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A BARN-LIKE HOUSE DEEP IN THE BUSH BALANCES LEVITY AND OPENNESS WITH THE ANCHORING QUALITIES OF TIMBER.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RODNEY WEIDLAND



**W**hen Natasha Marshall was about to complete her architectural degree, she was commissioned to design her first house. She counts herself as fortunate: "My clients gave me free rein to do what I felt was best for the site."

There were just two stipulations – Natasha had to ensure that the house would be marketable and that it would not negatively affect the owners' adjoining property.

"In a way it was a bit overwhelming to have such an open brief. Most architects start off by doing a little extension. Here I had no limitations, it just had to be saleable and aesthetically pleasing."

While her options were many, her sense of the land and the site dictated the direction she was finally to take. The classical simplicity of the country barn and storage shed as a structural form was her source of inspiration. "I looked quite carefully at the barn as a building type, which had a big impact on the main living area. I thought it was important to look at these traditional forms, given the requirements."

Researching the local agents around Berry, a NSW town south of Sydney, Natasha established that the market niche would most likely be Sydney buyers – possibly a retired couple or people looking for a second home. "The most sought-after features were said to be high timber ceilings, large picture windows,

timber floors and open plan living," explains Natasha – all of which have been incorporated in her design.

She spent some time exploring the site and surrounding rainforest. The site itself was a cleared mid-slope plateau, facing south-west, with views towards the coast. It looked straight across the owners' property and existing houses, which is situated further down the hill and screened by bush and their own trees.

The vertical patterning of the tree trunks, mostly Sydney blue gums, is an important feature. These are viewed from the house on all sides, framed by the large picture windows or glimpsed through the square timber-clad columns of the colonnade and deep deck – features that extend the living spaces outward on two sides of the house.

"The site had a very natural, native quality, which led to a difficult dichotomy. The site demanded a tight touch, but to fulfill the function of 'house', a certain degree of solidity, security and permanence needed to be achieved." Making this particularly relevant is the

Fruit and foliage in sharp lime green, right and opposite, offset grey cement-rendered walls, intense blues and the warmth of natural oiled timbers. All furnishings are from Sarum Gallery, Paddington; kitchen utensils from The Design Store, Mosman. Below: the colonnade wraps around the house, framing views on all sides. Deep steps were a device to avoid the use of railings. The roof is BHP Colorbond 'Slate Grey'. Vines will be planted along the colonnade to lend a softening effect to the exterior.



plateau's exposure to strong northerly winds, "which was one of the reasons why I wanted it to look so solid", anchored to the ground, so to speak. The finished product elegantly does that with its strong linear quality of vertical and horizontal elements. "I'm really attracted to linear space and linear progressions," adds Natasha. "They have energy and movement."

The shed-like appearance was countered by using masonry for the internal walls, to give weight. Natasha's aim was "a house that balanced qualities of solidity and permanence with openness and lightness."

With this in mind, she chose a mainly timber construction, with strong architectural forms inside and out. "I felt that a masonry house would have had too much impact on the land." Timber also made more sense on the sloping site.

A brilliant touch was to place a colonnade – the length of the northern side of the house, edged by river pebbles and extending out to a large, flat, grassy area. "It gives the house a solid reading and cuts out the summer sun." It also parallels the long wide gallery, or corridor, reminiscent of the old closed-in veranda space, which runs from the living area to the huge, airy main bedroom at the far end of the house.

"The corridor plays an important role in the planning of this house," Natasha explains. "It is an undefined space which could be used in many different ways. The bi-fold doors open the whole northern wall to create an open veranda-like space. The colonnade adds to the ambiguity of the boundary between interior and exterior." At the same time it becomes the main circulation space, providing access to the bedrooms, loft and bathroom.

Carefully sited to take full advantage of the views to the south and the winter sun to the north, the house's long rectangular shape is deceptive. While appearing to be low-lying when viewed from the ground, it has, in fact, two levels, with the upper level comprising an open loft overlooking the spacious

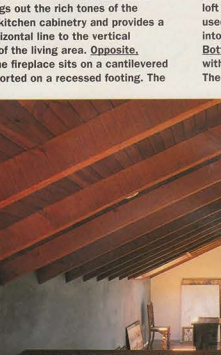
Surrounded by Sydney blue gums, the house, opposite, is strongly influenced by traditional country building forms. External timber is treated with Cabyle's oil-based 'Weathered Cedar'. This page: the gallery-like corridor functions as library, quiet reading area or additional living space. The outer wall of timber-framed glass doors folds open to extend the living area onto the colonnade and lawn. Doors are painted in Dulux 'Hurricane'.



'Ebony Oxide Velvet' Formica, opposite, inset, brings out the rich tones of the brushed kitchen cabinetry and provides a strong horizontal line to the vertical elements of the living area. Opposite, bottom: the fireplace sits on a cantilevered shelf supported on a recessed footing. The



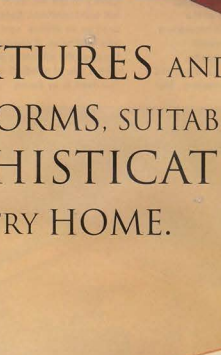
gallery to the left leads to the bedrooms, loft and bathroom. Below: the loft, presently used as an artists' space, can be converted into bedrooms. If required, at a later stage. Bottom: the kitchen's palm board is hung with a row of pendant 'Lineal' lights by Lucel. The oven is by Smeg.



The shower recess divides the bathroom, left, into two areas: wash basin and lavatory at the front; shower and bath, enjoying views of the valley, at the rear. Walls are lined, country style, with painted weatherboard. The tiles are from Fortulin Tiles, Balgowlah, NSW.



The living area, viewed from the loft. Activity zones are clearly contained – the lighting pines the kitchen, and the rug, from Tibet Gallery, Woolahart, anchors the sitting area – leaving the space uncluttered and composed.



The main bedroom, left and above, is lined with plasterboard for a soft effect. The freestanding wall conceals the dressing room, which leads to a large en suite bathroom. French doors open to a deck and colonnade, with picture windows framing views. Rush-seated chair from Sarum Gallery. Painting above bed by Jan van Wijingan.



the house so much that they found themselves agonising over whether to move in and sell their old house. "We like Natasha's design, the minimal fuss, the use of space – large open spaces with smaller intimate and private areas inside and out. And lightness, with cooling breezes going right through in summer. And she kept within our limited budget."

The problem was quickly resolved. "The owners have asked Natasha to list her architect's eyes on their old house: "It needs a lot of lightening up. We're looking forward to seeing what she'll come up with."

**BABETTE HAYES**

RICH TEXTURES AND SIMPLE FORMS, SUITABLE FOR A SOPHISTICATED COUNTRY HOME.



living/dining/kitchen area. "The plan was to have four bedrooms, two up, two down, but as it was being built it looked so wonderful we left it open."

When it came to furnishing the house, Natasha called on her mother, Annette Marshall, who runs the Sarum Gallery in Sydney's Paddington. "I had strong feelings about what I wanted – the warmth of timbers, the cool grey of cement render and deep blue painted doors and upholstery."

Natasha and Annette chose furniture that combined rich textures and simple forms, suitable for a sophisticated country home.

Pivotal to the whole house was the living and kitchen space. The fireplace wall provides form and drama in the centre of the house while the kitchen, with its rich timbers and dramatic black Formica laminate benchtops, provides an elegant but practical work and entertaining area. "It needed to be a separate entity and yet be part of the whole, which is why I combined the timber with black."

Currently working on several projects in Sydney and Kangaroo Valley, Natasha finds that "in the country, people have time to be involved and show interest in what's going on... everything works at a different pace, and the council is more approachable and laid back. In Sydney, it's a fight to get anything through. Berry was a good place to start."

And what better way to start? The clients loved the house so much that they found themselves agonising over whether to move in and sell their old house. "We like Natasha's design, the minimal fuss, the use of space – large open spaces with smaller intimate and private areas inside and out. And lightness, with cooling breezes going right through in summer. And she kept within our limited budget."