

LIGHT AND MAGIC

project

Swan Street Residence

architects

Iredale Pedersen Hook Architects

photography

Peter Bennetts

review

Gerard Reinmuth

A new project in Perth from architects Iredale Pedersen Hook radically reinterprets suburban convention to deliver a residence that is anything but ordinary.

adaptation



**/01**

An addition to an existing residential building, IPH's Swan Street project reinterprets the morphology of the suburban bungalow.

/02

The traditional white picket fence that fringes the property has been capped with copper. As the copper weathers, it will stain the fence below, a vivid expression of the passage of time.

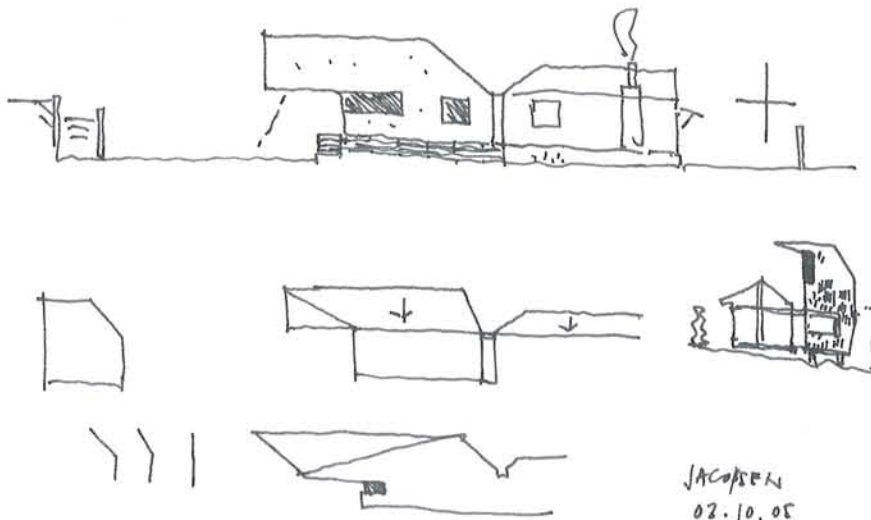
/03

Green polycarbonate serves to enhance the lush qualities of the surrounding suburban landscape.

architect's statement

The Swan Street Residence sits at the end of a mature tree-lined street; the narrowing of the street and the cul-de-sac resulted in an initial desire to create a project that was concerned with notions of discovery and retreat. The wooded street and a previous completed project on the edge of the city of Perth (Gooseberry Hill House, *AR101 Residential 07*) provided an opportunity to connect with the contextual, physical quality of the existing landscape and a subconscious connection to living on the edge of a city, the desire to be physically connected while offering natural landscape qualities that exist in outer suburban areas.

Green light and folding, light-filled spaces dominate the interior, while externally we explored formal connections to the existing circa 1920s house and the surrounding context. The strategically placed green light creates the illusion of landscape and is re-emitted to the street at night, producing an effect reminiscent of the coloured glass over the entrance doors of the neighbouring Federation homes.

**time**

Swan Street considers multiple moments of time – immediate time, daily time, seasonal time and long-term time.

This is partly achieved by the materiality that actively encourages the visibility of time. The recycled Jarrah timber battens that lap the vertical plywood joints will weather naturally based on their exposure to the elements, creating an evolving and inconsistent contrast with the dark, painted plywood panels. Slow time will emerge as the copper fence capping oxidises and stains the (manipulated) traditional, white painted picket fence. This is complemented with a mass of green-leaved Anigozanthos (Kangaroo Paw) planted at the base of the fence, flowering each spring against the 'evolving' qualities of the picket fence.

There are other, more immediate moments – the expression of the water flowing from the roof, the shifting sun patterns on the folding ceiling of the main bedroom, the deciduous trees placed on the axis of Olivia's room, the fractured prism of light that slowly moves up the wall and the diffuse and direct green light.

Eventually these become a collection of moments that require and demand contemplation... a distraction and challenge to the hyper digital residential world.

movement

The folding plan creates an a-perspective quality; traditional reference points are reduced to create an unfolding and refolding space in a dynamic equilibrium that responds to the activities of everyday living, carefully connecting interior and exterior in a mutually beneficial manner. Space is held in the delicate balance of reality and abstraction.

craft

Swan Street reinterprets the craft of a past time and the original Peppermint Grove and Mosman Park houses by Sir Talbot Hobbs and William Williams, while indirectly referencing Australian vernacular interpretations of the English Arts and Crafts houses by Eustace Cohen.

review: Swan Street House

I visited Iredale Pedersen Hook's (IPH) Swan Street house in December 2007, with the exterior 80 percent complete and the interior just starting to take shape. For much of that year I had been developing a position that placed the extension as a key project type in relation to issues of sustainability, and for that reason Swan Street house was of particular interest to me.

One of the problems with sustainability 'going mainstream' has been that the hard work required to convince society to genuinely consume less has been avoided in favour of the more palatable idea that we can achieve personal betterment via consumption. Disturbingly, this trend has been encouraged by many of the eco-practitioners within our profession, who, busy surfing the wave of liquidity that accompanies the distribution of ESD advice, encourage the consumption of supposedly 'sustainable' products, thus reinforcing the tendency of an advanced consumer society to deal with this issue by consuming more.

In response to this, I have suggested that sustainability is not only a technical issue, but perhaps more importantly an aesthetic one. That is to say that the consumer images we hold dear, the isolated bush shack, the all-white urban apartment and so on, are all reinforcing generally unsustainable positions. The reality of sustainability should be uglier – invoking the world of the parasite and the graft, the microsurgery that is involved in renewing something old and maintaining its store of carbon and, at the same time, minimising the extent (and thus the energy involved with) any adjustments or additions. This is quite a different approach to demolishing existing fabric and replacing it with a five-star or six-star rated project that, ironically, requires further mining, transportation and manufacturing than a small addition may do.

The extension as a type addresses sustainability on both energy and cultural grounds, but is constrained in its take-up by an architectural culture that struggles with the aesthetic of such projects. Thus Swan Street is important in my view as an exemplar

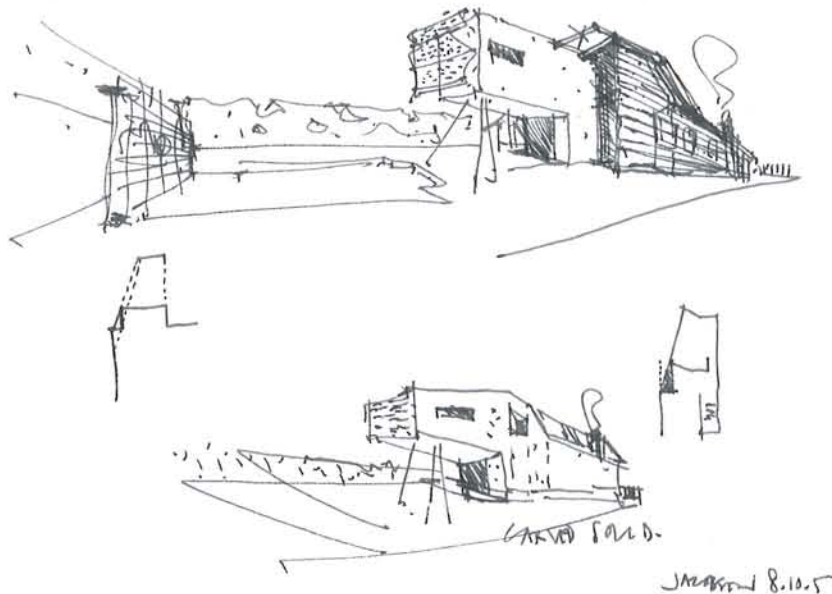
that challenges the approach of those who have corporatised the sustainability agenda and its expression via twirling propellers and solar panels (see 'Fatal Distraction', *AR105*, pp 40-44). Swan Street also has a more specific significance in the context of the work of IPH, where it signals a development of the suite of extensions completed by the practice over the past decade or so. Its best-known early project, the Reynolds residence, located a pavilion with a curved wall/roof up against an existing bungalow – a sort of juxtaposition of something with the optimism of the 1950s (the addition) with an original house from the 1920s, all completed in the 1990s. This pavilion was unashamedly a formal variant on the existing bungalow and would fit all arguments about a project being 'of its time' and expressing its era and so on, while still being connected to the existing house via a deft inflection at the neck where the two join.

This new project is therefore a relative of the older one, but here the deft inflection at the point of juncture has been inflated to encompass a whole project. The roofline of the existing house has been picked up and extended as a sort of jazz solo or improvisation. Not only is the roof extended, but it is also expanded upward to enable a whole second storey. The result is a curious zigzag riff, which is both of its suburb (in terms of the morphology of pitched roof bungalows) and also a completely new invention generated by the specifics at hand.

This improvised formal expression is also a development from the earlier house. The tightness of the Reynolds project – impressive for a young practice – has given way here to a collage of elements that are loosely related. This looseness hints at a deeper confidence in a practice that has already demonstrated it can do 'tight' as well as anyone and recalls the strategies of Adrian Iredale's hero Hans Scharoun, and Finn Pedersen's work in the desert, where IPH has tested these ideas in its own work.

The interiors are less successful in my view, the distinctiveness and inventive quality of the exterior strategy giving way to a more

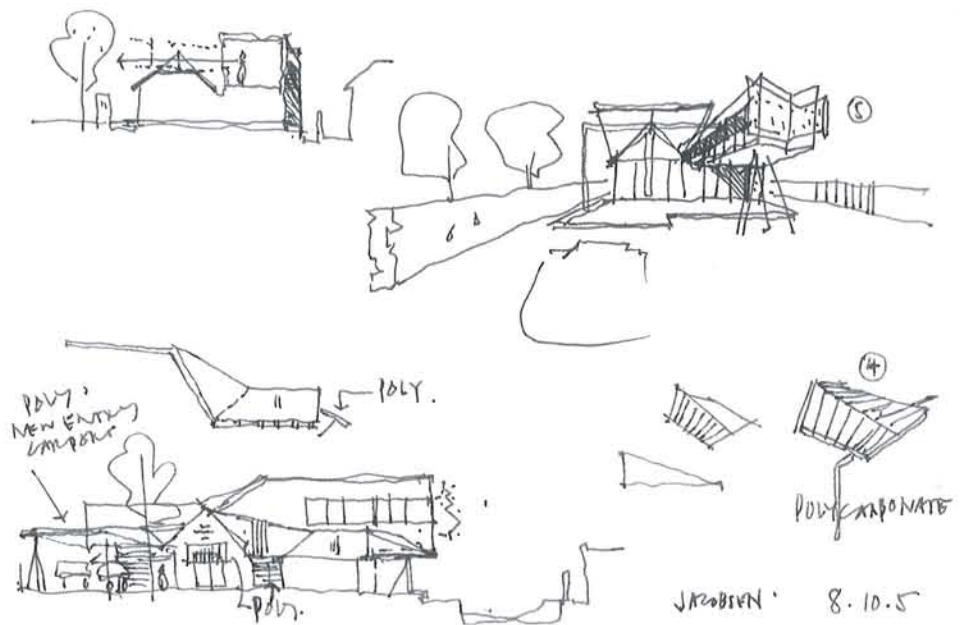
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/04

The house's folding dynamic is designed to facilitate the smooth integration of indoor and outdoor space.

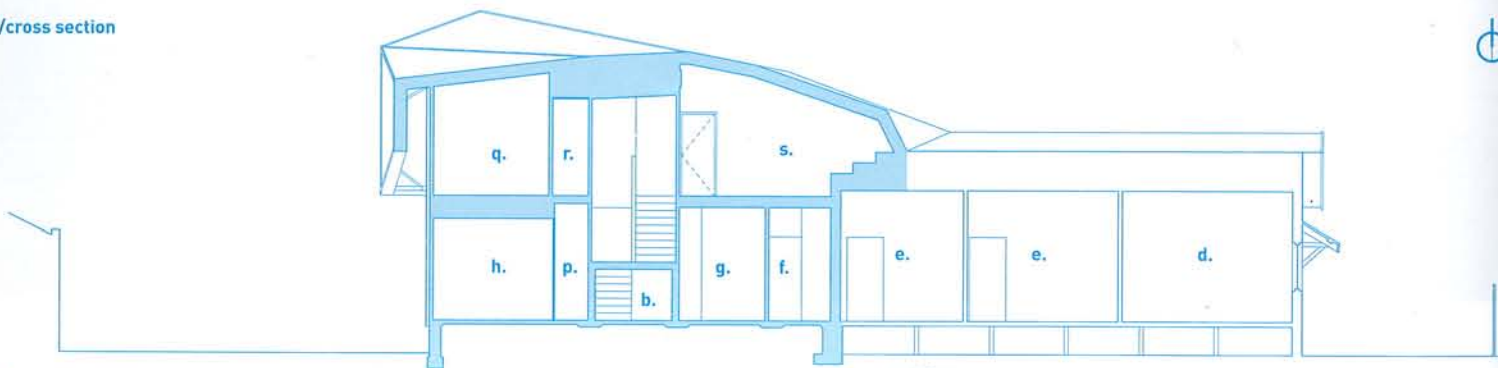




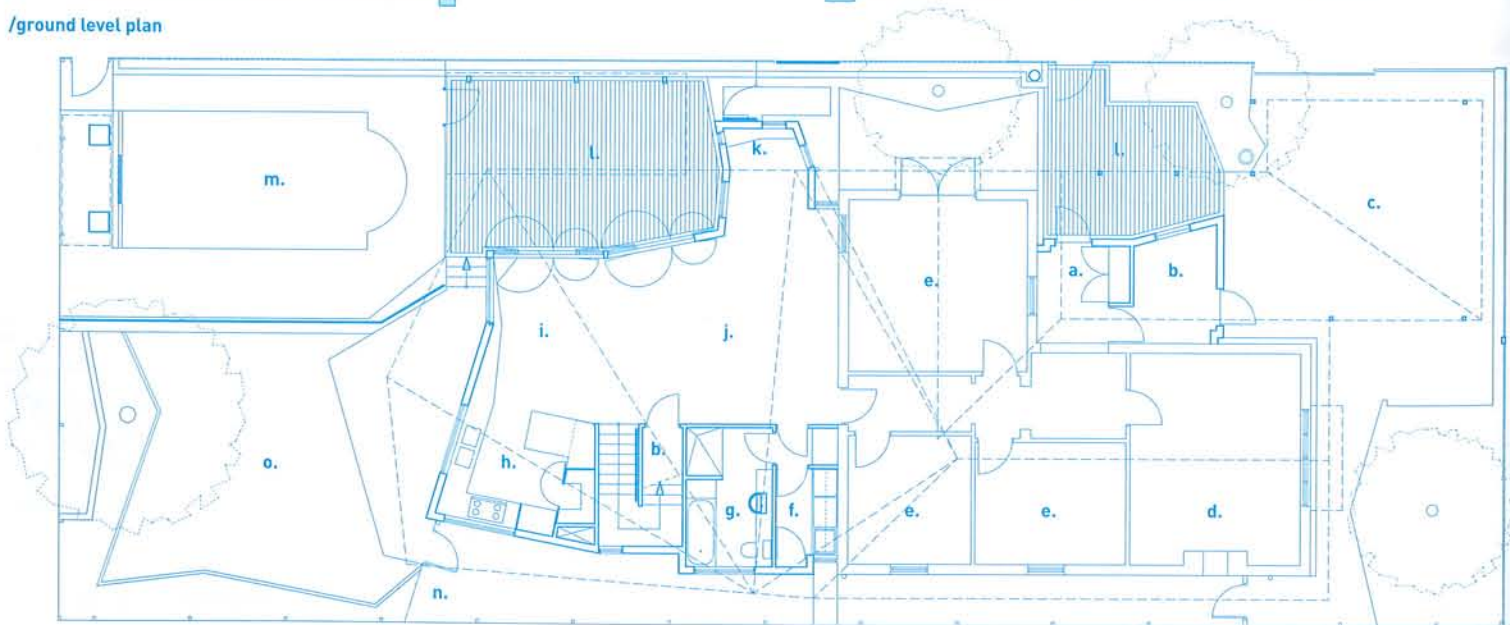
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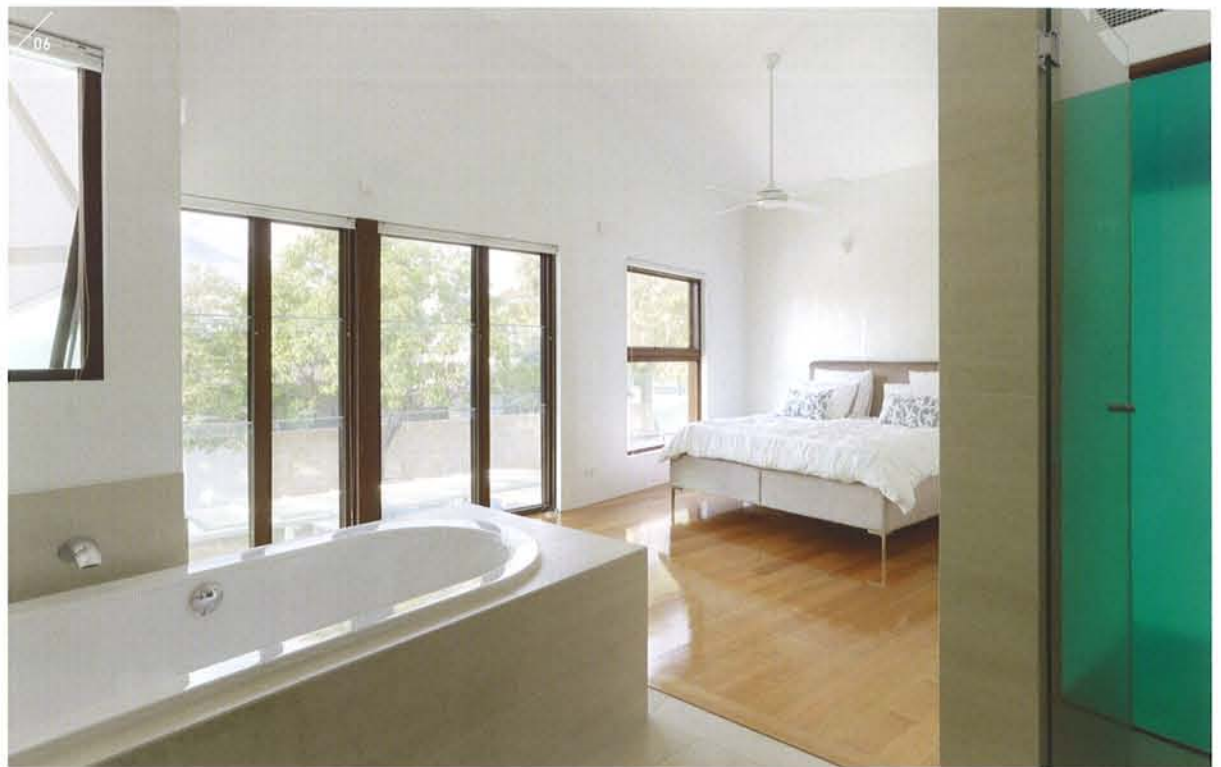
- a. entry
- b. store
- c. carport
- d. lounge
- e. bedroom
- f. laundry
- g. bathroom
- h. kitchen
- i. dining
- j. living
- k. play area / desk
- l. deck
- m. existing pool
- n. drying court
- o. grass
- p. pantry
- q. wir
- r. wc
- s. theatre / bed

/cross section



/ground level plan





/05 /06

Green polycarbonate creates a diffuse emerald light at carefully considered locations within the house, lending a magical quality to the interior.

/07

The roofline of the pre-existing house has been extended to encompass a second story. Seen here, the junction where old meets new.

/08

Jarrah battens will weather over time and contrast with the darkly painted plywood cladding.

This project is an important one... the house extension that actually tries to make sense of the existing building and then uses the extension as a genuine cultural and environmental project.

standard suburban fare of timber floors and white plasterboard walls, interrupted at times by magical moments. While this is in many ways a relief from the fetishisation that accompanies much residential work – as if the wardrobe arrangements or cutlery drawers of our patrons should be objects of earnest research and focus – IPH has left the interior as a blank canvas of sorts, formed by the external machinations of roof and plan arrangements. This mute interior is thus left for the inhabitants to occupy and complete with their domestic accoutrements.

I believe this project is an important one, given that it occupies a small sub-set of Australian architecture – the house extension that actually tries to make sense of the existing building and then uses the extension as a genuine cultural and environmental project. If more architects adopted this approach, relying on their abilities to improvise and respond to circumstance rather than continuing to produce the often ill-fitting visions currently attached

to existing houses (which are then carefully photographed without the existing building in frame), we may have a far greater chance of a sustainable future. Similarly, this approach provides an alternative to the propellers, louvres and other consumables currently understood to signify sustainability. Thus the Swan Street house sits on a knife-edge – on the one hand, there is the humble reality of its program, scale and familiarity as a project type; on the other, there is its power as a polemic, which I dearly hope is acknowledged as such, perhaps inspiring more similar work across the country. **ar**

Gerard Reinmuth is a founding Director of TERROIR Pty Ltd and Adjunct Professor at the University of Technology, Sydney. TERROIR are known for their discursive design approach and research-based practice culture, an important part of which has been Gerard's regular contributions to AR over the years.