

Architect: Sean Godsell
Project team:
Sean Godsell (principal), Hayley Franklin
Structural engineer:
Felicetti Pty Ltd
Landscape architects:
Sean Godsell with
Sam Cox
General contractor:
Kane Constructions
(Vic) Pty Ltd
Structure: steel portal
frames with lightweight
infill walls
Materials: oxidised
steel, jarrah (timber)
screens, concrete
Construction 2001-2002
Photographer:
Earl Carter

Architect's statement A 30 metre x 7.2 metre oxidised steel portal structure has been embedded into the side of a sand dune. This structure forms the 'exoskeleton' of the house, onto which the weather-controlling outer skin – operable timber shutters, glass roof and walls – is mounted.

The simple programme of the house – a living/eating room, library, and sleeping room – forms the 'endoskeleton' of the building. The sleeping room is an inner room accessed by a private stair. These notions of inner room (moya) and enclosed verandah (hisashi) were explored in an earlier work (the Carter/Tucker house) where the idea of fluid (aisle) space formed the basis of the design for that building. Whereas in the Carter/Tucker house the three primary spaces were treated equally in dimension and volume, in this house the three primary spaces are different in dimension, volume and quality of light: the living room is very light, the bedroom is moderately light, and the library is dark by comparison. The verandah has become further abstracted in this work to become the protective outer layer of the building. There is no distinction in that sense between the function of the roof and the function of the walls. The house itself is the nurturing inner room, protected from the elements by a coarse outer hide. The interplay of the occupant between these two elements activates the simple form of the building (by the opening and closing of the facade) and transforms it into an organic domain. This effect is further accentuated by the emptying and filling of the building with light, filtered through the timber screens, which maps the course of the day and the time of the year in the shape and extent of the shadows cast by the screens.

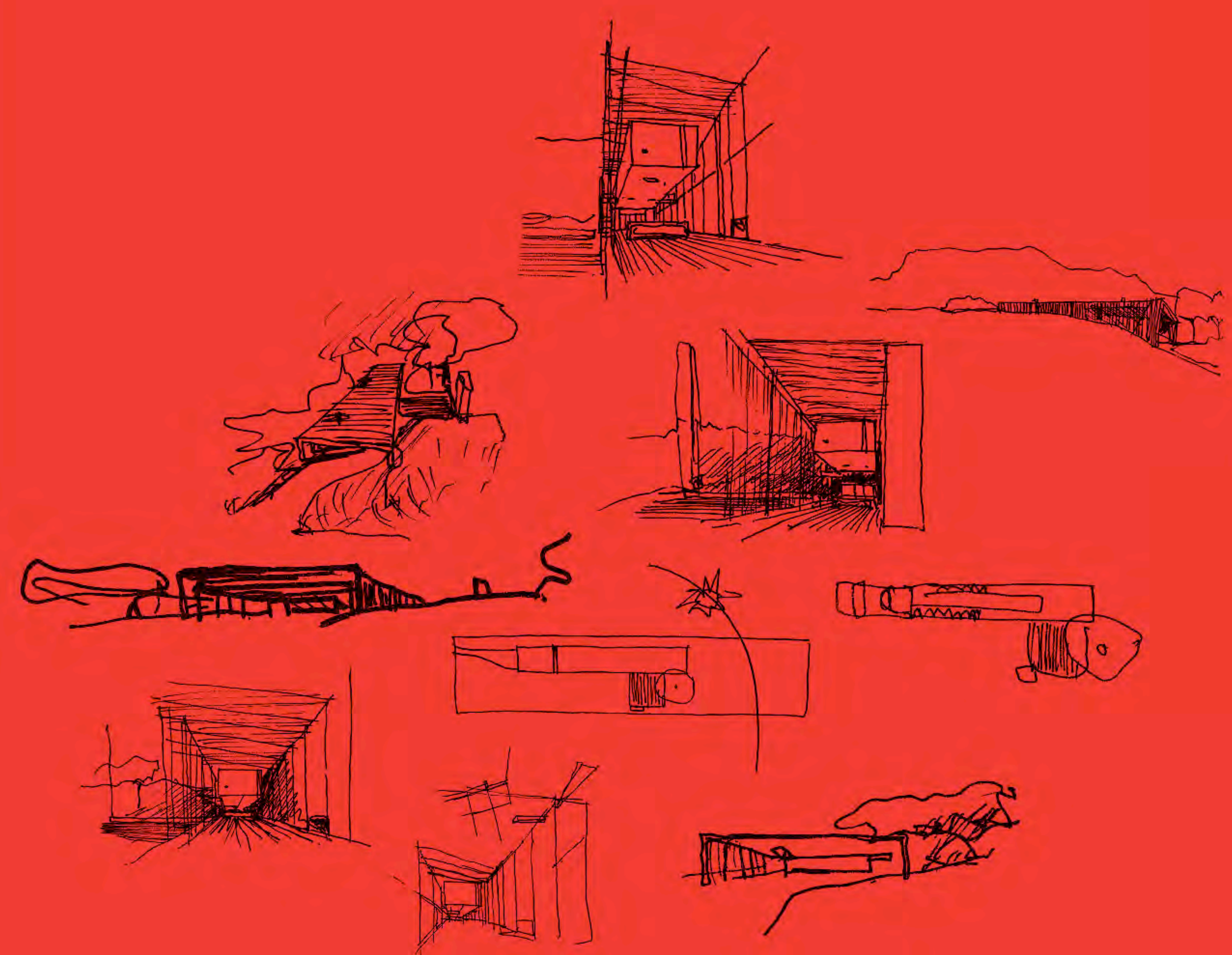
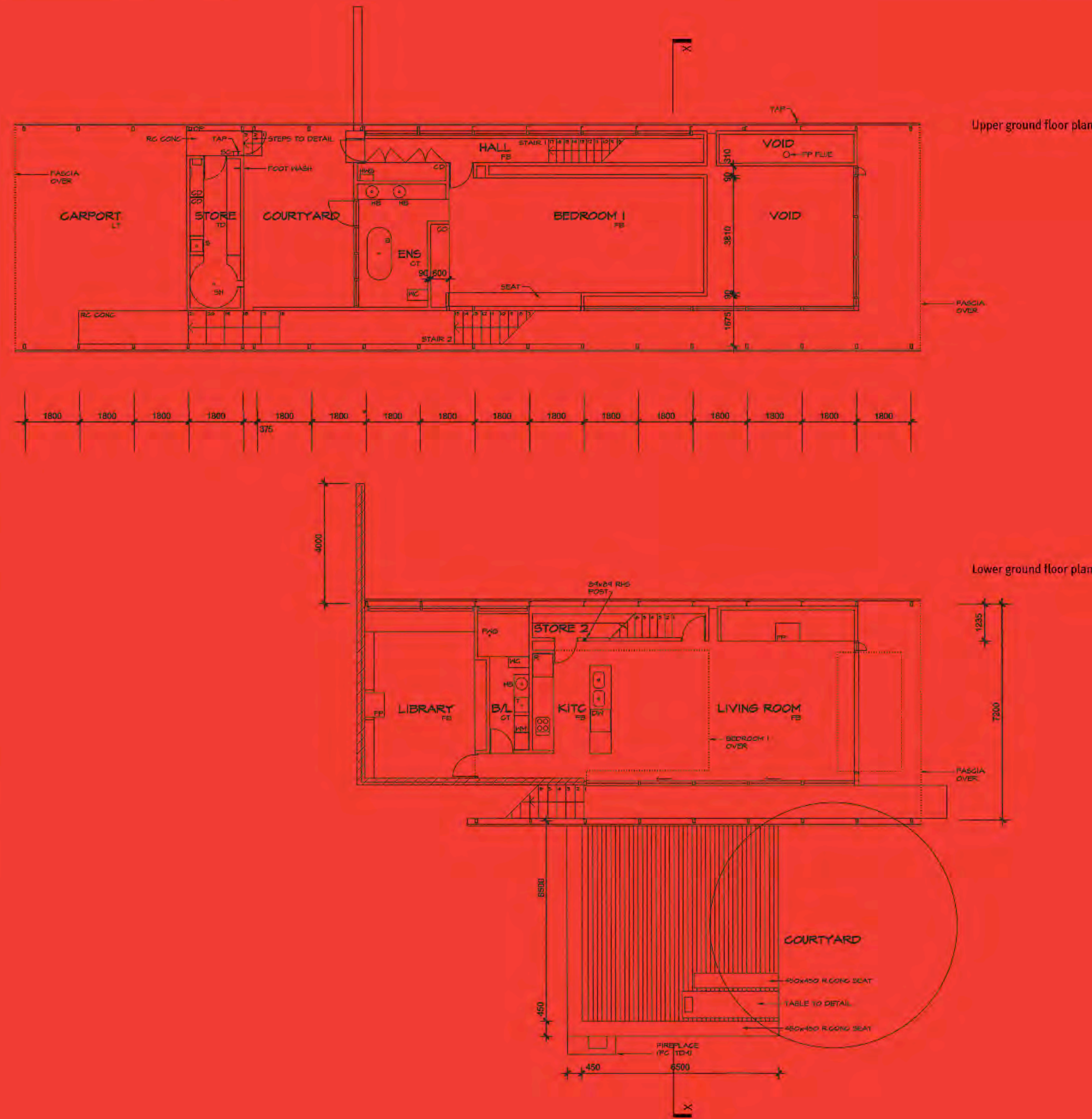
This is a further investigation into the similarities between the enclosed verandah of the traditional Japanese house and the sun room of the Australian house. My interest lies in the iconic nature of these elements to both cultures – Asian and European – and the common architectural ground which they afford to the region.

Sean Godsell

Sean Godsell



Sean Godsell alludes to the verandah and the sun room of Australian domestic architecture, and indeed the atmospheric qualities of both spaces are captured in this house. Yet it probably evokes more powerfully another traditional Australian domestic element, the shade house, a batten-enclosed space used for growing ferns, and valued as a cool and shady outdoor room in northern tropical and dusty country areas of Australia. Godsell makes the entire house from what is conventionally the marginal area between inside and outside, the verandah. One is reminded here of Murcutt, not because this house resembles a Murcutt building, but rather because both architects amplify the interstitial, inbetween space of the verandah to encompass a whole building, as a logical response to achieving a climatically responsive architecture.



Godsell's architecture is marked by the formal clarity that he brings to the rigorous pursuit of an experimental idea. This building can be seen as an exploration of the Farnsworth house, the austere glass box (Mies van der Rohe, 1950). It is an idea that Godsell has developed through a series of buildings: his own house, a glazed steel box; and again in the batten-screened Carter/Tucker house; and in this house. All three are essentially glass boxes adapted to modulate the strong light and heat of Australia. Another interest is in locating the building within the terrain, rather than floating above it. (His father was an architect, and Godsell was steeped in the Wrightian tradition of lodging the building within the ground.) A prodigious tenacity is required to take an idea like this – the batten shade house screening a glass box – and make it work programmatically, practically, and especially in terms of the detailing – materials, fabrication, water-proofing, sunscreening, maintenance. There is a level of resolution achieved here that is rarely encountered outside the best English high-tech tradition; and this has been accomplished using hardwood battens, the most wayward and undisciplined of timbers.



