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**P.06—1** Patrick Kennedy and Rachel Nolan —**2** Merricks Beach House, Melbourne **P.07** St Kilda West House, Melbourne

[ 06 ]



# profile

# Kennedy Nolan

**Article** Ben Morgan  
**Photography** Derek Swalwell



**Material connections**  
From a pairing of like-minded university friends, *Kennedy Nolan* has grown into an architecture practice esteemed for its innovation with materials and appreciation of their symbolic power.

Hanging out in a wine bar in the 1990s, *Patrick Kennedy and Rachel Nolan* were unwittingly forming emotional connections with materials that continue to inform their practice today. Arriving in the world of architecture following the devastating recessions of the 1980s and '90s, the pair established their practice just a couple of short years after graduating.

Kennedy and Nolan had some definite ideas about architecture, which they couldn't see being expressed anywhere else in the late '90s. The white-painted brick walls of Jimmy Watson's wine bar in Carlton imprinted a certain aesthetic on the minds of the young architects, but more generally they shared an interest in the 'late flowering of modernism in Melbourne' – the legacy of Robin Boyd, of which Jimmy Watson's is a part, to Graeme Gunn and beyond, where housing changed and there was 'a new understanding of the craft of building and a close relationship between landscape and the built form.'

Modernism as a style has become fashionable now, but it's the ideas of modernism that have continued to inform Kennedy Nolan's development.

'When someone comes to us and is interested in modernism, we interrogate that to find out what it is they actually like about it – we talk about volumes and relationships to external spaces,' Nolan explains. 'They're things that interest us more than "it should look like this."'

While the white-painted bricks of Jimmy Watson's wine bar may have been formative for Kennedy and Nolan, their fascination with materials – like with every facet of their projects – is more about an understanding of juxtaposition and variation.

'When we started the practice in the '90s people were putting a "big family box" on the back of their house, with open living, dining and kitchen; neither of us was really interested in that,' Nolan recalls. 'We were interested in diversity of experience as opposed to just being big, bright, high and loud.'

'We talk a lot in the practice about contrast,' he continues. 'If everything's white, bright and big, you become desensitised to it, so we talk about low spaces and high spaces, bright spaces and dark spaces, loud spaces and quiet spaces.'

By having this contrast in spaces, you actually feel something.'

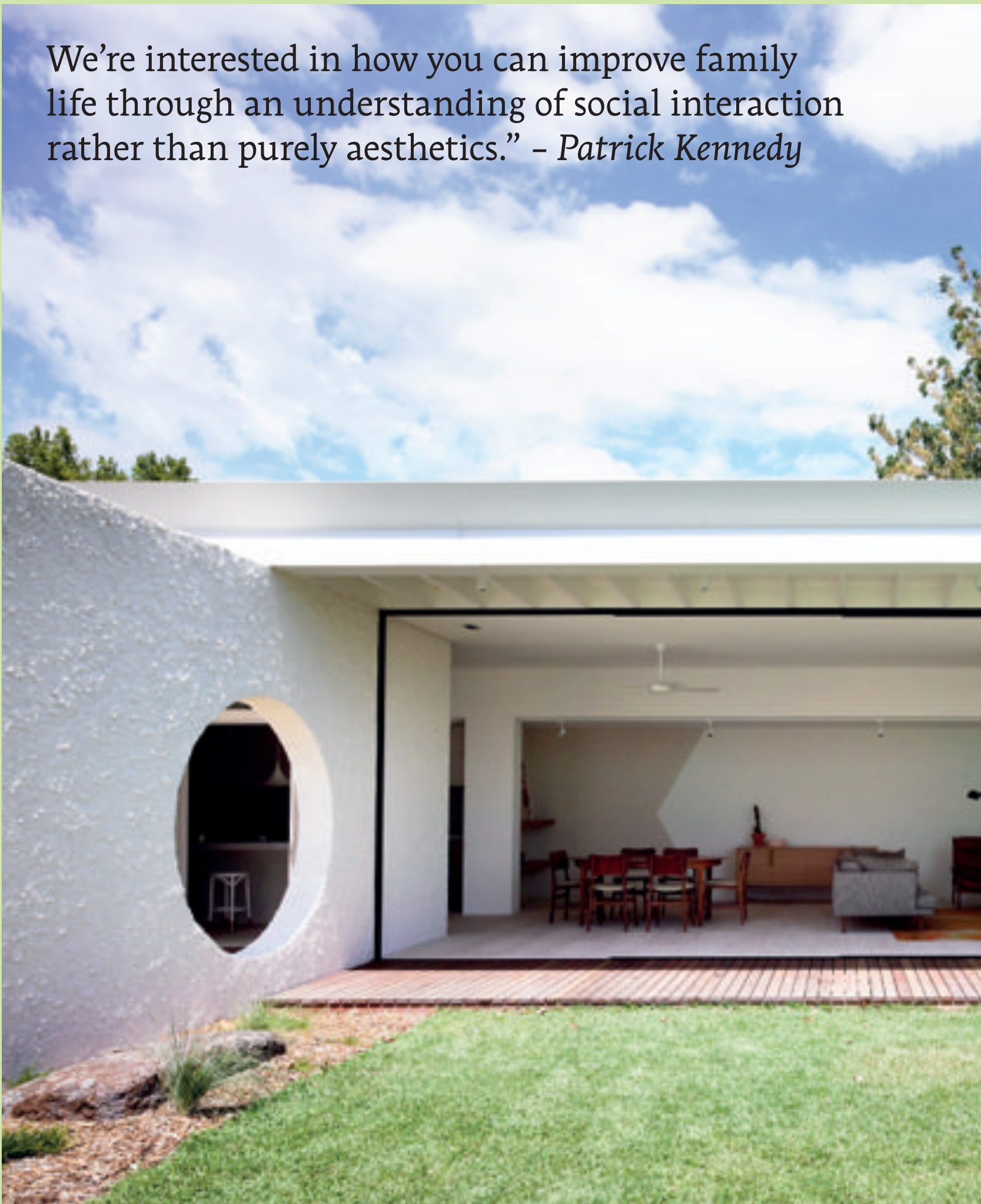
This contrast and variation can be seen throughout their portfolio of work, most distinctly in their Park Lane project, which features different heights, scales and materials along its laneway boundary wall.





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• We're interested in how you can improve family life through an understanding of social interaction rather than purely aesthetics." - *Patrick Kennedy*





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As a substantial addition to an existing residence, the project also demonstrates another preoccupation of Kennedy Nolan's alterations and additions – the establishment of 'second entry'. With older homes, there is often an obvious or dominant entry, which leads guests down a hall and past the 'personal' spaces such as bedrooms. Nolan explains that by establishing a second entry into the living areas, it's possible to maintain and strengthen the private and shared zones.

The architects are also excited by technology – not 'high-tech' bells and whistles, but the pushing of materials within the limits of constructability. 'We're not interested in designing crazy stuff in software that then becomes a palaver to build and basically a stage set – an idea of what's high tech, when really it's all smoke and mirrors. We're more interested in technology for what it can allow you to do.'

When it comes to materials, the practice aims not just to provide distinctive visual detail, but to trigger much deeper connections with place, acknowledging the power of material signifiers. 'The aesthetics for us are really about engaging memory – making memorable places and also provoking memory.'

With a well-established staff of 16, the practice has evolved over the years. While there's commonality of thinking, there are now other influences and a broader mix of work – they no longer just work within the high-end residential sphere, but in everything from social housing to retail.

'We're doing the refurbishment of Melbourne Central right now, which is a fairly atypical project for a practice like ours. We've been able to bring something fresh to it, which is what we were hired for, because we're not retail architects or shopping centre architects.'

Kennedy and Nolan both believe a good architect is a thinker – that while they follow their instincts in a lot of their work, these instincts are based on a wider understanding of what materials do; what their acoustic and textural qualities are, their durability, how they age, how they work with other materials, and perhaps most importantly, what they mean or signify to the occupants.

'It's about looking at materials that age in place – that start looking more beautiful or stay the course,' says Nolan. 'We try to avoid using cheap materials that are terrific when you hand the keys over but from then on it's all downhill. When talking about materiality, we would encourage clients to build less, but build with great materials that last.' ●





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# A tower in a garden

## **CARLTON WAREHOUSE**

**Architects** Kennedy Nolan

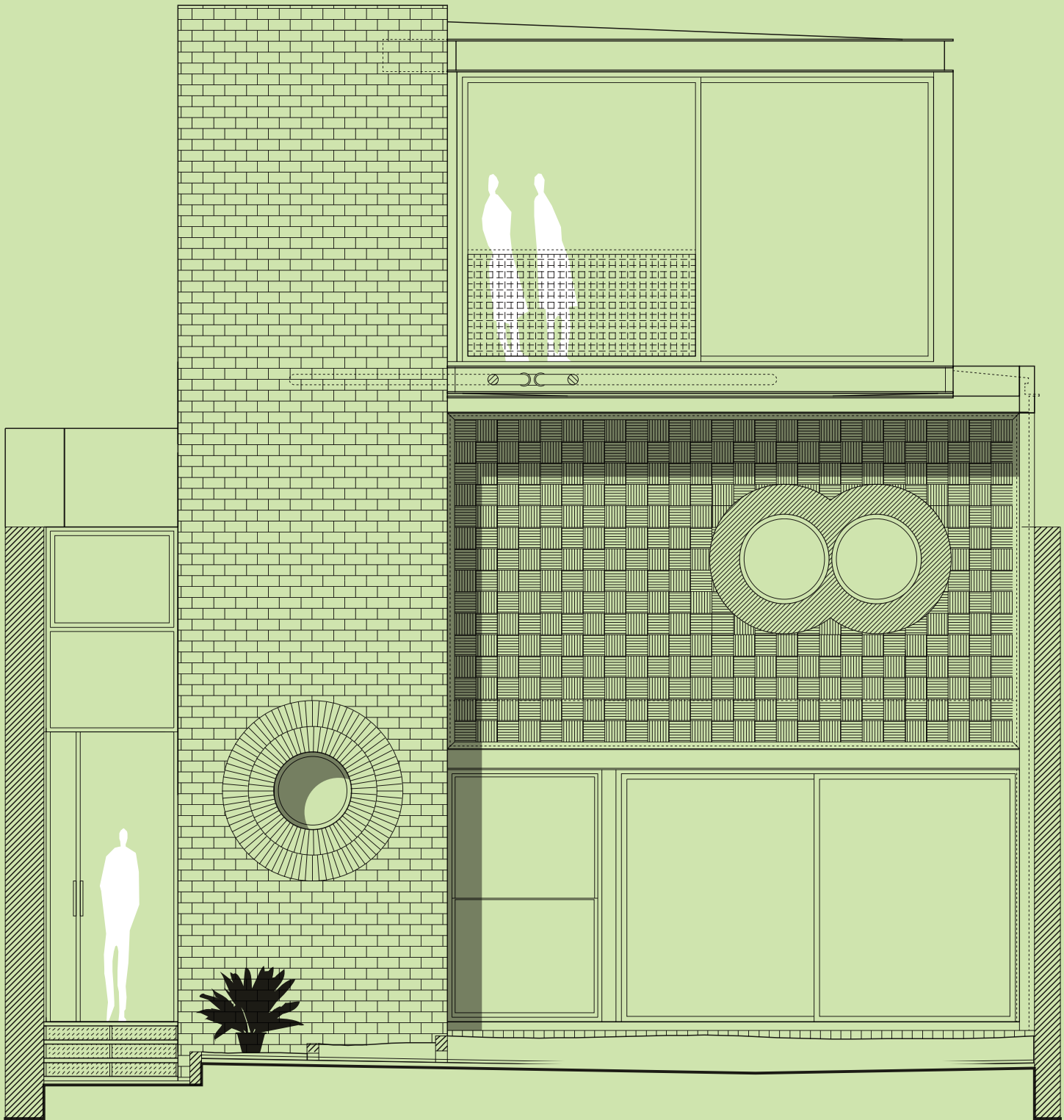
**Type of project** Residential

**Location** Carlton, Victoria, Australia

**Year of completion** 2015

**P.14** Removing the contents of the warehouse, and its roof, the architects have created a garden inside the shell – a private sanctuary that satisfies the client's love of gardening and offers refuge from the city outside.

**P.16** Drawing describing the south elevation of the new building within the shell of the original warehouse. Image—Kennedy Nolan Architects

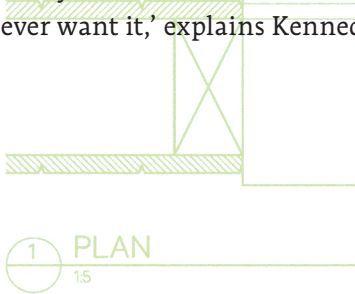


# A residential building in a commercial shell; a suburban setting with an urban outlook; a tower in a garden – from this confluence of apparent contradictions, architects *Kennedy Nolan* have shaped a remarkably singular building, thanks in no small part to the versatility of brick.

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In one of Melbourne's more architecturally eclectic inner suburbs, architect and client have come together to both preserve and reinvent a former warehouse. When Kennedy Nolan was engaged to create a home for a woman who'd spent her life living in period-architecture Hawthorn, they were given quite a challenging brief. 'She wanted a warehouse which she could convert', explains architect, Patrick Kennedy. 'What she really wanted was a view of the city, but she loves gardening so she also wanted a garden at ground level – it was quite difficult to reconcile these things.'

The challenge for Kennedy Nolan was merging these two seemingly conflicting elements – one is obviously on the ground and the other is elevated to capture the views. The brief was also for a house that would suit the client's lifestyle, where children and friends could come to stay – a sort of family house – but also somewhere she could grow old; a 'forever' house. 'She also wanted something that would be appealing to other people in the future – not so idiosyncratic that no one else would ever want it,' explains Kennedy.

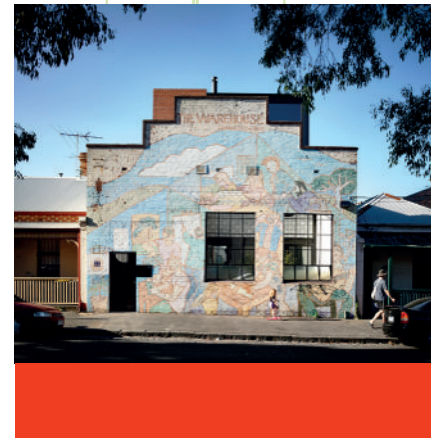


1 PLAN  
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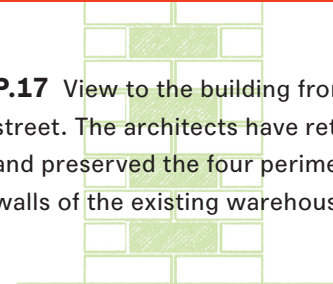
Their client eventually discovered an old brick warehouse in Carlton. After considering the existing structure, the architects came to the conclusion that they would essentially be retaining and preserving just the four perimeter walls. 'We had a lot more freedom compared to building on a normal Carlton lot because it's in a regular Victorian streetscape, but it's a big volume that has existing planning rights.'

Kennedy Nolan's response was to create a 'tower within a walled garden' – fulfilling the brief for a garden at ground level while simultaneously capturing the views towards the city. However, with this configuration arose the difficulty of movement between the levels. 'The biggest challenge was reconciling living three floors up and trying to have some relationship to the garden. It was an interesting starting point because it made us think of this sort of spiral arrangement,' says Kennedy, referring to the building's plan.

The architects created a pavilion in a garden, removing the contents of the warehouse and its roof, and creating a 'walled garden', inside of which they constructed the new house. 'We thought "How do we connect these things?" So we used the spiral form to move up via terraces as you go through the house; that's the way we could mediate that vertical distance via moving down on larger terraces of different types.'



P.17 View to the building from the street. The architects have retained and preserved the four perimeter walls of the existing warehouse.



3 ELEVATION  
1:20







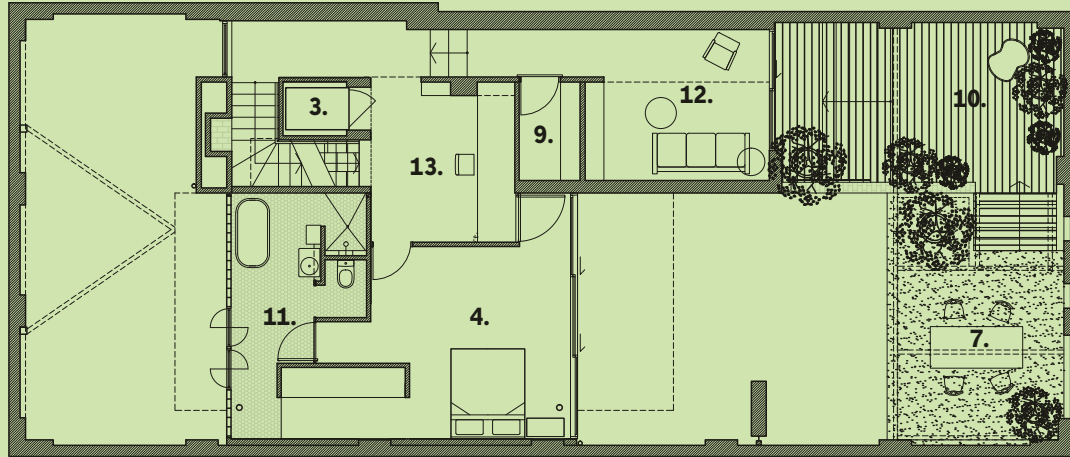
**P.18** Kennedy Nolan's new structure responds to the existing architecture of the warehouse. Red brick – with its strong association to the industrial buildings of Melbourne's past – is paired with complementary materials like glass and metalwork.

**P.19—1** An upstairs living space marries the internal and external, and captures views of the city beyond.  
**—2** A playful porthole window shows-off the potential of brick, while helping to draw light into the stairwell.

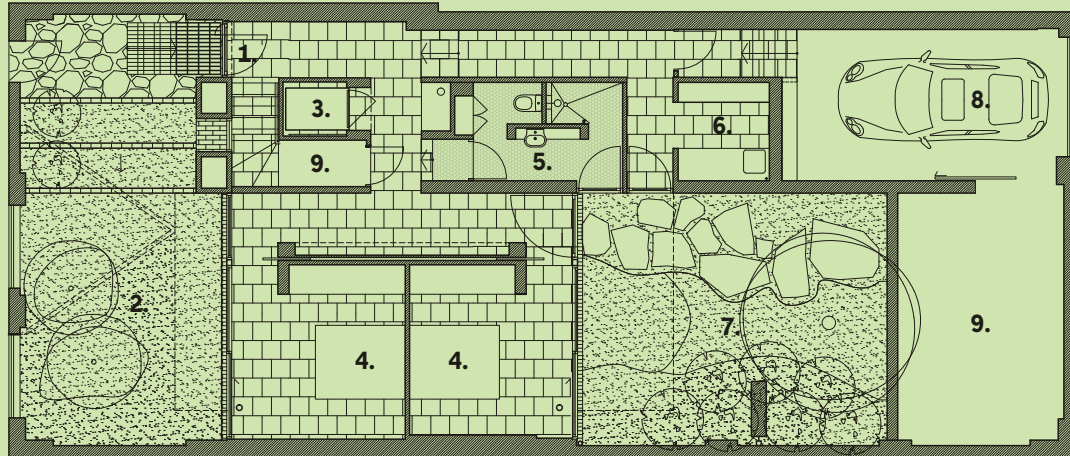


**GROUND LEVEL**

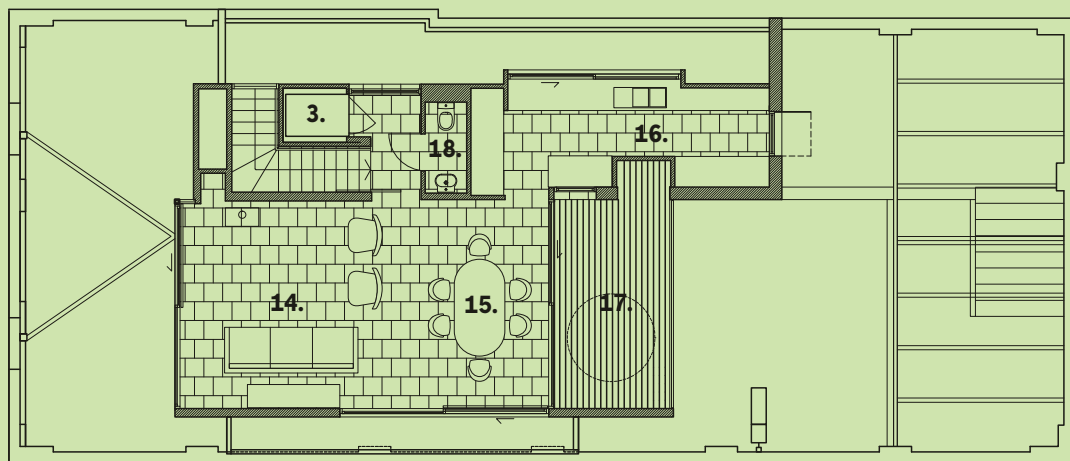
- 1 Entry
- 2 Front court
- 3 Lift
- 4 Bedroom
- 5 Bathroom
- 6 Laundry
- 7 Central Courtyard
- 8 Garage
- 9 Storage
- 10 Lower terrace
- 11 Ensuite
- 12 Sitting Room
- 13 Study
- 14 Living
- 15 Dining
- 16 Kitchen
- 17 Deck
- 18 Powder Room



**1ST FLOOR**



**2ND FLOOR**



Scale — 1:100

**P.20** Plans reveal a trajectory moving from the entry on ground level, up through the living spaces and out to a deck on the second floor, overlooking both garden and city. Image—Kennedy Nolan architects

**P.21** The communal spaces are designed to be highly liveable – places that can comfortably host guests, that can adapt as circumstances change, and that would appeal to potential buyers in the future.





Materially, the new structure had a responsibility to reference and add to the existing architecture of the warehouse. ‘The red brick has a strong association with industrial buildings in Melbourne, so that was a really good starting point,’ Kennedy explains. ‘Giving the building a sense of solidity was really important to us. We also wanted to look at other complementary materials which have those references to industrial architecture, but which also could be adapted to fulfill a particular domestic purpose.’

The team then considered how steel and metalwork was incorporated, approaching the detailing so it was designed, refined and manufactured in a traditional way, but with an aesthetic connection to what we understand of industrial architecture. The architects were able to retain some of the existing roof trusses, preserving more of the building’s industrial heritage.

‘We had really particular ideas about how we would express the architecture, which was probably of less interest to the client, but she was quite interested in the emotional reactions you can have to materials,’ says Kennedy. ‘She loved the mass of the brick, and we re-used all of the old Oregon trusses in the joinery and she loved all the timber, all the connections and the warmth and solidity.’

Kennedy notes that his practice has a real affinity with North African and Middle Eastern architecture, which often has a clear delineation between the public and private. ‘I love the idea of a really highly charged threshold, where you go from something quite public into something very private over a very short space. That’s quite exciting to us, and so the idea of a tower in a walled garden really got us excited. It gives you a sense of refuge – of being in a city, but having this incredible opulence and retreat and silence, like the perfumed garden within the gritty city. Putting the two so closely together just heightens those experiences.’ ●

In reinventing this old warehouse in Carlton, Kennedy Nolan architects made extensive use of the Chapel Red brick from the Nubrik range. For architect Patrick Kennedy, the strong historical association of red brick with Melbourne’s industrial buildings was particularly appealing – it enabled him to preserve and respect the building’s heritage while adapting it to suit the client’s requirements for a multi-level, liveable domestic space. The warmth and versatility of the Chapel Red brick made it an ideal choice. For more information on the Chapel Red brick and the Nubrik range, see page 114.

