



Travelling from an early age, I have always been inspired and intrigued by the importance that other cultures place on beauty. Frequent trips to my homeland in Greece always make me think about my attitude towards art and architecture, helping me to understand the roots of our current architectural position. Understanding these roots helps me to progress. Sometimes I like to return to the origin of things to understand the design direction required by a particular project.

My early work almost always involved finding ways to repair dysfunctional buildings or pieces of broken urban fabric. Those projects were often about reshaping a number of complex elements into a simple, legible solution. I feel that this is still the case with many of my current projects – it is the context and its reading that is expanding. The Bega house, for example, sits on eighty acres of land. It responds to a very general idea about the wider landscape in the area. Its siting accentuates the small rise and fall of the land and plays with the ideas of 'sliding along' and projecting forward to a specific view. Weaving together two simple ideas about framing and siting enhances the reading of a subtle landscape.

Architect Prineas. is the evolution of architectural projects I have been involved with over the past ten years. The number of staff at the practice fluctuates between two and four, which makes it comfortable for everyone to collaborate on each project, in the spirit of the atelier.

Like all small practices, we aim to be flexible enough to take on all scales of work. Curiously, I find there is some consistency to the way we approach all projects, from small alterations to large-scale challenges. My ideas are based in the pragmatics of building. I value the skill of an architect to distil complex building briefs into simple ordered forms. We use simplicity to add legibility to a project.

With our work on existing buildings, simplification is a way of finding the original reading of a building. Interestingly I find that a lot of our work with existing buildings is about stripping back and deleting rather than adding new work. Often constrained by the existing footprint, it is about achieving more within the same envelope. This often requires a more open and flexible space. I am interested in rooms that can be read in many ways. By distilling a project into simple elements a room can take on different functions. With a kitchen, for instance, I try to leave out as much detail as possible so that it becomes ambiguous whether it is a kitchen or a piece of furniture. Similarly, materials are used monolithically to bring out their inherent beauty as much as their application.

Where Sydney's architecture is often obsessed with architecture as a frame, often to expensive harbour views, I am interested in creating intimate outdoor worlds, which are often overlooked in the current housing models. Containing space is as important as framing space, especially in the restricted grain of suburban allotments. Whether it's an incision, as in the Stanmore and Cammeray houses, or an outdoor room, as in the Rose Bay and Balgowlah houses, contained outdoor spaces allow part of the outside context to be pulled into the house.

Increasingly I am becoming interested in building strategies that can influence the way we build in suburban Sydney. The majority of development occurs without the input of architects, away from the city and the harbour. Housing models are far from ideal but it is difficult for architects to compete with developers' mass production. Perhaps the growing awareness of sustainability can begin a new consciousness to the way we build in suburbia.

Architects are trained to be critical lateral thinkers. As such, we tend to be creative and proactive. Competitions generally receive as many entries that operate outside the rules as those that comply. It's frustrating, then, that at a larger planning level we find that our position is increasingly a reactive one. Part of my interest and involvement with the Royal Australian Institute of Architects is to promote a higher profile for architecture and the influence of architects on a wide scale. I would like to create opportunities for those trained in architecture to have an impact outside private architectural practices.

The structure of the contemporary political scene leaves critical decisions about our planning with government, council planners and developers. In an ideal world architects would have greater representation on decision-making bodies. Planning strategies could be debated and the wider architectural profession would be more involved in this debate, allowing planning to become more creative rather than restrictive. It should not be long before architects are more integrally involved in the formation of policies that affect the future of our built environment.

CAMMERAY HOUSE

THIS PAGE AND NEXT A light-filled, contemporary living wing is added to the rear of an old cottage. The transition between old and new is through a glazed garden court. Photo: Eliot Cohen

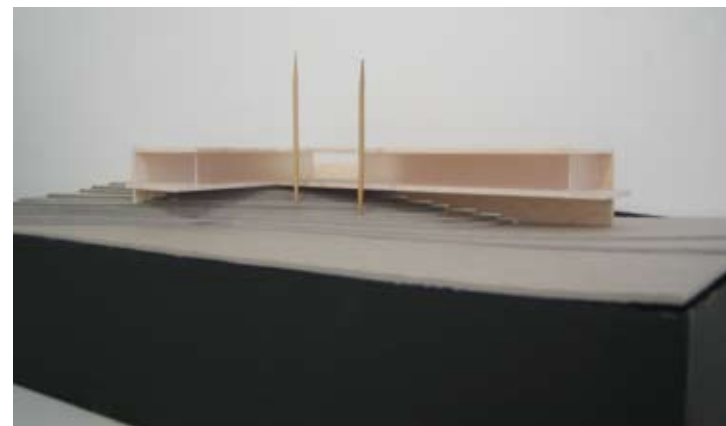




STANMORE HOUSE

ABOVE Designed by The Superstudio when Eva-Marie Prineas and Shaun Carter were the directors, the interior features a warm palette of materials to complement the garden. Photo: Brett Boardman

LEFT The smallest of incisions brings a grove of bamboo into the centre of this house. Photo: Brett Boardman

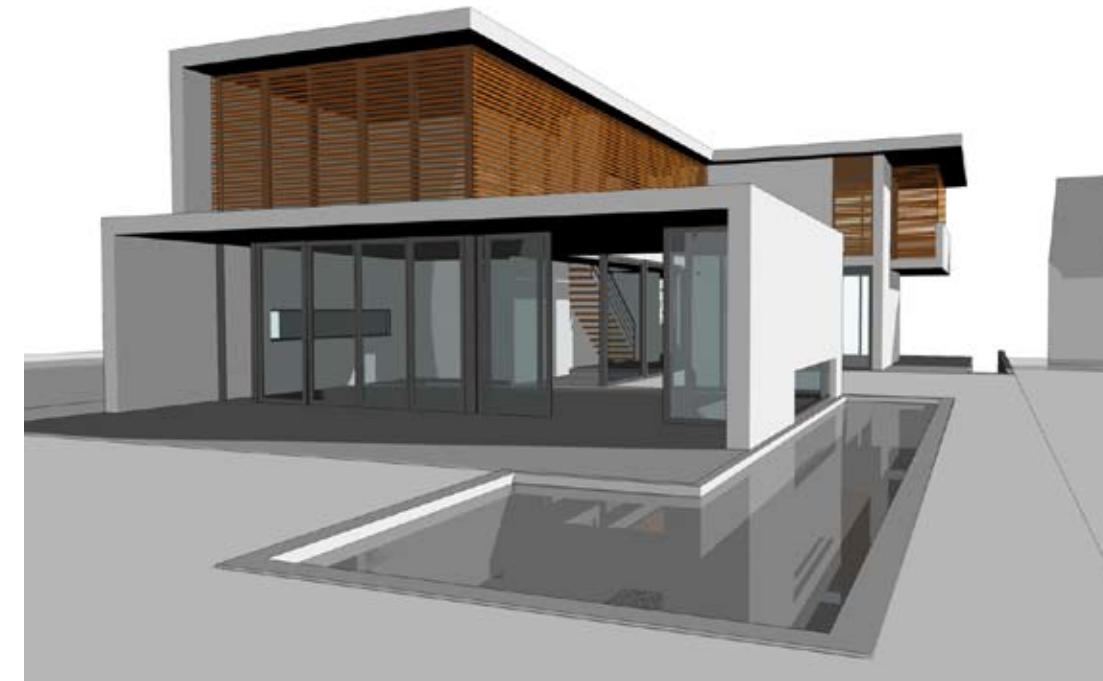


BEGA HOUSE

TOP Concrete block walls define the edges of the house - under construction, January 2007.
Photo: David Hargraves

BOTTOM LEFT The site topography is emphasised by two linear wings anchored by a solid garden wall. The two wings provide two different responses to viewing the landscape.

BOTTOM RIGHT A covered courtyard at the intersection of the two wings grounds them to the site.



NORTH BALGOWLAH HOUSE

TOP LEFT Over three levels, spaces interlock around a central courtyard open to the views and light from the north.

BOTTOM LEFT A filigree of timber blinds provides sun protection to the upper level rooms.