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cottage point house

TAKING ITS CUE FROM ITS DAZZLING SURROUNDS, COTTAGE POINT HOUSE IS AN ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECE OF FORM AND FUNCTION, WRITES ANNA HOUSTON.

The bush at your back. River at your feet. Sky and sandstone all around. The romance and changeability of the Australian bush and its collision with the Hawkesbury River has gifted the inhabitants of Cottage Point with a share of more dazzling waterfront views than seems strictly fair. Nestled within the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park and perched cosily above the Coal and Candle Creek, Sydney's smallest suburb is also the city's most secluded and unspoilt. It's here in Cottage Point, far from the madding crowd, that architect Richard Cole's paean to the serenity and quiet grandeur of the place, Cottage Point House, was completed in 2011. A masterstroke in marrying design to geography, Cottage Point House represents a divine communion between bush and river, shelter and wilderness.

On paper, the specifications of the Cottage Point site present a list of challenges that would appear to range from the mildly irksome to the outright

terrifying. The north-facing 1100 square metre site is positioned on a steep incline, deep in the heart of a national park. Its location within a bushfire zone together with its utter seclusion – only one road in and one road out – required Cole to get creative in the planning stages. "It is rare to have a project with a beautiful waterfront block surrounded by bushland, a good budget and a client with an appreciation for design. When those stars align the architect has an enormous responsibility to deliver an exceptional design," he says.

And deliver he has. To compete with the stunning surrounds of the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park would be sheer folly; to attempt to defy them, a disastrous conceit. Rather, Cottage Point House pays them homage, embodying and evoking those very elements that comprise the beauty and toughness of the national park's terrain. First and foremost, Cole wanted the journey from the street front through the house to the river's edge to be



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tangible in the design. He took his cue from the sandstone escarpments that dot the Hawkesbury region, carving into a sandstone base built into the hillside to create the foundation of the house. "The experience of emerging from the bush onto these rock platforms, with the canopy of Angophora trees at your back, and being presented with the broad panorama of the river below, was represented in the house by the hollowed out stone base and lightweight steel canopy roofs," Cole explains.

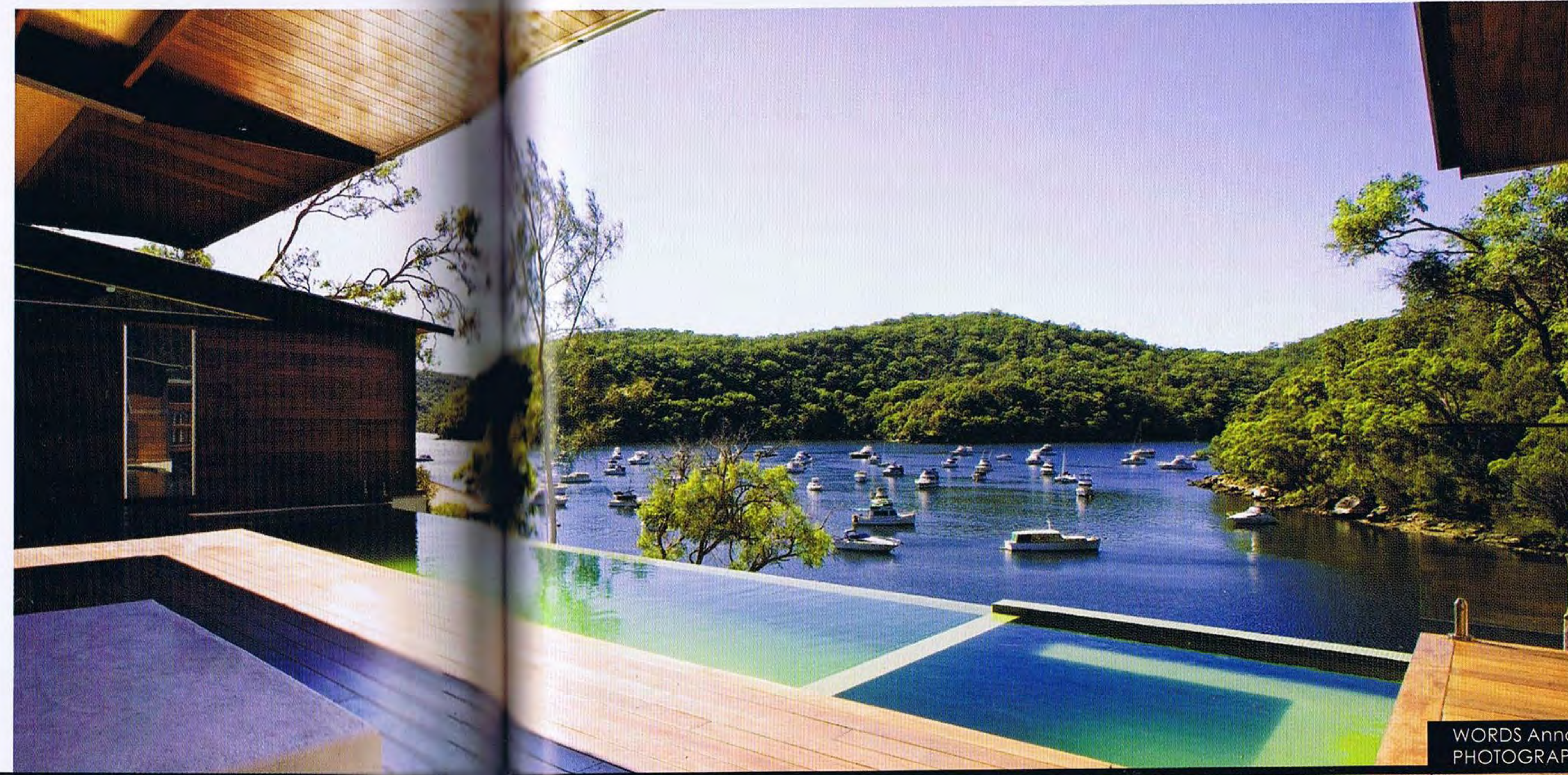
The excavated sandstone base comprises the ground floor of the house: three bedrooms, a spacious rumpus room, and an infinity swimming pool. The pool is an impressive design flourish of

sleek beauty and even greater practicality: round portholes built into the floor of the pool refract light from above into the bedrooms directly below. Further maximising light in the downstairs quarter is a long slot skylight in the hallway, an elegant window to the world outside.

Each step of the design process is geared toward an integration of the terrain and interior of the house. "Buildings which directly respond to, and are generated from, their site and environment are, like the natural elements that have evolved within place, embodiments of the genius loci of that place. They capture the characteristics and particular aspects that make that one place different from all others. They enable dwelling in a very specific and particular way. This is something we aspire to with every design," says Cole.

This aspiration led to the ingenious design of the home's first floor, the shape of which evokes nothing so clearly as the curve of the Cottage Point headland. Snaking around the infinity pool and grassy courtyard, the floor plan mirrors the creek's ebb and flow around Cottage Point, wrapping itself around the pool and courtyard on three sides, leaving the horizon open, limitless. Spacious living and dining room areas meet in a flowing confluence to form a long, wide kitchen space blessed with those spectacular waterfront views. The kitchen corridor winds its way between the courtyard and pool before emerging into a master bedroom, complete with en suite.

Key to the design and construction of the house was a palette of materials that was at once complementary to the bush, and resistant to its greatest threat, that of bushfire. As with the challenges posed by the angle of the slope, Cole found the risk of fire in the region and the restrictions it placed on his plans a source of inspiration. "The building forms a defensible compound within the



WORDS Anna Houston
PHOTOGRAPHY Courtesy Richard Cole

surrounding bush, with an inner courtyard and pool that could be used as a place of last retreat. Although timber is used extensively, it is a dense hardwood that is naturally fire resistant. All the windows are fire resistant toughened glass. Stone and steel are also naturally flame resistant. The selection of materials had to assume that at some stage during the lifespan of the building, it will be completely immersed within a bushfire."

The result of this love song to the bush is a sustainable, luxurious home, at peace with itself and its surrounds. Rich in innovative solutions to tricky terrain, Cottage Point House is an exquisite addition to the tiny settlement on Sydney's Northern Beaches. When asked, Richard Cole doesn't hesitate to name his favourite design feature.

"The site has a beautiful tranquillity to it. When you sit on the cantilevered window seat in the living room or below the large sheltering eave of the canopy kitchen roof, with the framed view of the river, escarpments and bushland beyond, there is a heightened appreciation of this tranquillity. I think making places where the occupants can have these types of experiences is what architecture is all about."

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