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Diamond Beach HOUSE

by Bourne Blue
Architecture

• MID-NORTH COAST, NSW •

A brave and sturdy courtyard house that reacts against the longhouse idiom often pursued in this region of New South Wales.

Words by Steven Fleming

Photography by Simon Whitbread

Soccer mums in the small coastal community of Diamond Beach, New South Wales, wondered for a while if that wasn't a new supermarket being built behind their kids' playing fields. Wouldn't a cul-de-sac at the far end of town, in a covenant-protected residential zone, more suit a house? It is a house, though, and being misunderstood is something it wears as a compliment, in the tradition of architecture pursued as an art form, with its own rules and traditions.

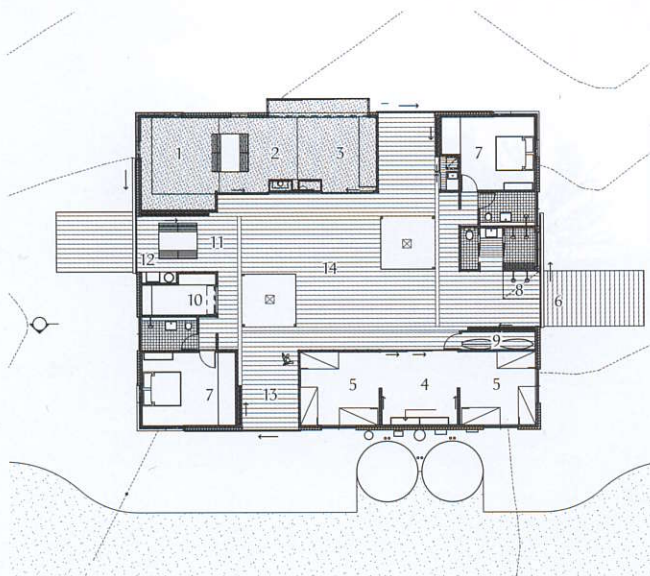
Like a lot of good architecture, Diamond Beach House by Bourne Blue Architecture is reactionary. It reacts against the longhouse idiom pursued by architects of this region (you know, opening to the north, skillion tipped skyward, as Glenn Murcutt would do) by instead curling itself like an armadillo around an enclosed courtyard. Cheekily, it reacts against the site's brick and tile covenant, with brick walls that are rendered to look more like tilt-up. Then the tiled roof planes face the courtyard, instead of the street, denying whoever insisted that tiled roofs go in that covenant the satisfaction of ever seeing those tiles from the outside. It's as though they are being deliberately shamed for trying to legislate against ancient wisdom. That is because the house also reacts against an historical accident, which saw the courtyard house fall from favour after millennia of faithful service.

English Grand Tourists, looking for houses to inspire their country manors, found Andrea Palladio's Italian villas, which in turn Palladio had modelled – thanks to his ignorance – on ancient temples, not ancient houses. Had it not been for them, we might all be living in houses like those in Pompeii: courtyard houses, like this one. In Pompeii, as here, roof planes slope inwards. Circulation paths, from any room to any other, crisscross an atrium or else hug a peristyle route if it is raining. The clan's focus is on the clan.

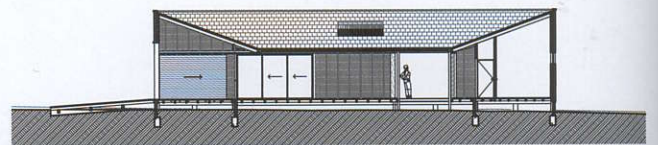
Having agreed with the clients to build such a house, Bourne Blue has next taken on a rare challenge, something that for architects is akin to a triple somersault with twists, the widow-maker of plan types: the pinwheel. Radial symmetry is a step up in difficulty from axial symmetry, but the pinwheel is a step up again. Usually it proves at odds with function, so is abandoned. Here, though, function and form more or less fit and the pinwheel has been pursued with religious devotion, with such rigour that the act of circumambulation creates *deja vu*. Yes, you did pass that very same doorway and hammock nook, and group of parked sliding doors, diagonally opposite. Given the added complication of an iris of sliding screen tracks, to solve like a Rubik's Cube (for the architects once, and the owners each time they come home), the planning deserves recognition as a virtuoso

01 The Diamond Beach House curls "itself like an armadillo around an enclosed courtyard" with brick walls rendered to look more like concrete.

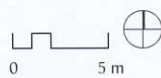




- | | |
|------------|-------------------|
| 1 Kitchen | 8 Outdoor shower |
| 2 Dining | 9 Surfboard store |
| 3 Living | 10 Store |
| 4 TV room | 11 Barbecue |
| 5 Bunkroom | 12 Laundry |
| 6 Entry | 13 Hammock deck |
| 7 Bedroom | 14 Deck |



Plan 1:400



Elevation 1:400



02 Sliding perforated screens are the main feature of the house.

03 The house is compartmentalized around a central courtyard, with the living quarters to the north.

performance, in a league with Glenn Murcutt's Marie Short House, or Louis Kahn's famed bath house in Trenton.

Sliding perforated screens (Mini Orb on aluminium frames) are the house's main feature. It is a testament to the architects and builders that so many large screens – sixteen in total, all around ten metres square – all function with hair-width precision. They don't even rattle. Another salient feature is the hardwood plank deck that, particularly near bedroom doors, serves to remind just how much of this house is technically outside. Blurring that distinction seems like a national enterprise among architects in this country, as we gloat about our benevolent climate, particularly where extremes are tempered as much as they are by the ocean.

Mandala-style colour-coding of corners (blue, red, green and yellow) mitigates against that *deja vu*, but better still provides moments of counterpoint against an otherwise neutral palette of colours. Concrete and particle board floors, plywood ceilings and formply cabinets are all presented "as found." Most plasterboard walls, and all battened fibre cement walls facing the courtyard, have been painted white.

The fragility of the site has not led to a heavy-handed, possibly counterproductive ecological response, but rather the simple best-practice measures a cool head would opt for. Yes, rainwater is harvested and solar energy stored, but what matters are breezeways, compartmentalization, and the thermal mass of a living room floor slab, retaining coolness in summer and gathering sunshine in winter. The house is rectangular, not square, to increase northern exposure.

Architects receive less credit than they perhaps ought for the careful consideration that goes into aspects of a design that are not at first apparent – how r-shaped windows give privacy plus a view of the sky, how the two atrium gardens steer two couples' kids away from their respective retreats, and how a handful of outdoor lights can create a dozen various moods. It is a beach house, so there are drencher showers right at the door and a handrail in the sun waiting for towels. It wants to be recognized as paradigmatic, an alternative to the kind of north-facing longhouse this site might have prompted, so hundreds of design hours have been invested in it. That supermarket exterior conceals some seriously high-calibre architectural thinking. **Q**



04 The protected central courtyard flanked by the various living compartments.

Architect

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Practice profile

Established in 1996, this practice has worked on small alteration and addition projects to large school faculty buildings.

Project team

Shane Blue, Rachael Bourne, Claire Lavis, Sarah Manners

Builder

Sugar Creek Building

Consultants

Engineer: Izzat Consulting Engineers

Products

Roofing: Bristle roof tiles, prestige titanium

External walls: Off-white cement render; James Hardie fibre cement with Scyon cover batten, painted Murobond pure acrylic

Internal walls: Boral plasterboard, painted Murobond pure acrylic

Windows and doors: G. James aluminium windows, low-e glazing; sliding screens made by builder

Flooring: Particle board floor, finished with satin polyurethane; concrete with clear sealer

Lighting: Bunnings copper uplights; Davis and Spence plastic spotlights

Kitchen: Kevin Thomas joinery; Laminex benchtops, 'Calico'; recycled sink; Westinghouse fridge

Bathroom: Reece Whitestone Hox vanity, Muzu R200 showers, Porcher Renso WC; Astol Metal Spinners outdoor shower

Floor area

4001 m² site
173.5 m² internal floor
169 m² deck

Project cost

\$520,000

Time schedule

Design, documentation:

8 months

Construction:

6 months