

# MODERNIST Liveability

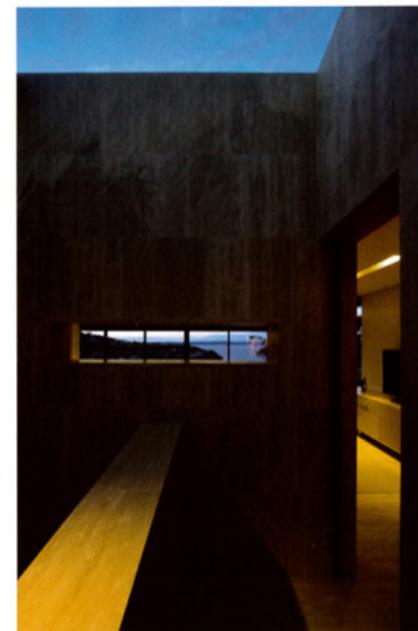
The owners of this house at Sydney's Whale Beach wanted a house they could "hose down" – in keeping with the great Australian beach tradition. *Heather Barton* visited this house by architects *Cullen Feng*, which enjoys sublime views down to one of Sydney's finest beaches and north along the coastline.

**Text**  
*Heather Barton*

**Photography**  
*Eric Sierens*



I 03



I 04

I 01 Previous  
*The Staircase*

Acts as the home's backbone, linking all levels.

I 02  
*Slow reveal*

Views are delivered in stages, so they don't overwhelm the home.

I 03  
*Bathroom*

Natural materials and a back-to-basics approach are vital.

I 04  
*Snapshot Windows*

Assist in layering access to outside.

While there is no dominant architectural style in the Whale Beach area, there is a loose tradition of organic Modernism, taking material cues from James Barnet's local sandstone, colonial architecture, and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century designs of Burley Griffin and Ruskin Rowse that pepper the Barrenjoey Peninsula.

More recently, Alex Popov, Tonkin Zulaikha Greer and Stutchbury Pape have made monumental marks in the area, once occupied by the indigenous people of the Guringai language group, before they were decimated by smallpox and measles in 1790.

The area now defined as Whale Beach is a pocket of land popular with those prominent in business and particularly the arts, including film directors George Miller and Peter Weir, actors Bryan Brown and Rachel Ward, author Thomas Keneally and opera singer Joan Sutherland, but was once part of Father John Joseph Therry's 1837 land grant.

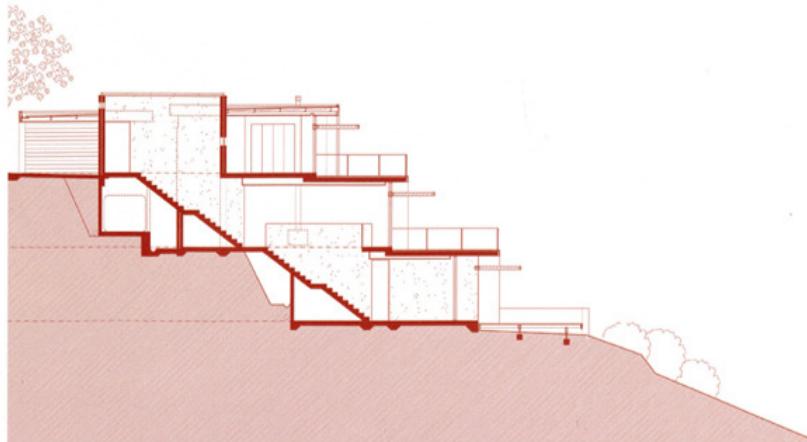
The Jesuit order sold the land after Therry's death to finance the construction of a new Catholic cathedral in Sydney, replacing the original razed by fire.

Architecture and interior design firm Cullen Feng's contribution to Whale Beach is executed on a trapezoidal-shaped site, accessed from the rear via a private road and falling away to the north approximately 11 metres. They have avoided intruding on the landscape by making the house, which lies in a foreshore protection area, barely visible from the beach.



whale beach — nsw, australia

CULLEN FENG



| 06



| 07

- | 05 Previous  
*Balcony/Pool*  
An outdoor room with a view across Whale Beach.  
| 06  
*Side elevation*  
| 07  
*Kitchen/Dining*  
The natural materials blend with the timber deck.  
| 08  
*Home Exterior*  
Steps down the site to lap pool.  
| 09  
*Living Area*  
An intimate space within a larger, flowing space.



| 08



| 09

In keeping with the tradition of the beach shack, this house harbours a concept of habitability, but within the more grand Modernist proportions of the three overlapping, offset rectangular pavilions, placed diagonally down a hillside with a unifying staircase holding a straight line through the section.

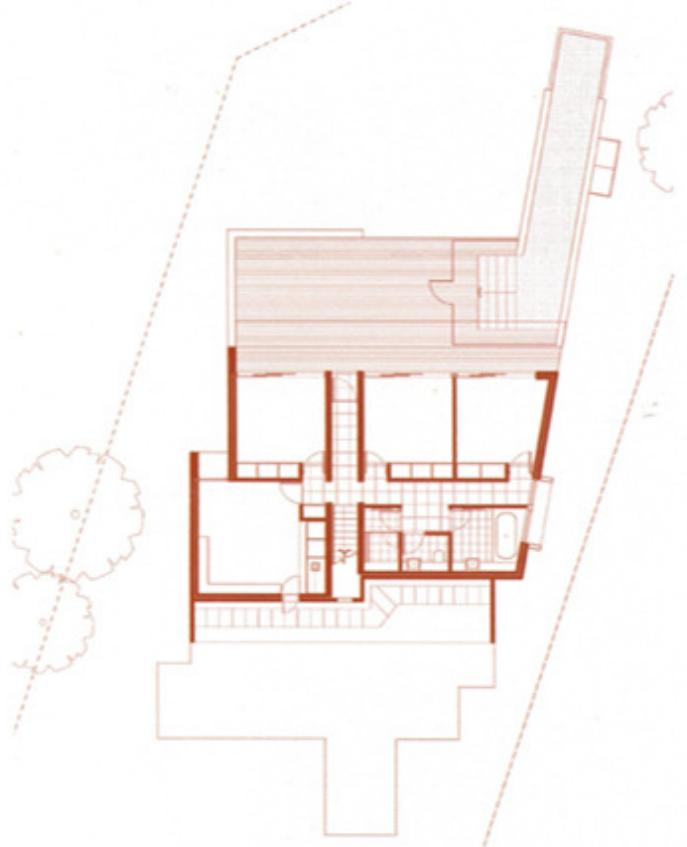
This generates a rich source of formal interest, enhanced by material selection, to accentuate each part of the composition. A Colorbond parapet and end-wall cappings form a series of continuous rectilinear ribbons around the composition, stepping down the site and taking advantage of the exhilarating views via the northern aspect over Whale Beach.

In reference to Peter Zumthor's Heideggerian experiential, sensory architecture, Jon Cullen and Michelle Feng have created a liveability with a staged experience achieved through clever framing, heightened by sensitivity to materials.

Feng comments that "The views from the site are so spectacular, they needed to be framed so their impact would not be experienced all at once."

**Whale beach — NSW, australia**

CULLEN FENG



The façade, therefore, gives no hint of what lies beyond. Once inside the entry vestibule, a rectangular aperture at eye height creates a snapshot of the ocean view. Designed as a contemplative antechamber, the vestibule gives pause upon arrival – relief from the traffic and intensity of the trip to the house and an invitation to the peaceful retreat below.

On departure, the frameless skylight leaves an after-image of the relationship of the house with the splendour of its setting.

Similarly, on descending the stair – deliberately compressed by the full-height travertine walls and illuminated naturally from above – the view opens up and retreats over the three-level journey.

Each level is oriented to the view, with the widest possible shaded northern elevation opening out to external living decks. The southern elevation is partially buried into the hill, housing services, rainwater tanks and garage space. Slits and hooded windows to the side create vignettes of the setting, while the forecourt frames a space open to the sky between house and garage.

"The house is externally dignified and reserved and purposely low-profile," says Cullen. "It relies on a series of rich formal and spatial experiences to create effect rather than epic exterior monumentalism. We've inverted the concept of monumentalism to achieve it through materials such as the use of travertine in the soaring stairs and atrium walls used in the interior."

The plan responds to the steep topography by growing out of the site with solid and private rear and side walls, while the north face of the house has a lighter filigree treatment of glazing and louvres that open onto a series of decks formed by the roofs of the levels below.

"Embedding the house into the hill, stepping it over three levels and using the roofs of the lower levels as large northern living decks captured the site's topography and climate potential," says Cullen. "The flat metal roofs support pool solar heating tubes as well as solar collectors for hot water. The majority also drain by gravity into the rainwater tank. And the east wall of the pool is a charcoal slate material, which works like a heat sink to give passive solar heating for the pool water."

The site is fortunate to have a northern aspect and being just below the top of the ridge behind, so it offers a magnificent solar aspect in sync with the direction of view and the sea breeze while being sheltered from the colder and more vicious southerlies particular to the area.

**FURNITURE**

Dining table Emmemobili

UFO from FY2K fy2k.com.au.

Dining chairs Emmemobili

C130 from FY2K.

Lounges

in lounge room Vira Soft Snail

from Format Furniture.

formatfurniture.com.au.

in bedroom Craxseving Elctecere

from FY2K.

Armchair Kudos

Mai from FY2K.

Occasional

and side tables Kenneth

Cabonique Spheres Revolving

from KE-ZU.

Ketu.com.au.

in bedroom Tastefanta Nada from

FY2K.

Sofat Vista Butterfly.

vita.com.au.

Outdoor chairs

Craxseving Net from FY2K

Atlas Bigframe from Space.

spacefurniture.com.au.

Outdoor tables Richard

Schultz Pearl and Indecasa

Domino Teak table from FY2K.

Chaise Richard Schultz 1960

adjustable from FY2K.

Serving cart Halle Porsche from Space

Furniture.

FINISHES

LPA, lpaust.com.au.

Bedrooms

and Bathrooms Go-Baths from

Euroline, euroline.com.au.

Windows aluminium framed

sashless with powdercoat finish

**VIVIDIA**

Brilliance by Interpon.

interpon.com.au.

Pergola saint

interpon.com.au.

Finish St Enoch Grey by Dulux.

dulux.com.au.

Flooring Simona

Travertine, honed and filled, and

Konekor carpet in Old Lace

from Cavalier Birkenworth.

carbide.com.au.

Benchtops

Cavestone Onyx.

ceastone.com.au.

Johney

satin polycarbonate and New

Age Veneers Alabaster veneer

ceastoneveens.com.au.

straight quarter cut,

renewgreenveens.com.au.

Blinds Silent Glass motorized

roller blinds, blockout and

screen fabric.

silenglass.com.au.

Rug Woodnotes New York

from Ambou.

ambou.com.au.

Bathroom tiles Roggereller

rectified white gloss,

roggereller.com.au.

Pool finish

custom black Pebblecrete,

pebblecrete.com.au.

and Bianco

bianco.com.au.

site wall tiles from Orivite

LIGHTING

Downlights recessed from

LPA, lpaust.com.au.

Bedrooms

and Bathrooms Go-Baths from

Euroline, euroline.com.au.

Floor lamp David Weeks Torso

standing from FY2K.

**FIXTURES & FITTINGS**

Baths oval from The Japanese

Bath Company and Kaldevali

classic, japanesebath.com.au

and kaldevali.com/bathe.net.au.

Basins Roggereller Scandeo.

WC Roggereller Verso, Shower

bar, Roggereller Aquastone.

Tapware Infraxx Roma from

Accent International,

accentinternational.com.au.

Towel rails from Hydrotherm,

hydrotherm.com.au.

Oven Fisher

&amp; Paykel, fisherpaykel.com.au.

Cooktop Miele induction,

miele.com.au.

Rangehood

Qaser, qaser.com.au.

Refrigerator Liebherr,

liebherr.com.

Dishwasher Neff

integrated, neff.co.uk.

Sink and

mixer Blanco undermounted,

blanco.com.au.