

# HOUSES

## CHROFI



# BALMORAL HOUSE



The Balmoral House is located within the lower north-shore suburb of Balmoral. The site presents many difficulties being wedged shaped, on the low side of the street, hemmed in by two substantial existing houses and with just half the land area of its neighbours. Where previously the site would have enjoyed the benefits of a sunny rear yard beyond the rear building alignment, this is no longer the case with the yard having been sold-off to the neighbours.

Our design process has been about finding amenity where on first appearance there appears to be little.

The design stems from the first key observation, that the view to Middle Harbour is better from the lower ground level due to the height of the canopy of a nearby angophora that impedes views from the first floor level. Placing the living areas on the lower ground level allowed us to exploit setback controls to build closer to the rear boundary where oblique views to the key local features of Balmoral Beach and Rocky Point Island are best.

This strategy also provided the opportunity to extend these spaces into gardens and terraces to the limits of the site, maximising the sense of space of the 'living domain'. Every part of the site is utilised to create an array of connected interior and exterior spaces.

The planning then became about ordering these living volumes and garden spaces to maximise access to view and sunlight and to structure these to accommodate an array of social situations for our Client's young family. At first floor level, the garage and bedrooms are composed in a linear block perpendicular to the street along the south-western to enable glimpses of district views from the street as a gesture to the public realm. Critical to the success of the house is the journey from the street down to the living areas and vice versa. A series of stairways break up the journey while the main glazed central stair is the centrepiece to the house as a light-filled piece of sculpture that hangs above a reflecting pond with pool beyond.

The architecture works as a series of stacked interconnected volumes that carefully manoeuvre down the site, wrapping around to establish a secluded light-filled courtyard and terrace area on the north-eastern side. The expression is 'minimalist modern' to avoid visually complicating an already dense set of circumstances. Warm natural materials including off-form concrete, neutral bricks and blackbutt timber imbue the house with a calm quality whilst floor to ceiling glazing and large pivot and stacking doors create light-filled interiors, bringing the garden inside.

In the end the design reverses the obvious strategy of an elevated living space with balcony facing the view. Rather, the outcome is a grounded compact family home sculpted around daylight, views to Balmoral and intertwined living and garden spaces that satisfy the social needs of a growing young family.



*It's a house that slowly unfolds itself to you. It really does feel like a work of art, it has a meditative quality. It's intimate, but with a sense of space. It's restrained, but detailed and finished to a very high standard.*

**- Bianca Abbott, Owner**





# NARRABEEN HOUSE



Narrabeen is a suburb with housing plots and street layouts characteristic of the 'garden suburb' ideals espoused by early 20th century Australian town planning. The Narrabeen House of 2009 sits in this historical context amongst the other two storey family homes with each dutifully addressing a quiet, tree-lined street. It is a safe and familiar setting; no hint is given of the spectacular fresh water lagoon flowing to the ocean through each house's backyard.

The Narrabeen House plays with this dramatic contrast between the back and front of the property - Narrabeen Lagoon to one side, unremarkable suburban street on the other - in search of the 'suburban dream'. We were deliberately conservative with how the house is presented to the public while inwardly pursuing ideas of oasis and retreat where the water experience could be used to maximum impact - in effect, amplifying the current contrast between street and lagoon.

This sets up two key planning strategies.

Firstly, a central courtyard is introduced as the principal organising element for the planning with all of the house's key shared spaces - living room, dining room, kitchen, study and pool - grouped around the courtyard to connect these spaces visually, and physically when the courtyard walls are opened up.

The arrangement promotes a socially inclusive dynamic as well as extending the spatial opportunities of the house. The courtyard also has a significant environmental role bringing sun, light and air into the centre of the house.





*The 'suburban ideal' – a framework that would allow the house to address the street as any other suburban house would, while inwardly pursuing the ideals of oasis and retreat.*



# NORTH SHORE RESIDENCE



The North Shore House project involves the renovation of a narrow Victorian house with great streetscape appeal but outdated interiors and spatial layouts.

The former plan was structured by a north-south corridor along the eastern edge of the house connecting rooms facing west to the side boundary. A recent split-level addition at the rear had placed a small family room at garden level with the kitchen and dining room situated above.

Our principle strategy was to restructure the living spaces at the rear of the house to bring these onto a single level in a functional arrangement, and with their primary aspect to the north.

A key design intention was to compose the living spaces with an unexpected scale combined with an expansive outlook in contrast with the narrowness and confined sense of space of the old house.

The planning arrangement establishes a new stair perpendicular to the corridor in the old house to re-orient the aspect of the new spaces northward. The side walls are pushed toward each boundary to maximise the living room frontage to the north. A broad new kitchen lies against the stair looking out over the living and dining spaces to the rear garden and view. And a substantial garage with ancillary spaces at the lower ground level is provided as foundation to a new elevated garden terrace that sits as a seamless extension of the interior.

The architecture of the new work is conceived to support the experiential contrast between the old and new. Whilst the new addition is rectilinear in form, it contains detail and material differences that give the new work a contemporary expression. The master bedroom suite is housed within an abstracted roof form that aligns with the old roof and enables a 'top of wall' datum to run through both parts of the house. At the lower level, the datum of the rusticated sandstone base to the old house is carried through in the concrete block walls of the garage. The use of colour across all surfaces continues the interplay to provide the final touch in reconciling new and old.



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# LUNE DE SANG



A former dairy property, Lune de Sang is now the centre of an ambitious project that is bringing back a pocket of subtropical rainforest to the Byron Bay hinterland. The first seedlings are beginning to form an impressive canopy but it will be another 3 centuries before this slow growth forest reaches maturity. This enduring, multi-generational project demands architecture to match; if not in a continuously functioning capacity, then in the capacity of ancient stone and concrete ruins; witnesses to the early years of this extraordinary project.

The project's latest component, the Pavilion, sits as part of a suite of 5 structures on the Lune de Sang site. These include two working sheds, a guesthouse and a general manager's residence. While categorically a dwelling too, the Pavilion's function is distinctly communal in nature. The building is divided into two, very discrete parts: an open, functionally public, local gathering space, and a hidden, intensely private retreat.

The communal component of the pavilion has more in common with public architecture than with private dwellings. Its scale walks a fine line between retaining a degree of domestic comfort without feeling oppressively private – you won't feel awkward waiting on this couch. The pool and accompanying amenities are similarly geared toward visitors and the space has already played host to community and family gatherings. At no point is the connection to the emerging forest interrupted; its only solid wall is a continuation of a stone landscape retaining wall, while floor to ceiling glass brings the forest inside.

Physically the building is one structure but the two parts are so distinct that to enter the private retreat one must step outside into the landscape before coming in. Once inside a kitchenette and living space stress the pavilion's public function. There are no sweeping views of the landscape, instead the glass perimeter looks onto a lush rainforest embankment lending the space a subterranean quality. An exquisitely refined concrete and stone structure provides the thermal mass that keeps the space cool while robust blackbutt joinery partitions the space.

The proportions and scale of the retreat are intimate and reveal the refined craftsmanship so critical to ensuring this building capacity to stand the test of centuries. It's an outcome that demanded an incredibly close partnership between client, architect, engineer, builder and expert craftsmen, each spending months on careful, hands-on iteration.

While endurance is a defining feature of the architecture, it is also a key feature to the building's ecological response to the site. Great care was taken in ensuring a minimised carbon investment and this was bolstered by using locally sourced and recycled materials.

All water is collected locally and returned back into the forest ecosystem after use; a level of integration that demanded close partnership with forestry and hydraulics specialists.

Between endurance, integration into a forest ecosystem and the careful use of locally sourced materials, Lune de Sang's Pavilion aspires to be a sustainable project that will serve a family and their local community for generations to come.

*A distinct sense of permanence, of reshaping the land, of inserting significant architecture in the landscape.*







# CHURCH POINT HOUSE



Church Point House is a 4 bedroom, 2.5 bathroom house on a leafy, steep site overlooking the Ku-ring-gai National Park and Pittwater. Responding to the challenging conditions, the building is split into two forms; a masonry base designed to be grounded in the landscape and a lightweight box floating above. Materials and devices allow for the landscape to permeate the architecture and allow the user to feel close to the natural elements. A tall, sheltered courtyard in the middle of the section lets sunlight drench the living spaces.

The house also has a flexible programming, becoming two homes or one unified home if needed. The client is nearing retirement, the primary home is on one accessible level with fantastic aspect and views. The lightweight box above can be separated to become a distinct unit dwelling or seamlessly integrated with the main house.

The main living space was deliberately pulled to the bottom of the site, instead of on the top, to enable a better connection to the property's waterfront, pool, boathouse, and garden area.

Within all of that, there is an aspect of independence but connection. Church Point House offers a more flexible family home that contemplates accommodation for extended family coming and going and optimising the investment to enable discrete short-term leases to occur.

Another innovative aspect is realised in the home's ability to operate almost as a one-bedroom flat for the residents, so they don't feel like they are in a monstrous home with unused space. The main section they inhabit is very connected, offering them the comfort of never feeling far away from each other.

Whereas conventional family home designs have functional rooms on opposite corners of the house, our intention was to create a very connected day-to-day living space for the clients. The unique design gave the ability to operate almost as a one-bedroom flat for the clients so they don't feel like they are in a monstrous home with unused space, while the main section they use is very connected, giving them the feeling they are never far away from each other.

The presence of concrete came from the client's brief of blending the countries where they previously lived, in particular, the volcanic stone of New Zealand, offering a light grey colour in contrast with the lush landscape, timber and stone accents throughout.

A dense planning strategy offsets the grey of the concrete with a hint of greenery noticeable in every view. Ideas taken to the interior include board form concrete and soft neutrals which is continuously offset against either landscape views of Pittwater or the internal courtyard.

CHROFI collaborated with We Are Triibe to explore different materiality, incorporating locally sourced timber and stone accents which provide a fluid transition from the concrete structure to the greenish-blue waters of the harbour.

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## LITTLE MANLY HOUSE



House at Little Manly is located nearby Little Manly Beach at the base of Manly's Eastern Hill. The house enjoys oblique views across the street to the harbour to the south west while the topography rises from the rear yard to the north-east with established trees providing a green sense of enclosure to the rear of the property.

Being at the base of the Eastern Hill, the property is subject to overland flows and rivulets when it rains as runoff finds its way to the harbour. The site therefore has a lushness that has been drawn into the design of the house and gardens. Terraced platforms and waterways guide the movement of water giving the garden more complexity, function and connection to place.

Our principal concept for the arrangement of house was to create a level ground plane for living within a secluded lush garden perimeter. The primary living level comprises a series of loosely connected living and work spaces and an outdoor living room immersed in the garden.

The topography of the site has been manipulated with much of the site artificially elevated to make this level platform with garaging and ancillary spaces housed beneath at street level, then bedrooms and bathrooms located above.

The look and feel of the house was inspired by our Client's attraction to mid-century modern architecture and the iconic homes of Palm Springs USA.

The house is a contemporary version of these early homes expressing itself as an arrangement of a well-proportioned rectilinear volumes dressed with carefully composed minimalist façade elements.

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## HOUSE AT FORTY BASKETS BEACH



House at Forty Baskets Beach is located on the edge of the intimate Forty Baskets Beach at the base of an escarpment between the beach and the road above. There was an existing mid-century brick home on the site that was retained for its character and form, and as a reminder of the past.

The original home however was not suitable to contemporary family life in either its proportions, or in the way it related to its beautiful surrounds. Of great benefit however was its close proximity to the edge of the beach which for this area, provides an unequalled sense of connection to the water.

The challenges were how to create an arrival experience from the street, 5 storeys above the level of the living room, how to create an indoor-outdoor living arrangement, and how to bring contemporary room proportions to the project.

Our design took the existing house and its relationship to the beach as a given, then built the project around this key element. A small courtyard was created behind the original house to allow the old house to retain its prominence while bringing sunlight into the centre of the site. Each of the key living spaces including a new outdoor living room, are organised around the courtyard to create a connected ground plane that facilitates family life.

The site was excavated to extend the ground plane to include a pool and terraced landscaped gardens creating a series of visually connected spaces from the escarpment behind the pool, through the outdoor room, the courtyard, the original living, the front terrace and then the beach.

The bedrooms are located on the first floor with a central stair and void over the kitchen providing connection between the living areas and bedroom quarters. A new loft above provides a second living area with terrace that captures elevated views over the harbour.

An existing studio and garage have been re-fit internally and its balcony extended to enable outdoor entertaining with views over the harbour.

A commercial grade lift connects the street entry with the studio and ground floor delivering visitors into an unexpected sandstone cavern before entering the home proper.

The materiality of the project draws upon the painted white brick of the existing home, then fuses this with the beachy tones of sandstone and light timbers to create a light and neutral canvas that compliments the marine tones of the harbour and the lush landscape of Forty Baskets Beach.





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