



Fortress

Drawing from Medieval architecture
Renato D'Ettore has designed
a contemporary fortress



Kazuyo Sejima | Geoff Crosby | Grose Bradley | Stuart Yokes
Esmond Dorney | Williams & Tsien | Virginia Kerridge

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Cover / Renato D'Ettorre's Coogee House. Photography by Bart Malorana.

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Fortress

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The Young House / 1959, Sandy Bay, Hobart / Tasmania
Architect / Esmond Dorney

The Young House then & now

The Young House, designed in 1959, is Esmond Dorney's best known residential work. The significance of the house lies in the way it describes in formal and spatial terms the role played by the architect and his work in Tasmanian architecture

Compiled by Gerard Roinmuth
Photography by Leigh Woolley

● Dorney was always something of an outsider. Arriving in Tasmania from Melbourne after the war, Dorney never really assimilated into the local architecture culture. He remained, quite deliberately, something of an outcast from the local scene, living in isolation on Fort Nelson from where he devised a series of guerilla-like interventions in the local built environment and landscape. Sited prominently above the suburb of Sandy Bay, the Young House appears as an alien, or implant, relating more to the Melbourne work of the period than any Tasmanian precedents. However, this formal language hides, and then on closer inspection reveals, Dorney's understanding of the complex nature of Hobart's topography, climate, and prospect – an understanding rarely found in the work of his contemporaries.

Dorney's work provides a classic example of an architect who, through 'foreign' eyes, was able to perceive and explain the essence of a place in a way that escaped local architects perhaps blinded by their familiarity with it. The relevance of this house then extends far beyond its Tasmanian context, providing clues toward the resolution of both local, place-related issues and the wider international discourse demanded in a world connected through the information superhighway.

Gerard Reinmuth is a graduate architect with Denton Corker Marshall in Sydney and a regular contributor to *Architectural Review Australia*. Plans and elevations supplied by Petrina Moore.



Leigh Woolley

Leigh Woolley / Craig Rosevear Architects, Hobart

Life in Hobart is inseparable from its terrain. Each of Dorney's dwellings engenders an architecture reflecting the particularity of its site and prospect. For me, growing up around the corner from the house at 536 Churchill Avenue, Dorney was simply 'the architect on the hill' – his own home occupying the ridge of nearby Porter Hill (Fort Nelson). Examples of his work were not only identifiably different they were also prolific, dotted along the developing subdivisions making their way over nearby and distant hills. Friends lived in another Dorney house further along Churchill Avenue – here spaces also flowed, levels were split, walls of glass embraced the view, a bituminised deck shot forward grabbing the distant hills while masking the nearby roadway, inside and outside were dissolved by changing light reflected on raking and curved ceilings. Esmond Dorney's domestic work expresses (apparently wilfully) the

complex diversity of locations within this setting. From dwellings claiming the high ground and circular in plan, to those running along slopes which cant and fold with the changing contour, all continue to offer a discourse on designing with the character and form of this place.

Nicholas Murcutt

Nicholas Murcutt Architect, Sydney
Churchill Avenue winds its way like a domestic gallery along the back of the wealthy suburb of Sandy Bay. Well spaced houses push out from a steep hill side, each presiding over the Derwent River below. The end of the avenue slows at two opposing bends with the Dorney house on the high side very close to the street edge. I had been in Hobart for only a few months but it stood out against the comfortable sameness. Hobart is very strong on styles, stemming from a history of consensus amongst architects. As I discovered, Dorney remained independent from the architectural community developing his own expressionistic style.

The uniqueness of this work seemed to heighten its theatricality. Sandstone flagging, slatted timber screens and two interlocking roof vaults over a deep set carport gave great complexity to the street facade. The planning inside seemed to work around the effect of this front lounge and entrance area. Detailing was rudimentary compared to the very good building stock of Hobart; he was not deterred by box gutters, built up rooves and stick-like steel columns. I was thinking of doing a booklet on the building so I organised to have lunch with Esmond Dorney, who at the time was in his eighties. His own memory of the house was not clear, but there was a discussion about the work of Romberg and other Melbourne architects of the period. He showed me some photographs of Sandringham District Hospital in Melbourne, designed by Dorney but documented by Conarg Architects. For some reason he never worked at that scale in Hobart. On the whole we didn't talk much about architecture. He did tell me however that the faceted three metre high glass wall

in front of us (with a spectacular view) had recently blown out. He said that as it had stayed up for some time he saw no reason to do anything but replace the glass, methods unchanged.

Paddy Dorney

Research Architect, University of Tasmania

The war was a watershed for my father. Despite the quality of his pre war Melbourne design work, he never referred to it again. Inspired to move to Hobart by the topography, which commonly grants magnificent aspects, the visual generosity of the landscape became a prime generator of his design. His style quickly metamorphosed, adopting light, innovative structures, maximising glazing and so natural light and an intimacy with the abundant natural landscape. His introduction to

almost exclusively from academic to academic over its lifetime. The house hovers above the street. Entrance, from the earthbound glare of the footpath, is punctuated by the shade of the canopy/carport/deck, before turning up floating stairs that puncture the deck to reveal light and breathtaking view. The events facilitating entrance find strong analogy in the revelatory experience of ascending in an aeroplane through cloud. Esmond, after all, was a pilot. Access to the internal spaces from the deck turns through a small, glass-screened garden to the side which defends the door from itinerant visitors and the strong north wind. Despite its fully glazed front facade this is a very private house. Denying the successful previous exploration of circular curvaceous plan form in his house (1949) and beach



Tasmania of the most radical aspects of the Melbourne School was a revolution for many young architects and perhaps disturbing to the more conservative practitioners. The lack of wider recognition of his work might be traced to this conservative establishment response.

The post war boom in the numbers of young professionals, academics and well-educated European migrants created a pool of clients open to new ideas. The Young House, perhaps now the best known of Esmond's work from this period, has had ownership passed

house (1957), the Young House, in plan, adopts rectilinear form and a more sophisticated hierarchy in deference to its suburban context. The design however contains essential elements of the vocabulary already fully developed in the Dorney beach house: visually and tectonically light, incorporating the aesthetic and structural strength of the curved corrugated iron roof and steel frame with which he is now so often identified. One of the significant measures of Esmond's buildings is how little alteration they have endured over time. Recently, I

took some students through the Young House, and on showing us in the owner introduced it thus – "before you look around, let me just say... we love living in this house."

Michael Viney

Forward Viney and Partners, Hobart Angelo Mangiarotti once said, structure was a means to an end and nothing more than that.

Esmond's work and particularly the Young House fulfil and visually describe this meaning. The house forms a part of his continued exploration of the relationship between the straight line and the curve as a fundamental formal determinant and is a 'classical' architectural opposition.

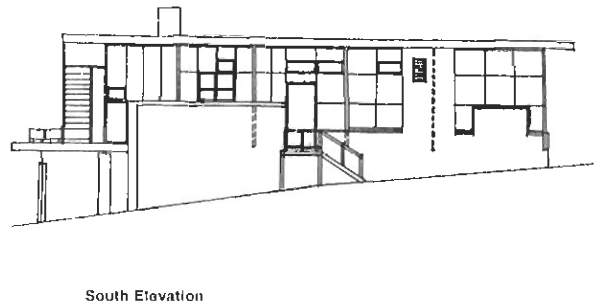
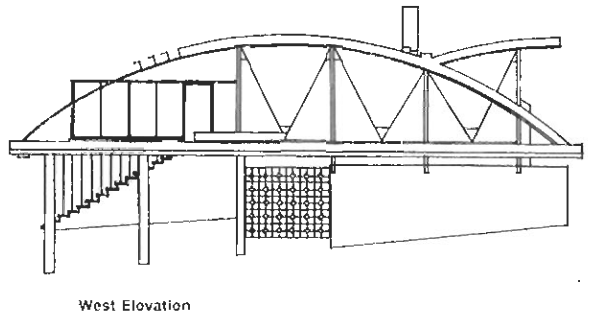
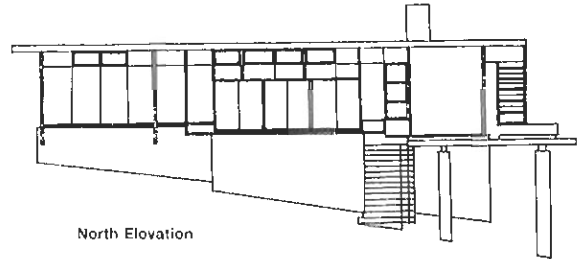
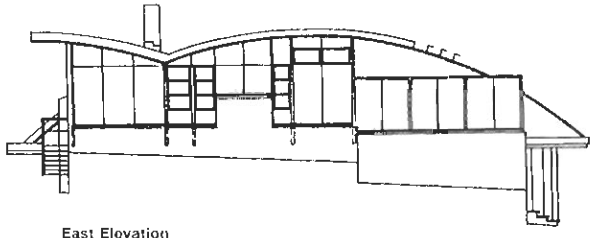
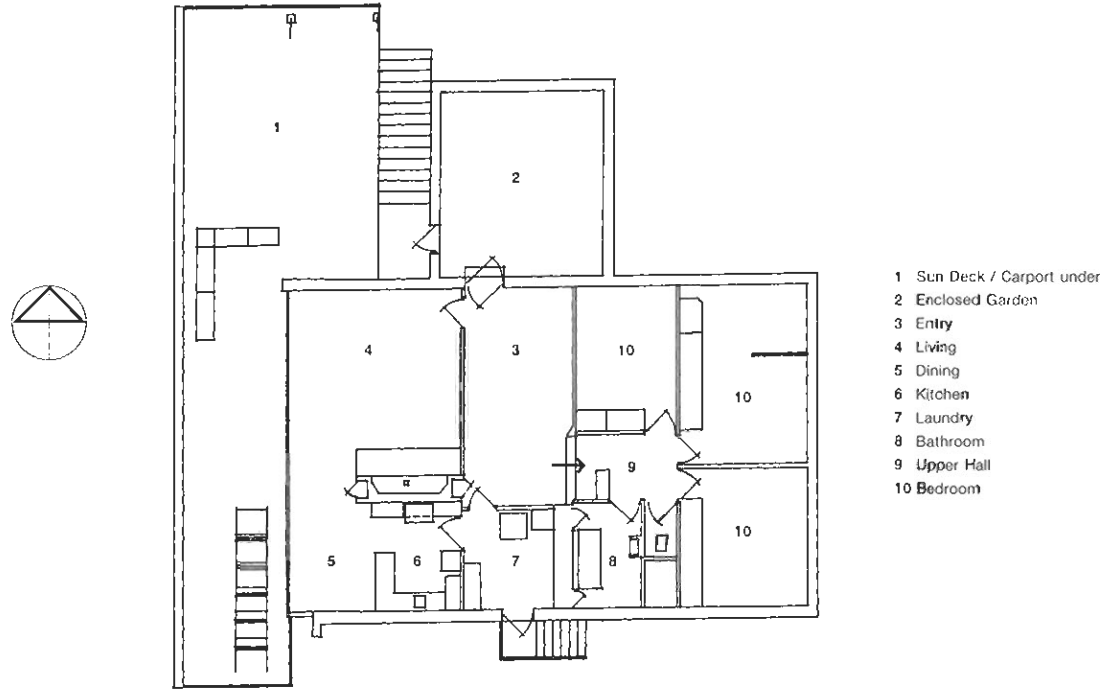
In 1952 Robin Boyd described the conflict between functionalist work and the more Organic buildings of the local revolutionaries as a stimulus to the development of Australian Architecture. Esmond's work is certainly stimulating and carries that most elusive quality of a contradiction between the past and present, and in distinguishing the present as modern – 'a transition from the old to the new' (Jurgen Habermas). With this house Esmond has arranged the juxtaposition of intersecting segments to reinterpret the butterfly roof form and give it a new and dominant expression. The diagonal window framing provides a dynamic departure from the Mondrian and Deco derivatives of the day. Here they work as a linking device at the facade plane facing the primary elements. The light segment chord carries the geometry to the floor plane restraining the visual carry of the weighted roof expression – the enclosing element. The base stability in its elevated form sets the pattern and establishes a planer relationship with the river and a consequent interaction. The space opens to this broad expanse of surface and the rolling hills beyond while enclosing and containing within.

True to the artist's unique vision we are taken from a point of knowledge/perception to a new place and provided with the potential for a new experience, an allegory of flight.

Craig Rosevear

Leigh Woolley/Craig Rosevear Architects, Hobart

As an architect in Hobart you cannot help but be aware of, drawn to, and influenced by Dorney's work, and in particular the Young House, his most prominent work. This modest building, like all Dorney's houses, is firmly anchored to the greater Hobart landscape a connection achieved here through two devices – roof and podium. The primary curve of the roof focuses the west mountain view and also turns your eye down the hill toward the river to the north. A secondary roof (south light) lifts to the skyline over Fort Nelson. The house courteously aligns with the street, placing the mountain in the distance off axis. An offset in the curved roof over the living space serves to reorient the viewer and therein subtly reinforces the gesture. A podium extends the main floor level outside the house, dissolving the edges of the room to provide a threshold outside the internal boundaries. This extension of the floor plane also cuts the immediate foreground from view and provides a platform from which the occupier gains a sense of soaring beyond the site. The aesthetic is derived from the expression of the structure which is lithe and efficient, expressing a relaxed understanding of engineering and materials. The structure and enclosure is rigorously detailed and faithfully constructed. That the house remains unaltered and in excellent condition dignifies the clarity of Dorney's design and interpretation of the program. The house distils and focuses the essential characteristics of the site and, in a word, is delightful.



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