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issue 31

Castle Cove House  
Seashore Library  
Casa Bruma

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**Editor**  
Joe Rollo

**Design**  
Garry Emery, Michael Hourigan

**Photographers in this issue**  
Rafael Gamo, Brett Boardman, He Bin,  
Xia Zhi, Sun Dongping, Cemal Emden

**CCAA Offices**

**Sydney (National Office)**  
Level 10  
Altitude Corporate Centre  
163 O'Riordan Street  
Mascot NSW 2020  
PO Box 124  
Mascot NSW 1460  
Telephone 61 2 9667 8300  
Facsimile 61 2 9693 5234

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Email CplusA@ccaa.com.au  
Website www.ccaa.com.au

**Melbourne**  
Suite 910, 1 Queens Road  
Melbourne VIC 3004  
Telephone 61 3 9825 0200  
Facsimile 61 3 9825 0222

**Brisbane**  
Suite 2, Level 2, 485 Ipswich Road  
Annerley QLD 4103  
Telephone 61 7 3227 5200  
Facsimile 61 7 3892 5655

**Perth**  
45 Ventnor Avenue  
West Perth WA 6005  
Telephone 61 8 9389 4452  
Facsimile 61 8 9389 4451

**Tasmania**  
15 Marana Avenue  
Rose Bay TAS 7015  
Telephone 61 3 6491 2529  
Facsimile 61 3 9825 0222

# C+S+U 31





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Fernanda Canales +  
Claudia Rodríguez



Castle Cove House  
Sydney Australia  
Terroir

C+A  
02

# CASTLE






# CASTLE COVE







made of folded concrete, zinc and steel, the house traverses the face of the escarpment in cranks and folds, looking out toward the dense bush, and the sparkling waters of the harbour beyond... a house as sculpture, of shifting geometries and visual delight



Clinging to the side of an eroded escarpment running down to the waters of Middle Harbour on Sydney's lower north shore, this house will, in time, be absorbed by the native bushland that enfolds it.

Set on the edge of a sandstone plateau, the intent of its architects, Terroir, is deliberate. Made of folded concrete, zinc and steel and, internally, of folded steel and blackbutt joinery, the house traverses the face of the escarpment in cranks and folds, looking out toward the dense angophora bush, across a swimming pool below and the sparkling waters of the harbour beyond: a house as sculpture, of shifting geometries and visual delight.

The concrete, poured insitu, is sharply defined. The roof, of zinc, folds down one side of the house; so perfectly detailed as to take on the aspect of a fifth façade. Like the concrete, it too will weather and soften in time to blend almost seamlessly into the landscape that surrounds it. The geometry of the house follows the contours of the land; its form largely dictated by a large scribbly gum on the harbour side of the site. Retaining walls of sandstone block at the back of the house loosely follow the geometry of the house. These, too, will weather and mellow in time, like a remnant retaining wall supporting an existing tennis court to one side of the land.

Design architect Chris Rogers perhaps puts it best: "This project considers the history of Castle Cove – a classic Sydney context consisting of steep ravines with tributaries through angophora bushland down to the harbour. The sandstone geology is omnipresent and takes many forms, from mighty escarpments to minor ripples in the bedrock.

"These landscape tectonics inform the design. The concrete shell of irregular geometry steps around outcrops and contours in a new,

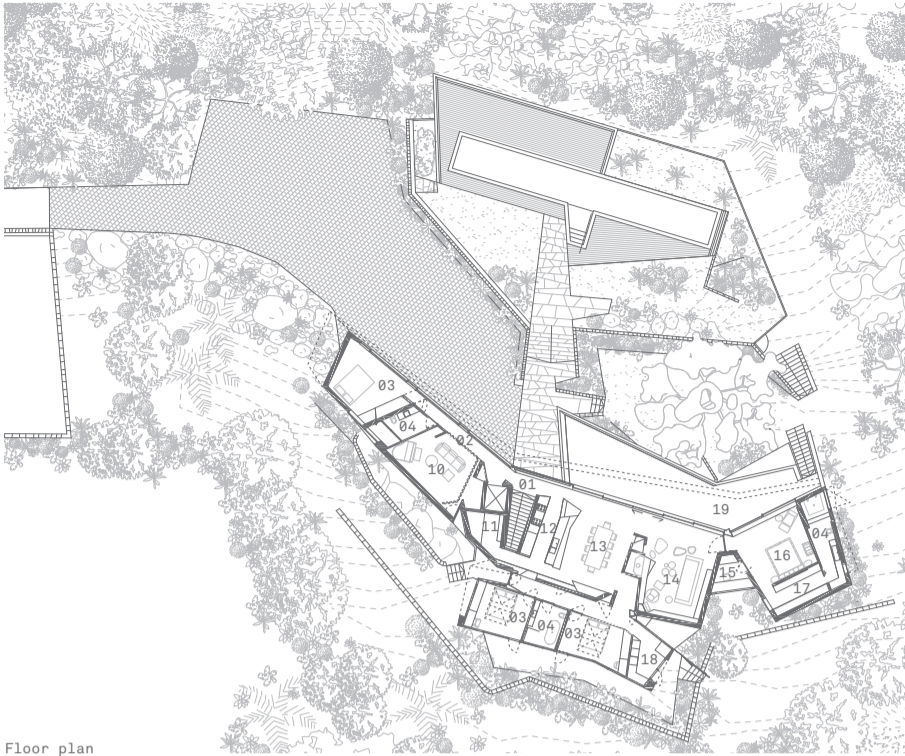
indeterminate form that is distinctively new but also could equally be a strange object 'unearthed' in excavation. This concrete element is something of a reverberation of the site geometry, forming a built escarpment that provides a plateau for habitation."

A twisted Clement Meadmore sculpture greets visitors at the front door. From here you step into a compressed entry sequence to a gym, a guest bedroom, bathroom and wine cellar. The feeling here is one of entering a subterranean world. Skylights, doubling as thermal chimneys, draw light into this space. Mirrors are used cleverly to reflect the outdoors at all times. A piece of folded black steel plate in the bedroom acts as desk, luggage store and step-up to an outdoor terrace.

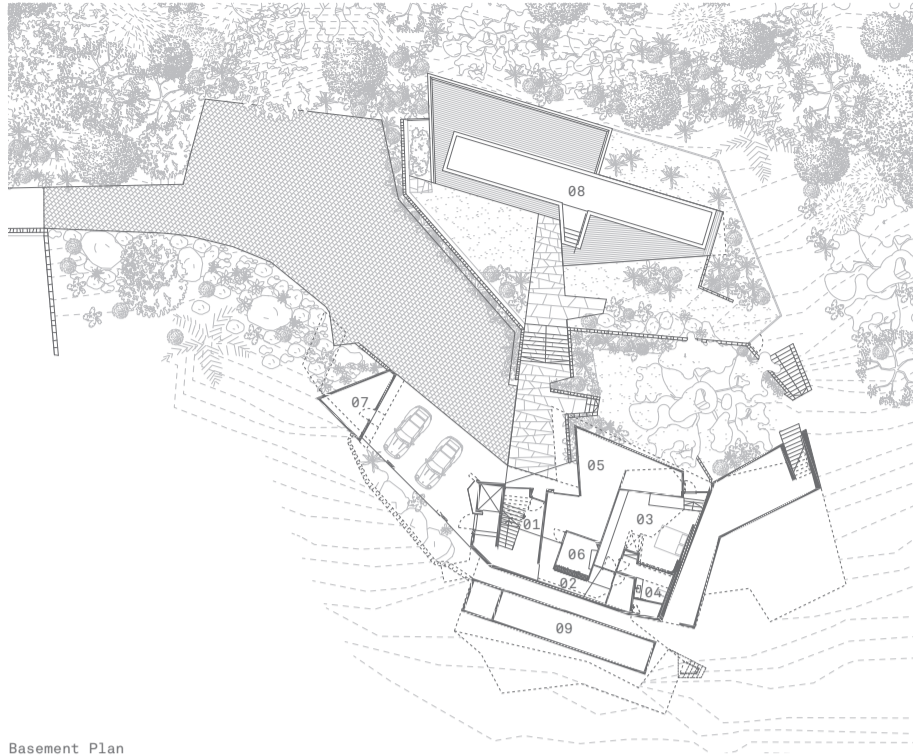
The main part of the house, up a set of steel-plate stairs, is spread in a linear arrangement of bedrooms, black media room, living room and kitchen and dining zone, all placed along a 'path' at the edge of the building, dressed in blackbutt linings and folded steel joinery. All is designed, all is pre-determined. Spaces open and close and expand. This is a house of reflected light and constant views towards the bush and the harbour below. There is a great balance of materials. And always the views – up close and distant – down along the escarpment. One bathroom with a Japanese-style step-down concrete bath opens directly onto a bush reserve via a large pivoting window. The sense of calm within is palpable. A second spine at the rear of the house, clad entirely in blackbutt linings, contains more bedrooms and a bathroom. Rainwater tanks for firefighting and for garden watering are concealed beneath the house. **Joe Rollo**







Floor plan



Basement Plan

C + A  
06

- |                |                      |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 01 Entry Stair | 11 Kitchen Store     |
| 02 Circulation | 12 Kitchen           |
| 03 Bedroom     | 13 Dining            |
| 04 Bathroom    | 14 Living            |
| 05 Gym         | 15 Office            |
| 06 Cellar      | 16 Master bedroom    |
| 07 Boiler room | 17 Robe and en suite |
| 08 Pool & Deck | 18 Laundry           |
| 09 Water Tanks | 19 Balcony           |
| 10 Media Room  |                      |

all is designed, all is pre-determined. Spaces open and close and expand. This a house of reflected light and constant views towards the bush and the harbour below

#### Project Statement

The history of the single-family house in Sydney during the last century is one that maps an evolving changing approach to our relationship with the landscape. Experimentation in this regard has largely related to the question of occupying the steep and often spectacular landscapes around their harbour and the modes of habitation possible between these houses and their site in Sydney's benign climate.

This project considers that history in Castle Cove — a classic Sydney context consisting of deep ravines with tributaries flowing through angophora bushland down to the harbour. The sandstone geology is omnipresent and takes many forms, from mighty escarpments to minor ripples in the bedrock.

These landscape tectonics inform the design. The concrete shell of irregular geometry steps around outcrops and contours, in a new, indeterminate form that is distinctively new but also could equally be a strange object 'unearthed' in excavation. This concrete element is something of a reverberation of the site geometry, forming a built escarpment that provides a plateau for habitation. The concrete escarpment is roofed in a continuous zinc membrane that folds over to form a smaller pocket to the rear containing a less public program. Both materials will patinate over time, moving again from a "new" to "pre-existing" form.

The infrastructural nature of this primary gesture has in its counterpoint the means of occupying the house through a series of crafted timber linings that enable the occupation of this concrete landscape with a spirit and glamour reminiscent of the California mid-century houses of John Lautner and others. The resulting interior spaces connect inhabitants with the monumental and wondrous nature of the landscape, yet still provide intimate moments for occupation that are so necessary for everyday life.

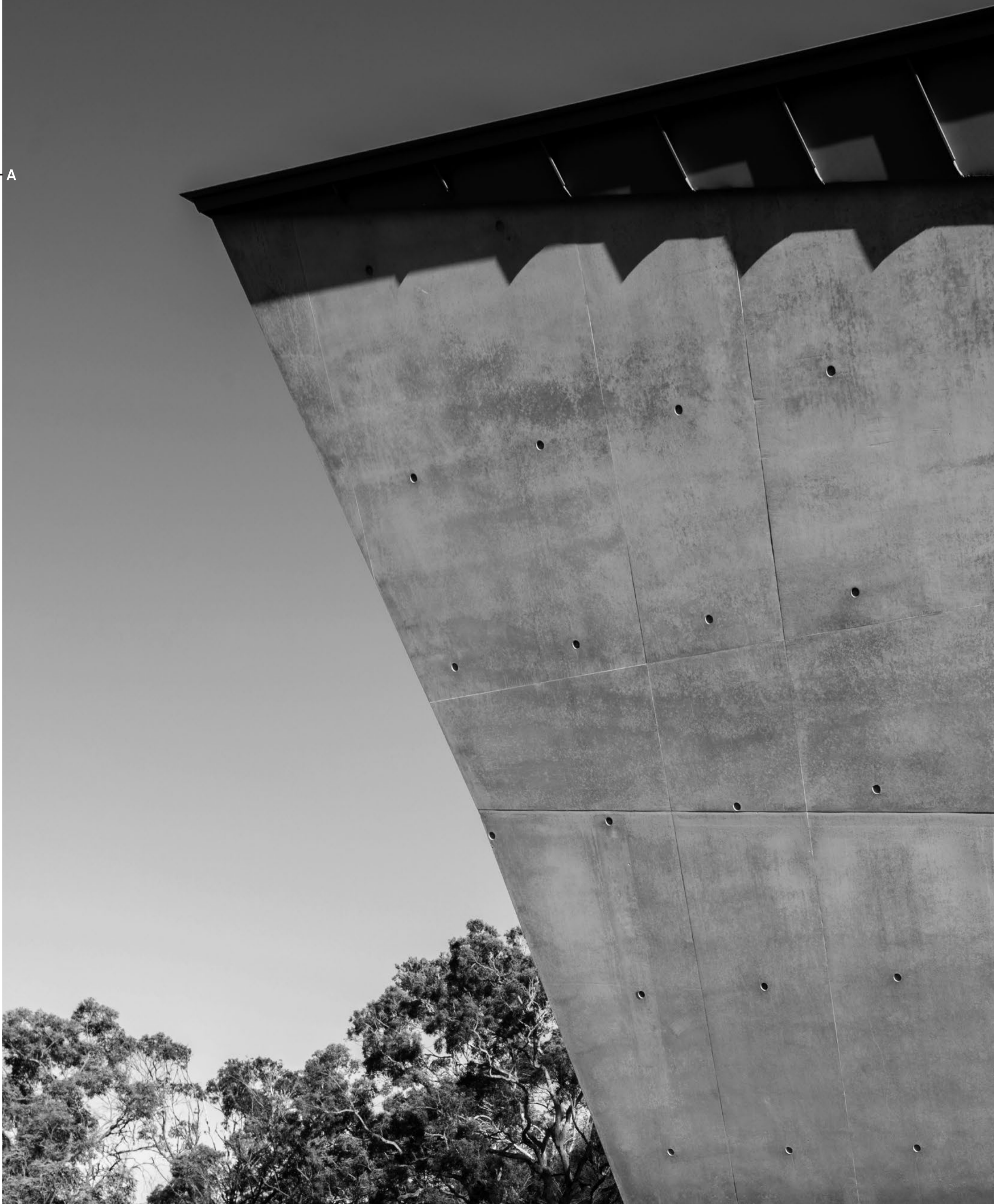
These linings are further embellished with a number of steel, brass and mirror inserts that are like devices or instruments that start in the practical requirements of occupation, given their basis in linings, benches, windows and skylights. The common thread through each instrument is the further diffusion of the concrete container both physically (in fissures and pockets that increase its porosity) and perceptually (through mirrors, skylights passing through all levels, openings that limit acoustic privacy) that serve to mentally expand the scale of the building. In every case, the instruments serve to intensify the relation between the occupants and landscape so directly established by the primary concrete form. This strong connection to place has also led to passive climate control strategies that are intertwined into the form of the structure. The basement acts as a cold sink that allows for cool air to be constantly drawn through the main living spaces via floor vents and operable skylights purposely tilted north to draw heat and assist in the convection process. Combined with cross ventilation, generous overhangs, thermal mass, double glazing with internal and external blinds and a hydronic under floor heating system these passive strategies have produced a thermally stable environment for the occupants that requires little active power consumption. **Terroir**













**Project** Castle Cove House  
**Location** Castle Cove, Sydney  
**Architects** TERROIR  
**Interiors & Lighting** TERROIR in collaboration  
with Pascale Gomes-McNabb  
**Interior styling** Pascale Gomes-McNabb  
**Structural Engineer** Kevin Mongey,  
Simpson Design Associates  
**Concrete Structure** Tony Olding  
**Exterior and Interior finishing** Ed Callanan –  
Callic Constructions  
**Photography** Brett Boardman

