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Diamond Beach
HOUSEby 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.

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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.

