

URBAN FRINGE

On the outskirts of Brisbane, Bligh Graham Architects has built a fragment of an imaginary city wall, where twenty-first

century design is entwined with timeless Australian bushland. **Story by Fiona McAlpine Photography by Jon Linkins**

PREVIOUS PAGES: Layers of blackwood veneer and spotted gum flooring create a warm, rich sanctum beside the many layers of green that compose the adjacent bushland. Clerestory windows assist with cross-ventilation and passive cooling. **RIGHT:** Recycled ironbark shiplap boards on the exterior appear robust, while delicate screens filter views to the bathroom. Stone lining continues the tale of material indulgence.

THE SAMFORD HOUSE on Brisbane's northern fringe straddles the edge; the house has an obligation to both the urban and the bush. It mediates between the two ecologies, forming the transition. As the last house in the "consolidated built fabric" of Samford Village, the house was conceived to enable its owners to occupy this threshold. Architecturally this notion translates externally and internally.

Designed by Bligh Graham, the house is located in the far corner of a small estate. There is a gum-lined pocket park and creek gully to the west. Bushland extends from the gully to a nearby national park, which lies further beyond. To the east and south, the house sits within an urban streetscape. Externally the limited palette of materials reinforces the architectural concept. To the street, solid white masonry walls belong to the urban realm, grounding the house. Recycled vertical ironbark boards and vegetation mediate the elevations, allowing the bush to penetrate through to the street. The timber shutters and rooftop terrace structure of the upper level lighten the top of the house.

From the street, the eye is drawn to the finer level of timber detailing on the gatehouse. On entry, a change in paving delineates the entrance axis. The importance of the covered carport to the left and the large timber doors on the 3.5-metre-high caravan store to the right is underplayed as one focuses on the double-height glazing of the entrance hall, and glimpses of water and the towering Canadian First Nation's totem pole positioned on axis. At the house's entry, just off axis, the ceiling soars above. The house pivots around this tall space, with a stair descending to the basement below and winding up to the level above. The lift is concealed here behind timber panelling, providing access to all levels of the house as the clients mature.

Past the stairs lies the living and kitchen space. Here at the heart of the house are the great elements of a home: to the north, the walled courtyard – a captured urban garden – plus the family dining table, couch, fireplace and the bay windows that open to the bush beyond. The large table gathers the family, while the smaller spaces such as the bay windows or bush verandah to the west provide more intimate spaces for the individual to occupy the edge. Here we see the house as the threshold from urban to bush. The western edge of the house opens through a four-layered fenestration system. When fully open, the house belongs to the bush; but in response to the hot western afternoon sun, the house closes down. Firstly, a timber shutter slides closed, then the glazing slides across, followed by an insect screen and, just in case, there is a roller blind. Any or all of these can be used in different configurations to change the feeling of the space.

The house even has the capacity to change itself. Automated climate-controlled louvres open automatically, allowing hot air to escape. Technology has been embraced in this house; the large plant room in the basement is a testament to that. Rather than shy away in an attempt at environmental responsibility, both architect and client have

embraced the highest-quality products, ensuring the house operates as a total system. For example, the photovoltaic cells on the roof actually give more power back to the grid than the house requires. The heat exchange process required in airconditioning in turn heats the pool. Low-voltage lighting supplements daylight, and rainwater is stored in a tank below the garage.

There is a balance here: the poetic guides the pragmatic, and the pragmatic informs the poetic. While the large brief dictated the size of the house, the monumentality has environmental advantages. The heavy masonry basement walls provide thermal mass, storing the day's warmth and releasing it at night. The lighter timber structure of the upper level opens, allowing the house to breathe – as hot air escapes, cool air is drawn through the house at the lower levels. The main living space and courtyard sit 800 mm above the natural ground level, providing privacy and allowing natural light to enter the basement level through high strip windows.

The living space feathers the western edge of the house to the bushland, while the main bedroom, walk-in robe and ensuite wrap the house to the street. Here the finishes, fixtures and furniture are beautifully considered. The level of architectural detailing is sublime. Throughout the house, timber panels slide away without a trace, leaving flush edges; floorboard widths translate into exact tile widths in the bathrooms and windows, and custom-designed light fittings complement the spaces. The craftsmanship of the builder is evident. It takes such patience to build a house of this quality.

Returning to the centre of the house, the folding ceiling draws you to the upper level. Here there are two bedrooms, a study alcove and a craft room, which can later double as carer's quarters. There is a lightness, perhaps femininity to the upper level. The two bedrooms, like the rest of the house, have exquisite joinery. Timber shutters dissolve the corners of the rooms, freeing the spaces and bleeding them into the surrounding bush. The architects instil the experience of an elevated tree house as light pours in through a north-facing skylight in the craft room. Vines climb a timber trellis that shades the rooftop terrace to the caravan store below, bringing vegetation into the space.

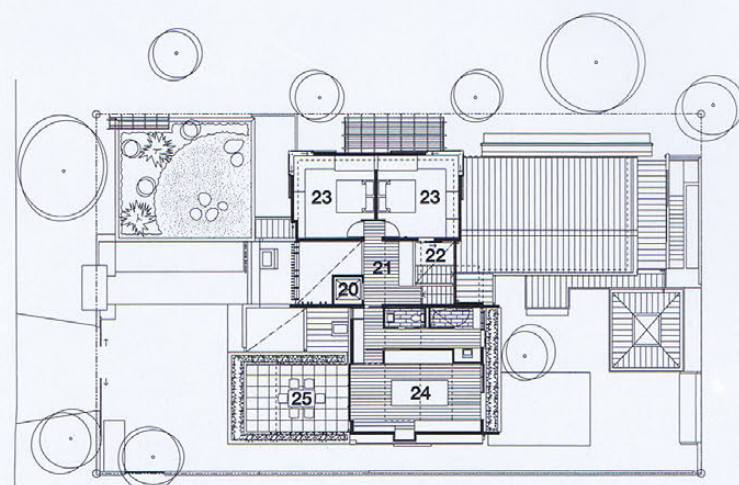
In equal opposition, the stair descends to the basement, where robust materials create a masculine space – with a workbench that will make any neighbour envious. It is impossible to resist running your hand over the hard-set plaster walls, which were finished with a wax sealer, creating a shifting sheen that reflects light and adds to the handcrafted feel of the home.

The value of the poetic in architecture translates in this house. Architect Chris Bligh describes the house as "a fragment of the city wall, overlapped and occupied by a timber 'bush' building." Here the city overlaps the landscape, and the landscape is drawn into the city edge. **H**

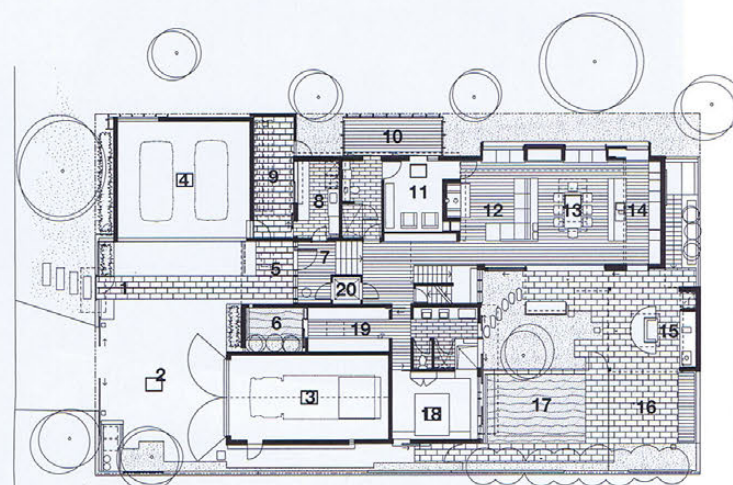




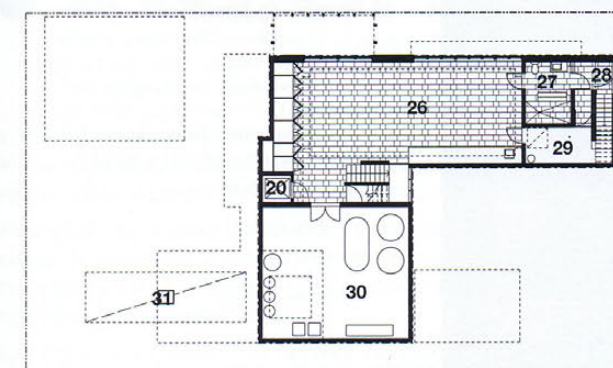
LEFT: The house was imagined as part city wall, part bush dwelling. Here architecture meets landscape and the two conspire to create majestic residential experiences. RIGHT: Hard-set plaster finished with a wax sealer gives the walls a shifting sheen and a handmade feel.



Upper level




Ground level



Basement

0 5 m

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Gatehouse | 17 Pool |
| 2 Driveway | 18 Main bedroom |
| 3 Motorhome | 19 Walk-in robe |
| 4 Garage | 20 Lift |
| 5 Porch | 21 Bridge/study |
| 6 Pond | 22 Void |
| 7 Entry | 23 Bedroom |
| 8 Laundry | 24 Craft room |
| 9 Drying | 25 Terrace |
| 10 Screened deck | 26 Client's retreat |
| 11 Day room | 27 Change room |
| 12 Living | 28 Access to pool |
| 13 Dining | 29 Pool plant |
| 14 Kitchen | 30 Plant room |
| 15 Outdoor kitchen | 31 Water tank below garage |
| 16 Pool terrace | |



BELOW: A high level of crafting is evident in both design details and construction. Details were conceived for low maintenance and a long life.

ARCHITECT

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PRACTICE PROFILE

A small ideas-based practice specializing in residential work with a focus on environmentally sustainable design. Projects undertaken range from modest renovations to significant new homes.

PROJECT TEAM

Chris Bligh, Sonia Graham, Carolyne Jackson, Jacque Maestracci

BUILDER

Fielding Homes

CONSULTANTS

Engineer Bligh Tanner
Landscaping Arterra
Interiors Bligh Graham Architects
Lighting Design Stage
Services Lincolne Scott

PRODUCTS

Roofing VM Zinc roofing; plywood substrate; Higgins wool insulation
External walls Recycled ironbark cladding with oil finish; core-filled blockwork walls with sealed render over extruded polystyrene insulation board; VM Zinc
Internal walls Hard-set plaster to rendered walls with Armourcoat surface finish; blackwood veneer panels
External windows and doors New Guinea rosewood joinery; Chemisys Cutek oil finish externally; Bona water-based polyurethane finish internally; low-E glass
Internal doors Blackwood veneer
Flooring Spotted gum with Bona X traffic finish; sandstone tiles; wool carpet
Lighting Low-energy LEDs and compact fluorescents; custom lights designed by Bligh Graham Architects
Kitchen Smeg oven and dishwasher; Liebherr integrated refrigerator and wine refrigerators; Qasair hood; Bosch steam oven and microwave; granite benchtops; blackwood veneer joinery; Vola stainless steel tapware
Bathroom Villeroy and Boch Subway toilets; Rogerseller basins; Vola stainless steel tapware and accessories; stone tiles
Climate control Natural ventilation; commercial-type mechanical plant; building management system linked to high-level motorized glass louvres
External elements Moss sandstone; cobblestones
Other Royal Botania outdoor furniture; teppanyaki bar with custom-made bench; teppanyaki BBQ by Cookon; Qasair hood; 45 kL rainwater tank; 10 kW solar power station with battery storage and grid interaction

SITE AREA

600 m²

FLOOR AREA

515 m²

TIME SCHEDULE

Design, documentation 12 months
Construction 32 months