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Merewether RESIDENCE by Bourne Blue Architecture

• NEWCASTLE, NSW •

A Richard Neutra-inspired coastal house has mastery over the elements and pays direct homage to a nearby architectural icon.

Words by [Micky Pinkerton](#)

Photography by [Simon Whitbread](#)

Merewether Ocean Baths opened in 1935 as part of that suburb's jubilee, and the celebrations included a procession, with participants garbed in their Sunday best, from the council chambers to the beach. At the time it was hoped that the baths would promote a view of Merewether as a residential suburb, which reveals that, despite its spectacular location, the area was then considered a little gloomy, dotted as it was with several small collieries and crisscrossed by railway lines. Merewether's civic leaders probably thought a parade was the only way to brighten the place up, as they dodged coal trains on their way to the beach.

Eighty years on, much has changed: Merewether is now resolutely residential. Clearly the ocean baths worked their promotional charm, as the original weatherboard miners' cottages of the district have now been joined by a postwar conglomeration of domestic architecture. A new home by Bourne Blue Architecture is a welcome addition to the design lexicon of the area, and from its perch on the bluff above the baths it pays direct homage to the utilitarian aesthetic of the structure below.

The Merewether Residence represents the third time that owners Louise Slavin and Michael Summers have engaged Bourne Blue Architecture, with the firm having previously worked on a small

addition to an earlier house around the corner, as well as on the design and construction of their weekender on the mid north coast of New South Wales. During the initial discussions for this project the owners mentioned their admiration for the work of American modernist architect Richard Neutra; Shane Blue of Bourne Blue took it from there.

"Louise and Michael referred to [Neutra's] Kaufmann House in Palm Springs [USA] early on, so we used that as a starting point for how the building might be expressed," explains Shane. "Then different things came to us, like the ocean baths, where Michael swims every day. I looked at its forms – it's heavy, it's masonry, it's white. It has big straight platforms. It's really grounded and so I thought there was an opportunity for a contextual relationship."

The practical reasons for choosing concrete back in 1935 are still relevant in 2012. The exposed site meant that any materials had to withstand all that the coastal environment could throw and blow at the building. Blue then employed a Neutra-inspired composition of intersecting vertical and horizontal surfaces to further protect the home from the elements.

"We looked at trying to reduce the building to planes – fairly simple planes – and we used them to shield it from the sou'easters,"

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