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his page, as well as the main

Fiboro Finesse

text: Jenna Reed Burns photography: Scott Burrows

Moving from the inner city of
Brisbane to a rural valley, an
architect couple has taken the
vernacular and refined it to work
with the landscape not against it.



A much loved bay window in his childhood home provided the impetus for architect Chris Bligh to add one to the living room. **opposite page** On all sides the house opens up to the spectacular bushland that surrounds it, with folding doors, cut-out courtyards and decks, and sliding windows.



allic rural setting and the constraints of a tight budget: ds of less able and aesthetically sensitive souls, this ave resembled one of the ham-fisted and entirely ill- that line many country roads. Instead it does all the old – it sits on the earth lightly; its materials are simple its form, respectful.

ago architects Chris Bligh and Sonia Graham swapped r-city timber cottage in the quaintly named Zig Zag e beautiful acres in the equally evocatively named Valley. Just 45 minutes drive from the CBD, the valley n three sides by the hills of the D'Aguilar National ouse has evolved in stages, driven by changing needs as s grown, and there are plans to do more.

three buildings sit beside a rainforested gully on the . A work studio for the architects and two employees he road, providing a street address for the office, while a public edge to the private space behind. The house ill walk away, nestled among lichen-covered granite ck that was once quarried from the range above. A ol and pool pavilion sit further down the hill, facing e three buildings share a similar language — that is, in the same palette of materials, with a harmony of ether they enclose a landscaped clearing.

re working with acreage you have this green-field ount how you make the buildings feel like they are ace and have a relationship with it, rather than just



being plonked there,” says Bligh. “We used the rocks to position the house on the site, and then we counterposed the roofs. The house’s roof kicks up to the north so from inside we pick up the views of the cliffs and the contours above, and the roof over the office folds up to the south, providing even light to work in. The counterposing folds of the roofs also pick up on the folds in the ridges, which, at a subtle, subconscious level, gives the buildings a relationship to the broader landscape and more presence and belonging than they might have had otherwise.”

Because of the tight budget, fibro was a natural choice for the buildings’ cladding, with aluminium windows used in combination with timber. But where these two materials might usually create a thin, mean form, clever design tricks have been used to, as Bligh puts it, “pump up the scale”: gutters are folded at the edges, building corners delineated with black pine timber mouldings, and windows layered with timber-battened screens or boxed within deep timber frames that add visual weight both from within and without.

The single-storey house runs across the slope in an east-westerly line. Entry to it is via natural stone steps onto an oiled hardwood deck which faces the entry and also overlooks the pool and garden. “We wanted to capture the views down to the valley, but also for the deck to be like a hand extended towards the entry, pulling you into the house,” says Bligh.

In plan view the deck is cut out of one corner of the house’s rectilinear footprint. Glazed sliding doors on two sides lead into

the living area and the kitchen. Opposite the kitchen, another bank of sliding doors opens onto a sheltered courtyard on the northern side of the house. When all the doors are open, cooling southerly breezes are sucked into and along the house’s interior.

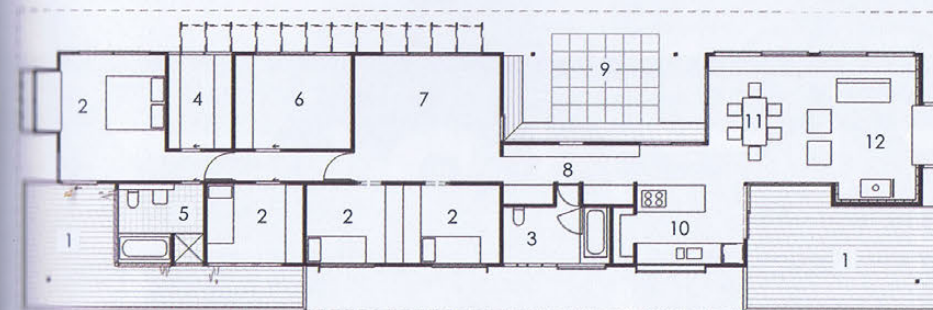
“The plan of the house is narrow for both passive ventilation reasons and good structural reasons – shorter spans,” Bligh explains. “To make a simple structure more spatially interesting in one corner the plan pushes in to make a deck space and on the other it pulls in to make a courtyard, which forms a diagonal breezeway to the house, and in that push and pull a series of indoor and outdoor spaces is created.”

The most recent extension to the house was a new master suite and a private deck added at its western end. Future plans include adding a bank of glass doors to the recently completed pool pavilion so that it can double as a teenagers’ retreat, and building a bridge over the now thickly treed gully that bisects the block. A self-contained studio may eventually be added to that side of the block, shaded by tall eucalypts that have survived the years when the land was part of a dairy farm.

“Building our own house has been a good chance to experiment,” says Bligh, “and there are various influences, including Japanese architecture, where the language of the landscape comes to the fore so the house isn’t competing. So much architecture today is so “try-hard”, with too much going on. This was about knowing when to elaborate and when to keep it simple and let the landscape play.”



Large granite boulders littering the property determined the position of the house.



House Floor Plan

Specs

Architects

Bilgh Graham Architects
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Builder

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Joiner

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Siting and site regeneration

The house and studio and associated vegetable gardens and orchard were sited following permaculture design principles and the desire to minimise the impact on the land. Significant planting of native species including those endemic to the area (some 3000+ trees to date) reflect the long-term plan of regenerating the original rainforest that was cleared for pasture while keeping an area for food production to maximise self-sufficiency.

Passive energy design

Passive energy strategies for the sub-tropics are embodied in the design of the house. The thin north-facing plan with precise sun angle control, generous openings and high level windows ensures excellent passive ventilation, appropriate seasonal sun penetration, and good natural lighting. The passive performance was further enhanced by the incorporation of thermal mass into the living areas in the form of a polished concrete slab and reverse veneer wall that are shaded in summer and warmed in winter by the sun and fireplace. A diagonal breezeway created by the entry deck and courtyard catches the eastern summer breezes and greatly enhances the passive ventilation.

Flooring

The flooring is re-milled reclaimed hardwood with water-based polyurethane finish. The honed concrete slab is finished with water-based sealer.

Insulation

The roof and walls are insulated with a combination of bulk polyester R1.5 batts and R2.0 Aircell.

Glazing

The doors and windows are a combination of aluminium and cedar joinery. As the house is designed for the sub-tropical climate with large openings and is not air-conditioned the glass is left as clear float glass with no special tint.

Heating and cooling

The house is not air-conditioned but comfortably relies on passive ventilation and ceiling fans in summer and sun penetration in winter plus a fireplace for heating the living/dining room only. The office has a reverse cycle inverter split air-conditioning system for heating and cooling in the short extremes or when breezes interfere with work. The water tank under the floor assists with summer cooling.

Hot water system

The hot water system is a roof top solar with electric booster.

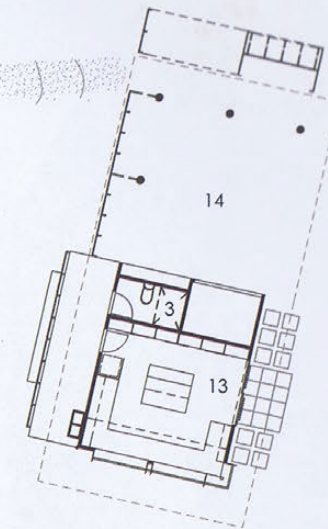
Water tanks and sewage treatment

The house has no mains water supply or sewerage connection. Two underground rainwater tanks store a total of 100 kL and an on-site Biolyfix sewage treatment plant treats black and grey sewage with the treated effluent used to irrigate the orchard.

Energy collection and use

A 4.56 kW solar array generates sufficient power for the house and office over a 12-month period.

- 1/ deck
- 2/ bedroom
- 3/ bathroom
- 4/ robe
- 5/ ensuite
- 6/ guest room
- 7/ rumpus
- 8/ laundry/study
- 9/ courtyard
- 10/ kitchen
- 11/ dining
- 12/ lounge
- 13/ studio
- 14/ carport



Studio Floor Plan

