



Generating MEMORIES

Beach houses are a *typology* all of their own. But *Jane Burton Taylor* discovers one by husband-and-wife team, *Rachael Bourne* and *Shane Blue* which turns the whole genre literally inside-out.

Text
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Photography
Simon Whitbread

scenario

seal rocks — NSW, australia

BOURNE BLUE ARCHITECTURE



02

Architects, Rachael Bourne and Shane Blue were well prepared to build a house in Seal Rocks (about three hours' drive north of Sydney), having already designed a house there. Still, after buying a block there themselves, it took them years to get around to actually designing it. They had to wait for their financial stars to align and to also finish the renovation of their home in Newcastle.

When they finally did design the house, it was serendipity. They woke up one summer morning and Shane did a sketch of exactly what Rachael had been thinking about.

"It was a real collaboration, we were both thinking about it in a very similar way," Rachael recalls. "Usually we design quite separately (but we both decided) that it would be a courtyard house. Because the block doesn't have the ocean views, it was more about protection and being able to experience what was beyond the site – but not be totally open to it."

One block back from the beach in a relaxed Eucalypt-dotted street, the house presents a polite, but poker face to the public.

A breezeway with a timber front door forms the entrance and a breezeway with a roller door the back. Once inside, you are in the private domain – a partially decked courtyard enclosed on every side by rooms.

"There are sliding doors in the living area and all the other spaces have roller doors onto the courtyard," Rachael explains. "The children's bunk room door is about three metres long and all the bunks have mosquito nets, so you can sleep with the roller doors up and look out at the night sky. It is really like very luxurious camping."

As well as giving the house its essentially cosy and quirky character, the "donut shape", as Rachael calls it, was utilised for several reasons. Firstly, because the site was not on the beachfront and because bush fire legislation meant they couldn't use the last ten metres of their land, it made sense to design a home with an internal vista. The second reason had to do with their children.

The first house they had designed in Seal Rocks, which took out a RAIA Blacket Commendation Award in 1998, is on a beachfront block and is made up of series of pavilions connected by decks.

"The kids were always a little freaked out there. They thought there were goblins that lived between the pavilions," Rachael says. "So we wanted to give them a sense of security. Having the feel of enclosure, with the rear roller door down and the front timber screen door closed, they feel completely secure here."

"You've got these scattered pavilions and you've got these amorphous spaces that anyone can walk through..."

— SHANE

01 The deck comes directly off the living room and kitchen.

02 The austere façade clad in concrete fibre cement with a timber front door.

03 The children's favourite spot on the hammocks in the breezeway.







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06

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Hues for the children's bunk beds were chosen directly from the landscape.

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The long window seat in the dining/living room doubles as extra sleeping space.

06

The bedrooms are screened from the living areas by water tanks and a still-growing garden.

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The bathroom features a double shower.

08

A galley-style kitchen opens on to the deck via roller doors.



07

"Also it is an evolution of a pavilion approach," Shane says. "You've got these scattered pavilions and you've got these amorphous spaces that anyone can walk through. In a house like this you can open it up without feeling exposed."

"The other thing the donut allowed us to do was to have a protected edge," Rachael adds. "So if the weather is bad, you can always get from one space to another without being too exposed."

Another real consideration in this part of the world is the risk of bush fire, and the architectural couple have ensured the design works on this front as well. Shane explains that because the site backs onto a bush reserve, that is considered a direction of fire threat. For this reason, the rear of all houses in this street must be constructed of the highest level of fire protected materials, such as fire resistant glass and flame shutters.

"So we tried to design that out of the equation by turning the house in on itself," Shane says, "and have the back breezeway shut down with a roller door. So we have essentially designed for the fire."

Because the couple were on a tight budget, designing defensively saved on potentially pricey fire resistant materials and features. They further trimmed costs by choosing affordable, durable materials like compressed cement sheeting for external cladding, Blackbutt for decking, polished particle board for internal floors and form ply for kitchen

cabinetry. Balancing this modest palette, they added vibrant colours and functional innovations that add interest and a sense of fun to the house.

"Because it was essentially for us, I felt we had free reign to really explore colour and what colours can do in a space," Rachael says. "And I wanted to use colours that were part of the Seal Rocks environment. So we went for walks and, for example, saw this great orange fungus on a Eucalyptus – that is where the orange, green and brown came from that we used in the living room."

From the front breezeway, where the surfboards live, the house is dotted with such quirky details. There are twelve metres of copper pipe mounted on the walls for beach and bath towels and a bathroom which has two showers, so the kids can all shower at once. In the living room, a daybed runs down two walls, minimising the furniture the couple had to buy.

Probably the family's favourite and most affordable tailor-designed feature is the ability to hang hammocks in the rear breezeway. "They work really well," Shane says. "It is the first stop whenever we get here. The kids grab the hammocks and set them up while we unpack."

From both parents and children's point of view, this super relaxed beach house is much loved. "It is architecture, but we didn't want it to be serious, overwhelming architecture," Shane says. "We really wanted it to be a place for our family to generate childhood memories."



They woke up one *summer* morning and Shane did a *sketch* of exactly what Rachael had been *thinking about*.

scenario

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BOURNE BLUE ARCHITECTURE



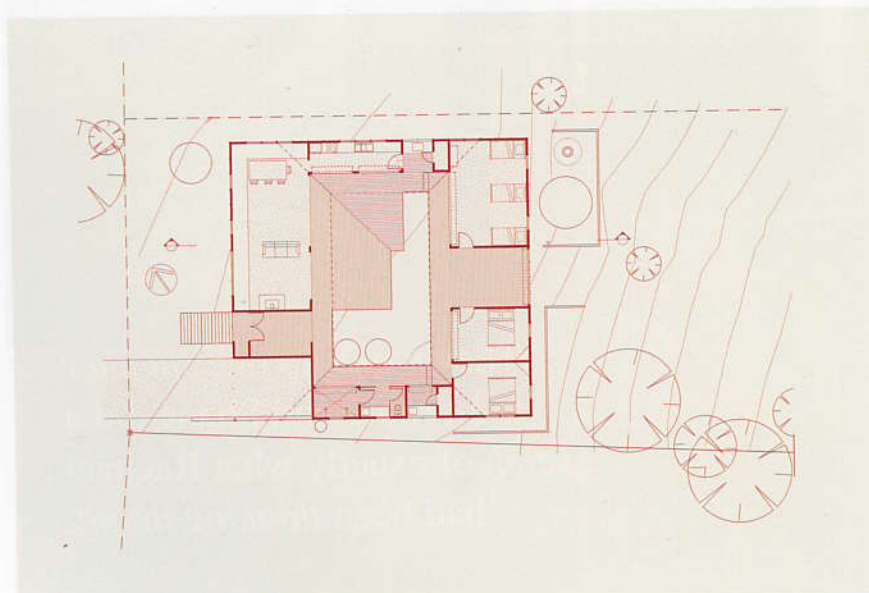
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A central courtyard and breezeways connect the front and back of the square-shaped house.
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Plan.

ARCHITECT
Bourne Blue Architecture
PROJECT ARCHITECT
Rachel Bourne, Shane Blue
BUILDER
Bruce Brown
ELECTRICIAN
Steve Brack
PLUMBER
Colin Andrews

PAINTER
Dean Hopkins
JOINER
Kev Thomas
CERTIFIER
Tim Stenning

bourneblue.com.au
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ARTWORK
Living room 'Aquabumps'
by Eugene Tan.

FURNITURE
From IKEA, ikea.com.au.
Lounge Lillbert three-seat solid Birch, lacquered plywood and cotton-upholstered. Dining chairs Nordmyra solid Birch and painted plywood. Dining table extendable Norden solid Beech. Bed Mandal and Tromso bunks. Hammock from Bunnings. bunnings.com.au

FINISHES
Cladding unpainted compressed cement sheet from BGC, bgc.com.au. Walls concrete blocks from C&M, adbrimasonry.com.au, painted in Murobond Pure, Aquaglaize Pearl and Murowash, murobond.com.au. Windows clear anodised aluminium frames from G.James, g.james.com.au. Deck and bathroom floor Blackbutt. Roof Colorbond in Shale Grey, flashings and gutters in Windspray, bluescopesteel.com.au. Floors polished particleboard. Bathroom walls Zincalume sheet. Towel rails copper pipe.

LIGHTING
Living Leran from Ikea. External parafood fittings and bunks at deck level from Bunnings.

FIXTURES/EQUIPMENT
Roller doors from Twin Towns. Garage Doors, (61 2) 6554 6052. Wall fans from Beacon Lighting, beaconlighting.com.au. Wastewater wet composting system from A & A Worm Farm Waste Systems, wormfarm.com.au. Oven Bosch, bosch.com.au from Winning Appliances, winning.com.au. Cooktop Bosch induction from Winning. Rangehood Qasair universal from Winning, qasair.com.au. Barbecue Sunco stainless from Quinlan's, quinlans.com.au. Fireplace Nectre M12 from Quinlan's. Watertanks various sizes in aquaplate Zincalume from Maitland Sheet Metal, (61 2) 4932 5855. WC Porcher Cygnet from Reece, reece.com.au. Tapware Pacific Ecotap, pacifictaps.com.au. Basin Abey round stainless steel, abey.com.au. Hot water Quantum heat pump, quantumenergy.com.au. Hot water recirculation Chilli Pepper from Reece. Fire sprinklers from Hunter Irrigation and Water Solutions, hunterirrigation.com.au.