the bush thrums with native birdlife – the most unmistakable of which is the sulphur-crested cockatoo, whose calling card is its raucous cry. Most often heard before they are seen, these intelligent and gregarious birds have a life expectancy comparable to humans, some living to over 100 years old.



Cockatoo

Stealth House



Practice : Terroir Pty Ltd
Architects : Richard Blythe, Scott Balmforth, Gerard Reinmuth
Photographer : Ray Joyce



The house's broken and irregular profile of dark colour is meant to become a shadow, to be seen out of the corner of the eye.



Stealth House

In the architects' words, "... [this] house furthers explorations into the development of a place-based architecture – but one which extends notions of place from topography, climate and vegetation to one inclusive of cultural and societal narratives. In this rural subdivision, these narratives include the role of the uncanny and unexpected." These words summarize both the general intentions of our book and the firm's letterhead translation of their own name: "Terroir: French term that describes the 'soul' of a particular site as resulting from the interplay between natural elements at that site and from the role played by human occupation transformation over time."

And a clue is in that "human occupation", a process which irrevocably changes the landscape from the first day. Indeed, the term "landscape" itself describes a particular genre of painting which arose at the time when architecture and gardening became especially preoccupied with re-forming the natural into an attractive "picture". From that 18th-century, largely English, version of the process to the 20th-century suburb (likewise a feature of English-based countries) is a short journey. To quote the architects again: "The large scale allotments contribute to the aspiration for "rural" living, but in fact only amplify suburban issues..."



So the house's dark colour is meant to become a shadow, to be seen out of the corner of the eye, like the Dreamtime People or their descendants. Its broken and irregular profile is a technique from an earlier war: the dazzle-painting of WWI ships, designed not to conceal something too large to conceal, but to distract the eye. The long footprint of the plan might not seem consistent with this goal, but experience has taught that a more "compact" plan often implies two levels, and as many metres of exposed wall. The linear plan, like many others in this book, also maximizes both winter solar intake and cross-ventilation for every room.

The volume of the house is folded in both the horizontal and vertical plans, providing many micro-variations in room shape and glazed openings. It is, paradoxically, set on a concrete surface with two parallel walls, and this disjuncture of geometries provides a doorstep as well as fragmentary "mini-decks" for the study and dining room. Thus the house's complex and up-to-date geometry is founded on that most quintessential feature of an Australian suburb, the slab-at-grade.

