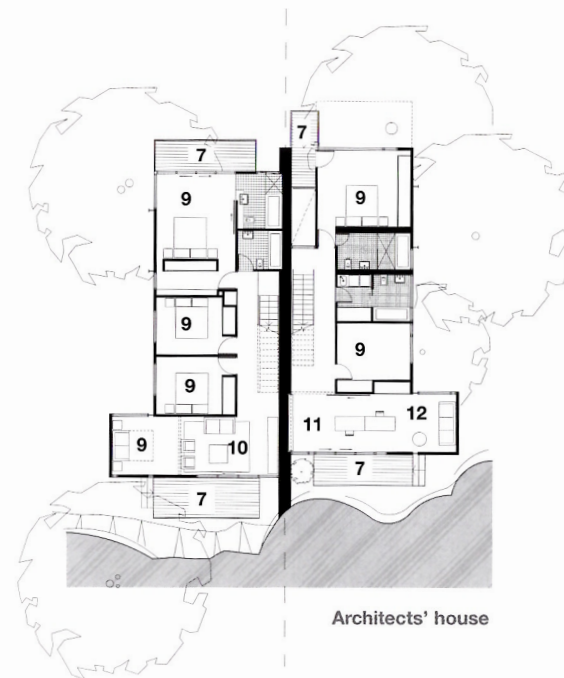
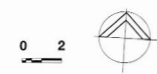


SITE SPECIFIC

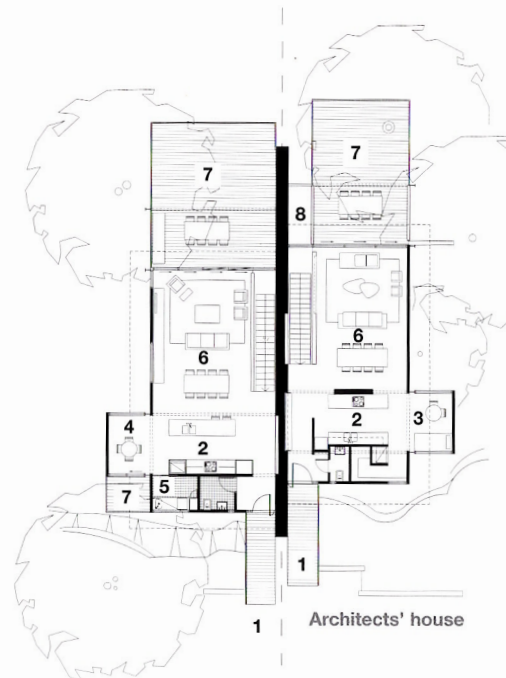
Architects Lisa Saville and Steven Isaacs have designed two dwellings that sit in sympathy with their surrounds, on a steep riverfront site in Sydney.



- 1 Entry bridge
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Play room
- 4 Breakfast
- 5 Laundry
- 6 Living
- 7 Deck
- 8 Void
- 9 Bedroom
- 10 Media room
- 11 Library
- 12 Studio



Lower ground floor



Ground floor



OPENING PAGES, LEFT: The deck and upstairs living area appear to float out over the tree canopy. RIGHT: The exterior palette of galvanized steel and Colorbond mirrors the soft greys found in the site's natural bush surrounds. PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT: Light streams down the stairs via generous vertical glazing on the upper level. RIGHT: The full-height glazing in the main bedroom takes in the leafy vista to the rear of the site. THESE PAGES, ABOVE: The pair of dwellings as seen from the street. BELOW: The cool white kitchen rests on a warm blackbutt floor. FOLLOWING PAGE: Detail of the void above the stairs and the main bedroom to the side.



“The facades are characterized by shifts in materials, screens and the siting of

decks and openings, playfully undermining the project’s apparent symmetry.”

SYDNEY HAS LONG BEEN INFATUATED with the sandstone landscapes that grace the foreshores of its harbour and tributaries. The place where the city meets the water has had an irresistible cultural potency – drawing large numbers of the city’s inhabitants to settle along the sinuous contour that traces the water’s edge. Increasingly, however, the character of this delicate edge is being undermined by insensitive contemporary developments that impose upon those waterways, reserves and parklands. It is reassuring, therefore, to discover this project, recently completed by architects Lisa Saville and Steven Isaacs, on the leafy banks of the Lane Cove River at Hunters Hill.

Steep topography and difficult vehicular access had deterred prospective buyers, even though council had granted design approval for a single dwelling. Lisa and Steven bought the site, and opted for a different approach – designing two slender pavilion dwellings within the approved envelope of the original proposal. They live in the eastern-most house and have sold the other.

The two houses are separated from one another by a single masonry element, a self-supporting blade wall that isolates the dwellings from each other in the event of fire. Lightweight timber bridges spring from a sandstone ledge and provide access to the dwellings that are, in turn, supported by a structural skeleton of steel columns and intermediate framing. The choice of materials was governed by the nature of the site, and by the desire to make a building that would sit lightly upon it. “The structural steel frame and Custom Orb cladding allowed for ease of construction and minimal maintenance on such a steep slope, as well as minimal impact on the greater environment,” note the architects. But rather than following the rigour of the frame, each house is freely planned within it, exploiting subtle differences in views and orientation.

The architects’ own house (the one on the right as you enter from the street) is a delight to experience. On the upper floor, the frame is entirely occupied by a spacious, light-filled living space, anchored by a white kitchen and services block at the rear. A floor-level strip window offers glimpses of the lower trunks and understorey. A child’s play space cantilevers from the side of the frame near the kitchen, looking out into the trees and back towards a sandstone rock face.

The axis of this main living room is oriented towards the river valley, and culminates in a generous, cantilevered timber deck – exactly the same dimensions as the interior living space – that projects out into the eucalypt canopy. The deck has been cut to accommodate a beautiful tree that twists through the deck to form a natural filigree roof. A small steel frame cantilevers from the edge of the building to house large sliding doors, allowing the entire level to be opened into a single space.

The rustle of breezes through the canopy accompanies the domestic activities carried out on this level.

The roof tilts to capture the early morning sun, as well as acting as a catchment for rainwater that, in turn, is fed into two tanks under the house. This water is used in the laundry, the toilets and for watering the garden while mains water is heated by an energy-efficient heat exchange system in the hot water cylinders located next to the tanks.

The circulation volume sits against a masonry wall, and enjoys a long vista through the house from the entry. A large vertical window allows you to register your movement from the lofty tree canopy, to the denser understorey and tree trunks at ground level as you descend the stairs.

The intermediate level has a more composed relationship to the site’s landscape. Shielded by the deck above, its outlook is more intimate and contained. The main bedroom frames the trees with a full-height window and a tall, thin opening, which captures the trunk of the tree that punctures the deck above. A tiny deck is nestled into the stair void off the bedroom, forming a contemplative outdoor space just large enough for one person. A second bedroom is oriented towards the side of the site with its window set against the wall to illuminate the room with gentle reflected light. A large rumpus room at the back of the house opens directly onto the sandstone rock face – a sliding wall allowing the space to function alternatively as a third bedroom, guest room or studio. All joinery in the house is finished with white laminate rather than polyurethane (to reduce toxicity) and the timber floors are oiled (rather than chemically sealed) to a rich, matte glow that complements the exposed galvanized steel structure.

The external facades are characterized by slight shifts in materials and screening elements and the siting of decks and openings, playfully undermining the project’s apparent symmetry. Colorbond cladding robustly articulates the rhythm of the frame, creating rich, rippling shadows on the facades – the vertical orientation of the cladding on the shorter bays subtly referencing the lofty scale of the adjacent trees.

Viewing the project from the bush below, the architects are surprised at how their home has become shrouded by vegetation. Of note, too, is how such a sleek building can be made to recede into the broader foreshore landscape. “As architects, clients and parents, it was important for us to respond responsibly to the impact of construction on such an untouched setting,” they say. “Our aim was to create a peaceful and healthy environment in which our family could grow.” It is an affirming approach, showing that a site treated with a strong sense of custodianship and care can support a spirited domesticity without brusquely colonizing the landscape. **LAURA HARDING**





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CONSULTANTS
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Landscaping Toolijodia and
architect
Interiors Lisa Saville
and Steven Isaacs
Lighting Anthony Berman

PRODUCTS
Roofing Colorbond Custom Orb;
Tontine polyester bulk insulation
External walls Zincalume
Custom Orb sheeting; galvanized
steel structure; Rockcote
Ecostyle 'White' paint on
blueboard and fc sheeting
Internal walls Rockcote Ecostyle
'White' low sheen paint on
plasterboard **Windows** Capral
powdercoated aluminium frames;
metal fly screens; Breezway
glass louvres; Pilkington Activ
self-cleaning glass; Helioscreen
roller blinds; white linen curtains
on s-fold track **Doors** Eezy jamb
frames; Rockcote Ecostyle
'White' paint; Madinoz solid
stainless steel hardware **Flooring**
Hyspan joists; recycled blackbutt
with Livos Ardvos natural hard oil
finish **Lighting** Internal – Bega
uplights; Koskela pendants;
Linlite Pegg al square recessed
downlights; Kreon wall lights;
external – Hansa ss recessed
wall lights **Kitchen** Miele steam
and wall ovens; Fisher and Paykel
Iridium fridge, dishdrawer,
cooktop; BMG Imports 'Zazzeri'
tapware; Qasair rangehood;
joinery by Niche Kitchens
Bathrooms Kaldewei bath; Parisi
'Kato', 'Nako' and 'Aqualine'
basins; Villeroy and Boch toilets
with Caroma concealed cisterns
Climate control Nobo heaters to
bedrooms; Pilkington low-e glass
External elements Plantation
spotted gum deck; Naturereed
screens **Other** Stair – recycled
blackbutt on painted steel
stringers; recycled ironbark dining
table, daybeds and custom
furniture by Koskela

TIME SCHEDULE
Design, documentation
1 year
Construction 1 year

SITE SIZE
1600 m²

PHOTOGRAPHY
Kata Bayer @ Product K