

Domain INNOVATION LOU SWEENEY



Blending in and standing out

Growing into its urban bush surrounds doesn't mean a house can't also add its own touches of drama.

WHEN you think iconic Australian landscape, you naturally think Kew. Don't you? Of course, in our mind's eye we conjure images of spindly ghost gums, ochre, dust, corrugated iron. Sometimes we might think surf or sun or sand. We never think suburbs.

Granted, Kew is not a place that should come to mind when thinking of anything other than exclusive suburbs with large houses. But there are riverside parts of this place that can look for all the world as though you've just carved a slice of quintessential countryside and popped it five minutes from the freeway.

That's in essence the premise of this two-storey house, which hunkers into the side of a hill on the dipping streets of this Kew patch. While a striking black zinc house doesn't exactly melt into its envi-

ronment, this place does not overwhelm its lovely surrounds.

It's exactly the way Paul Porjazoski of Bent Architecture envisioned the project from the start.

"The steepness of the site gave us the opportunity to really sit in the landscape," Porjazoski says. "It was something that was crucial from the start. We wanted to maximise the views and the northern orientation and effect a blurring of the edges between exterior and interior."

The house does sit well in this urban bush context. The black zinc is a thoughtful choice that allows the surrounding foliage to lie in relief against the dramatic exterior.

This is a house born of pure, utilitarian function, too. Although it might look the glamorous business with its angles, sections and cantilevered, open-book exterior, it works as a home that embraces its



present application but has an eye on how life might be for this family down the track.

"We wanted the house to be able to adapt with the growth of the family," owner Nicole Dour-Ferris says. "Right now we have two small children, but we were thinking of the future as well and wanting a house that could change with us."

To that end, Porjazoski has designed a fractured floor plan that disassembles traditional space in favour of a series of sections.

The genius here is that although those areas are distinct and can stand alone — for example, the children's wing is completely self-contained with bedrooms, play area, bathroom and study space — just about every part of the house can be seen from the central living space. This is a neat piece of work.

The key element to bringing the fragments back together is the cent-

ral gallery, a beautiful reinterpretation of the traditional hallway, which gathers light from the front north of the house and in effect extends the view by connecting the front and back environments. "It's a critical linking component and it works to feel as though you're stepping into different aspects of the house," Porjazoski says.

The darkly clad boxes that cantilever over the drop of the driveway are split by a steep stair that lends an enveloping, protective feel. There's a real switch of energy here from the sharp, straight lines of the public face of the house to a haven once you gain the steps. It's subtle but unmistakable, and it draws you up and in past the luminous warmth of the timber door.

The payoff on the other side is that terrific gallery, where the stone floor makes an outside reference point, and a more traditional tim-



Timber features (far left and above) with striking angles (main) and pool (top) make this a clever, adaptive dwelling.

PICTURES: TREVOR MEIN

northerly front of the house are repeated in the back dining section and children's area. It's an idea that deftly articulates the function here — that every external view and every direction matters.

"There is a play on scale. The gallery opens the house up and provides a coherence... Then details like the lowered ceiling in the living area bring a balance," Porjazoski says.

That sense of poise is palpable here from the hunkering, hanging, halved facade to the timber-and-stone material connections that tie the external world to the internal. Life on the edge, Kew-style, is very fine indeed.

CONTACT
Paul Porjazoski
Bent Architecture
www.bentarchitecture.com.au

ber takes the eye to the internal living, dining and kitchen areas.

It's not just the floor that gets the treatment here but the ceiling as well. The gallery above is lined with seagrass matting, a beautiful textural inversion that again references a more robust outdoor feel.

There are clever marks such as this one all over the house. A timber trellis in the courtyard carries beyond the external wall, where its lines cross the internal ceiling. A barbecue plinth near the edge of the children's wing also crosses the interior frontier to end up as a unit with sculptural qualities in the playroom.

"All those ideas, as well as the larger central theme of the gallery and courtyard providing a focus, are about, again, maximising the existing landscape to provide that visual link," Porjazoski says.

Large picture windows at the