

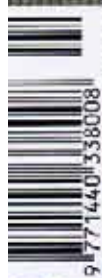
# HOUSES

THE RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

**DESIGNING  
THE DETAILS**  
CLEVER IDEAS FOR  
DISTINCTIVE HOMES

HECKER PHELAN & GUTHRIE IN PROFILE  
SCULPTURAL TALES BY PETER McLISKY

ADDING ON: REFINED RENOVATIONS  
**YEARNING FOR FURNITURE?**  
THE LATEST PIECES + NEW FABRIC







# RURAL IDYLL

A robust character infuses this flexible home by Richard Cole

Architecture, capturing the owners' long connection to the site. **Story by Ben Giles Photography by Brett Boardman**



**HOUSE DESIGN** can be simple really – or at least it can stem from fundamental ideas. In the case of this house in the upper Hunter Valley, architect Richard Cole explains that his design approach was to create a house for the site as the owners had always used it. The flat grass terrace had been used for years as a picnic setting simply by placing a table under an old eucalypt. A simple move, a simple idea, but one requiring a sophisticated architectural intervention to carry off successfully as a permanent structure.

Located on a cattle-grazing property, the house enjoys an idyllic setting with views to the north over rolling hills and a distant bush landscape to the west. Down a gentle slope on the northern side is a river in which the owners often swim in summer. There had been a demountable cottage on the site, which was removed for this project. Another adjacent cottage has been renovated as part of the project. The only remaining hindrance was the snakes that are often sighted around the site. To counter these slippery visitors, the owner insisted on proper seals to all windows and doors to keep them out.

The owners had a long relationship with the site – it had been in the family for many years and they had regularly holidayed there. This long connection led to an intimate understanding of the land and the best location to build a new house. The house was conceived as a weekender but one that the owners could move to permanently in the future. The brief called for the creation of a house with flexibility, one that would accommodate a couple or several families. It needed to be low maintenance, so the owners could simply walk in and walk out.

Richard structured his architectural concept for the house around ideas of refuge and prospect. With the site's predominant outlook to the north, it was a logical move to orient the living areas in this direction. An early version of the design placed all the spaces in a linear form facing toward the views. However, discussion with the clients led to a more compact yet flexible arrangement. The result places living areas on the north of the house with sleeping and service spaces on the southern side. The refuge, then, comes from the enclosing precast concrete walls that wrap around the sleeping and service zones on this southern side. These concrete blade walls anchor the house to the site and emerge out of the landscape like a pair of enveloping arms. Bedrooms are conceived as rudimentary sleeping quarters wrapped in these heavy concrete walls.

The prospect is provided by the soaring steel-framed roof that hovers above the large open-plan living spaces and extends with large overhangs beyond the glazed walls. The main axis of the living space runs east-west, enabling maximum northern exposure and outlook. Thus the house closes down on the south and opens up on the north, combining in a single form that can be read as an object in the

landscape. In this "big sky" landscape, the house responds to the scale of its setting.

Separating the living and sleeping zones is the main circulation corridor that also runs east-west. This spine houses the building services within the bulkhead above. The main bedroom is at the western end of the building, equipped with a large sliding door that can close it off when there are others in the house. When only the owners are present, the sliding door stays open so that the bedroom borrows some of the adjoining corridor space and maintains views to the north through the verandah. This verandah serves as an outdoor room on the western side of the house, but also acts as a solar buffer to control western summer sun penetrating the house. The verandah is protected on the western side with retractable louvre blinds.

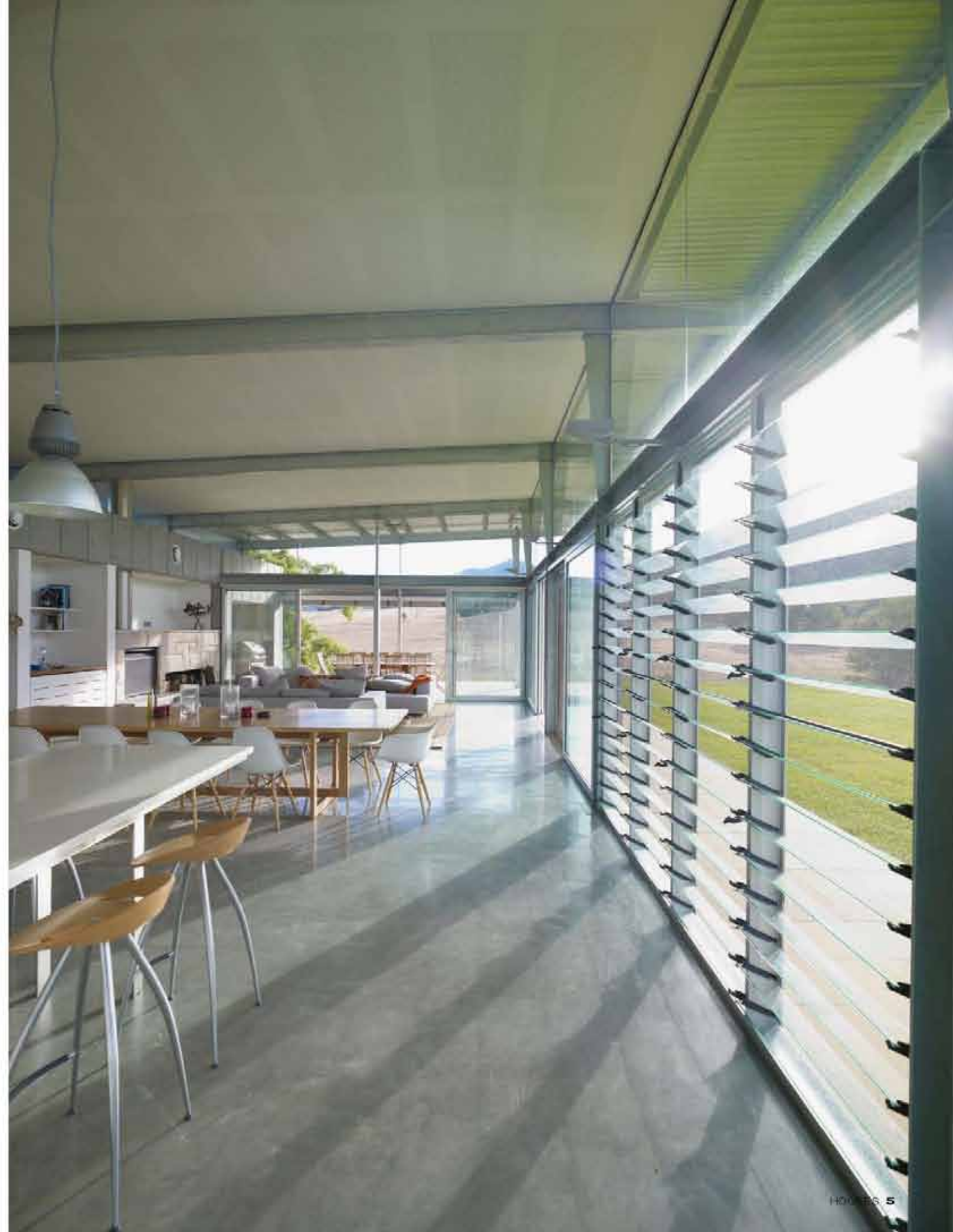
The idea of the central spine is further evidenced in the pantry wall. The back of the pantry originates in the service zone, anchored by the concrete wall, while the remainder extends north into the main living space. In order to keep the clear articulation of the two elements, a vertical slot has been created between the two. In this manner, the kitchen reads as a separate unit from the spine.

Materials throughout are deliberately raw so as to minimize maintenance and give the house a robust character. The cool, hard galvanized steel framing, polished concrete slab and precast concrete panels contrast with the texture and warmth of plywood and recycled tallowwood linings and joinery. Sandstone paving wraps around the outside of the house. The steel columns taper at the top to provide a sense of lightness and visible expression of structure. Acoustic plasterboard ceilings were used to mitigate the reverberation effects of the hard surfaces.

The passive solar principles employed in the plan are reinforced with a range of material choices and environmental strategies throughout. The concrete floor and walls provide high thermal mass to temper thermal change. As the property is isolated, no services other than electricity were available. An installed 130,000-litre rainwater tank supplies all the water needs for the house as well as for irrigation of the garden and fire-fighting purposes. Water is collected from the overhanging roof, which also accommodates a solar system for water heating. In addition, sewage is treated on site and the residual water is used for irrigation. Cross-ventilation helps to maintain air movement and minimize heat gain in the house, while high louvres on the southern elevation vent hot air out from the high ceilings.

The house is a successful manifestation of simple ideas that are combined in a sophisticated way – the house engages with the site, it tempers the climate and it creates a sense of place in a bucolic landscape. The only thing left to do is to keep the snakes out. **H**

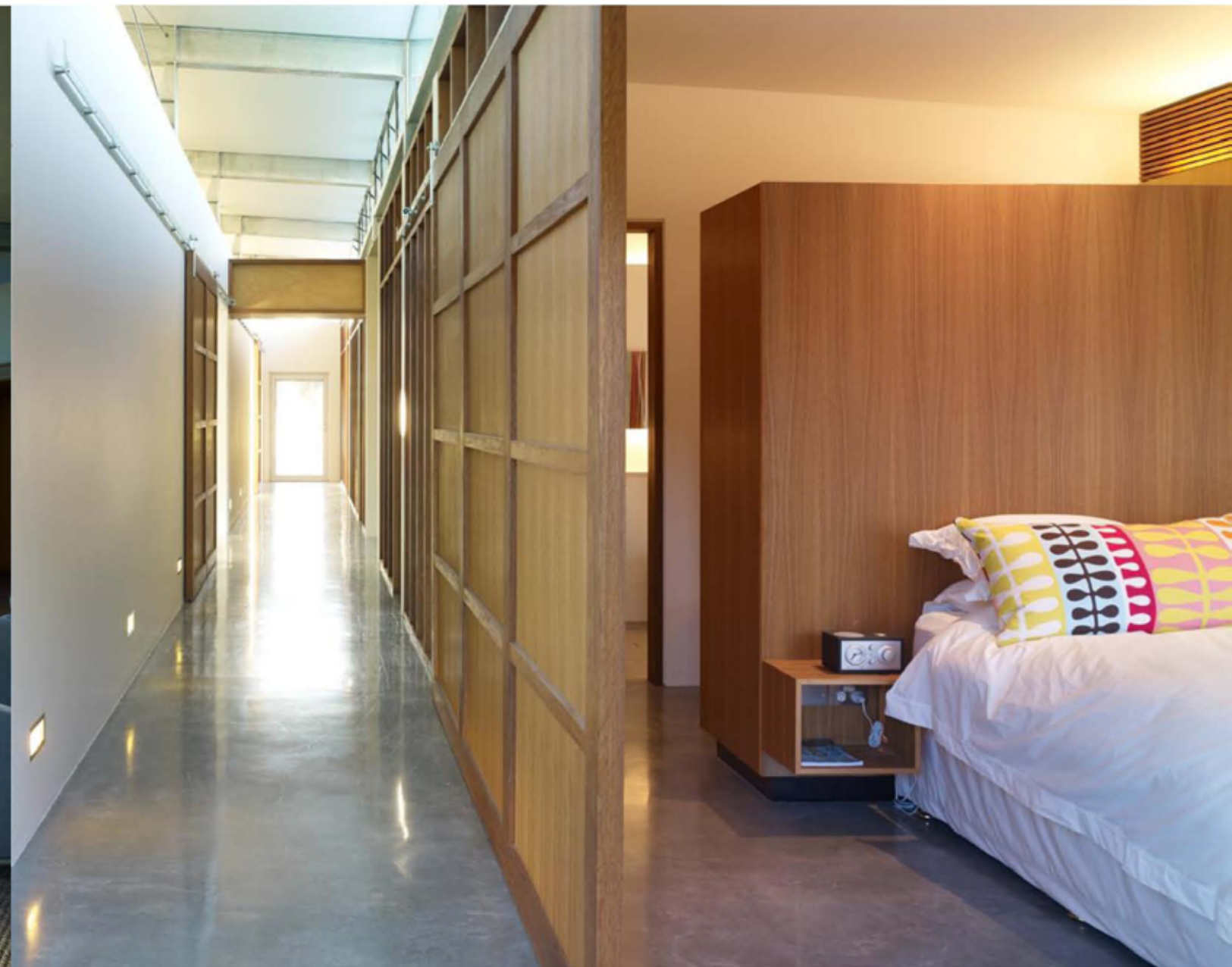
PREVIOUS PAGES: A steel-framed roof hovers above the glazed walls, creating generous overhangs to control solar penetration. RIGHT: Sliding glass doors and walls of louvres enclose the living space. A concrete floor provides thermal mass while plasterboard ceilings mitigate any reverberation from the hard surfaces.







**When only the owners are present, the sliding door stays open so that the bedroom**



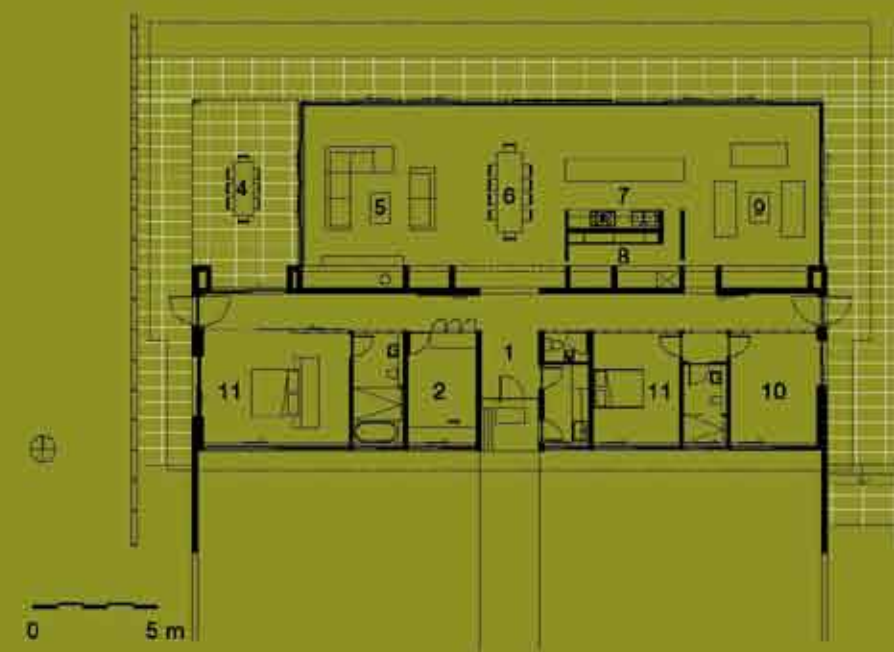
**borrows some of the adjoining corridor space and maintains views to the north.**

LEFT: Polished concrete floors, galvanized steel framing and precast concrete panels were specified for their robust character. Sandstone paving surrounds the house. RIGHT: A sliding door in the main bedroom can be closed for privacy or opened to views of the countryside through the adjacent verandah.





OPPOSITE: Precast concrete walls anchor the building to the site, wrapping around the south-facing sleeping quarters and service zones.



Plan

- |                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| 1 Entry        | 7 Kitchen   |
| 2 Study        | 8 Pantry    |
| 3 Main bedroom | 9 Living    |
| 4 Terrace      | 10 Bunkroom |
| 5 Lounge       | 11 Bedroom  |
| 6 Dining       | 12 Laundry  |



Section

**ARCHITECT**  
Richard Cole Architecture  
139 Palmgrove Road  
Avalon Beach NSW 2107  
T: +612 9918 3843  
F: +612 9918 3492  
E: richard@richardcolearchitecture.com.au  
W: www.richardcolearchitecture.com.au

**PRACTICE PROFILE**  
Small practice specialising in residential and commercial projects.

**PROJECT TEAM**  
Richard Cole, Eglantine Butty,  
Penny Gibbs

**BUILDER**  
Jeff Towler Building

**CONSULTANTS**  
Engineer Fozzard's Consulting  
Engineers  
Landscaping Gay Stanton

**PRODUCTS**  
**Roofing** BlueScope Lysaght Spandek with Zincalume finish, mineral wool insulation blanket with reflective foil insulation **External walls** 200 mm precast concrete panels with clear masonry sealer; cement rendered blockwork, painted Murobond Murowash 'Stone'; BlueScope Lysaght Mini-Ctb with Zincalume finish **Internal walls** Cement rendered blockwork, painted Dulux 'Natural White', Murobond 'Orange Peel', 'Stone' and 'Glisten', and Porters 'Thunderbird'; AA-face marine plywood with hoop pine veneer and clear Organoil finish **Windows and doors** 400 Series commercial-grade aluminium; windows: AWS Sidermaster; doors: custom recycled teakwood and plywood with clear Organoil finish; Centor A6 sliding track system; Medinox L45 ss handles **Flooring** Polished concrete with Commin Concrete Sealer **Lighting** Planet Lighting 'Sydney 2080' uplights with etched aluminium finish; Fagerhult 'Dome' pendants with grey enameled aluminium finish; Toca 'Panorama Mission' brick light with ss finish **Kitchen** CaesarStone benchtop 'Osprey'; five oven, Miele induction cooktop and dishwasher; Maytag fridge; Liebherr bar fridge; Asey sink; Casair rangehood; Accent International Intermix Borne mixer **Bathroom** CaesarStone benchtop 'Osprey'; Bisazza tiles; Rogerseller Catalano wall hung pan with Corbert concealed cistern; Parei Flow Q1 wall-mounted basin; Accent International Intermix Borne basin mixer with satin chrome finish; Brodware Program tapware; Dorf Tiber shower rose; Kaldewei Saniform Plus bath; Medinox towel rail **Climate control** M&H a/c; Vental retractable louvers **External elements** Eco Concepts sandstone paving 'Almond' **Other** Furniture by Space

**FLOOR AREA**  
300 m<sup>2</sup>

**TIME SCHEDULE**  
Design, documentation 12 months  
Construction 12 months