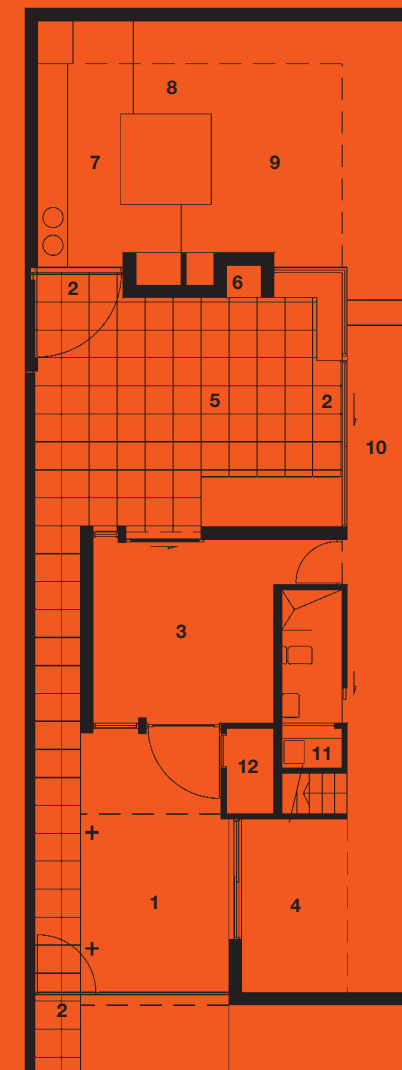


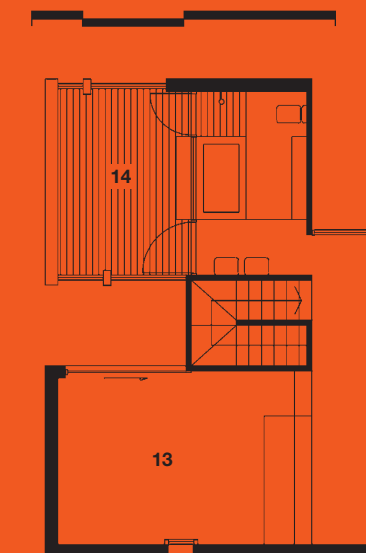


# BALANCED VOLUMES

Kennedy Nolan Architects has designed a house that embraces the boundaries of a diminutive Richmond site while exploring the dynamics of commensurate interior and exterior volumes within the building envelope.



- 1 Car space
- 2 Entry
- 3 Music room
- 4 Office
- 5 Courtyard
- 6 Fireplace
- 7 Kitchen
- 8 Dining
- 9 Living
- 10 Entry hall
- 11 Laundry
- 12 Store
- 13 Bedroom
- 14 Deck





**WALKING THROUGH THIS BUILDING** one becomes immediately aware of the intricate way its internal and external volumes have been pieced together. In our initial meeting off-site, architect Patrick Kennedy introduces the project via a model rather than floor plans: clearly, this is a building to be understood as a three-dimensional object comprised of interlocking shapes, more than as a series of floor plans.

Compact site dimensions partially informed the puzzle-like approach to the orchestration of the building's volumes. The plot, hidden away in a typically mixed use Richmond back street, measures 8 x 20 metres and called for maximum efficiency in the allocation of living and service spaces. "The volumes are a direct response to the site in terms of aspect, program, light and the amenity of neighbours," says Patrick.

Although the building presents a rather solid facade of pale concrete blockwork to the street, it offers the experience of a transparency that is gradually unveiled as one walks through. From the street, a slender vertical window in the upper floor bedroom frames a slice of sky, an indication that voids play as pivotal a role as solids in this distinctly urban composition. Passing through the entry gate, a covered car space leads to a glass-walled room, through which the eye is drawn to glimpse the courtyard beyond. A walkway along the solid outer wall of this first room leads directly into the courtyard, which is faced on all sides by full-height glazing revealing aspects of the interior. Passersby can look in, through the slatted fence, and glean a sense of open space within the building mass. "Specifically, we intended that vision through the site be available at street level, emphasising depth of field via the courtyard arrangement," says Patrick.

The architects describe the house as a "collection of volumes" in which materials reinforce the architectural ideas. Colour takes a back seat: volumes and spaces are defined by a robust palette of concrete blockwork (inside and out), terrazzo and sisal floors, exposed aggregate pavers, kiln dried hardwood and tung-oiled oregon joinery. Generous openings via large pivot doors and sliding glass panels produce easy devolutions from interior to exterior throughout the project: exterior and interior spaces take on properties characteristic of the other. "A wall opens as a door, a window acts as a wall, a room becomes a balcony," explains Patrick. Experientially, this strategy becomes apparent walking from the kitchen and living area to the foot of the stairs, via a corridor that is distinguished from the courtyard by a wall of glass. And upstairs, the bathroom feels like an extension of its balcony as the bath is inset into the glazing that separates the two spaces.

An important part of the program of spatial efficiency was using the whole site for the building and, in this boundary-to-boundary footprint, ensuring interior and exterior volumes were roughly commensurate. This enabled the architect to accommodate the clients' brief for a house for himself and his partner that would be flexible enough to suit their changing needs, as well as the requirements of future owners and occupants. "Our aim was to provide a house in which every room was used, whether the building was occupied by one person or several," says Patrick. "The response was to build spaces that were extremely flexible. The extensively glazed music room, with uninterrupted access to the central court, can become a bedroom with the addition of window



**THIS PAGE:** The living and kitchen area enjoys direct access to the courtyard. Overhead, north-facing clerestory windows usher in natural light.  
**PREVIOUS PAGES:** On dusk, the facade reveals its transparent aspects.



furnishings, and the study can be converted to a bedroom by the addition of a door, reclaiming some of the downstairs hall.”

Because of the democratic arrangement of spaces, this house resists the notion of having a permanent single hub of activity. In the warmer weather, it is likely to be the courtyard, a private and sheltered space which forms an accessible nexus between the kitchen and living area, and the carport and music room. An outdoor fireplace sets this area up as an al fresco living space. Visually, it is linked to the balcony off the upstairs bathroom. When it's cooler, the focus shifts to the living area inside, a space lit by north-facing clerestory glazing and the atrium-like courtyard. The living area communicates easily – via the glazed walkway – with the study, music room and the bedroom upstairs.

This is a building designed for occupants who are keen to resist all the traditional claims – on one's time, sense of humour, and wallet – of high maintenance dwellings. Inside and out, applied finishes have been minimised, and include a waterproofing emulsion that boasts superior weatherproofing qualities to normal paint. “The house is not designed to remain pristine, and we hope that time will create a patina on the concrete and timber,” say the architects. This low-tech house reflects the current owner's busy travelling schedule, and will also appeal to future occupants devoted to the nearby cafe and bar culture.

With its northern glazing, and excellent east-west cross ventilation, the building performs very well in terms of energy efficiency. An operable skylight above the stairwell also draws air up through the house in summer, while in-slab hydronic heating provides efficient warmth in cooler weather. In essence, the building's environmental advantage lies in its efficient and flexible use of space, and the fact that such amenity has been provided on a small site, and on a modest budget.

This building has appealed to many (neighbours, passersby, the clients) as a dwelling that continues the exploration of some important future directions for inner city living. But it has also caused offense – with no less than sixty objections from the neighbours – and had a bumpy ride through council that ended with a successful appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). Interestingly, all the objections were on the grounds of aesthetics alone: Patrick observes that there are many people who are still reassured by period-style ornamentation on new buildings. “People couldn't understand our building, they didn't know what to make of it,” he recalls. And yet VCAT had no problem giving the project the green light. “It was a sensitive project, carefully designed around the neighbours' amenity. It performs well environmentally and respects issues such as overlooking. All the objections hinged on appearance.” Patrick adds that the street is still divided on his building: some love it, some can't stand it. But a recent pre-auction inspection day changed some minds – it seems that experiencing the whole building plainly delighted many of those who had previously balked at its facade.

Controversy aside, this building can be read as part of a positive new wave of small-scale inner suburban architecture that embraces the challenges of providing flexible accommodation and amenity on small sites. Casting aside traditional expectations, buildings such as this encapsulate the spirit and values of living in the 21st-century city. **JD**



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**PRACTICE PROFILE**  
Residential projects undertaken, with a wide range of locations and briefs. Three staff. Practice is three years old.

**PROJECT TEAM**  
Patrick Kennedy, Rachel Nolan, Emma Mitchell

**BUILDER**  
J & M Langan

**CONSULTANTS**  
**Engineer** TD & C  
**Landscaping** Jerome Malard  
**Interiors, lighting** Kennedy Nolan Architects

**PRODUCTS**  
**Roofing** BHP Colorbond  
Spandek, black; Rockwool bulk insulation  
**External walls** Ash grey concrete block  
**Internal walls** Pale concrete block; plasterboard; painted shiplap lining boards  
**Windows and doors** Kiln-dried hardwood sliding and conventionally hinged custom made units; Lockwood hardware; Aneeta sashless units  
**Flooring** Terrazzo; sisal; plush pile carpets upstairs  
**Lighting** Interior – Masson track lighting system; exterior – flush to ground uplights from Richmond  
**Kitchen** Solid oregon joinery, tung oil finish; Mintaro slate benchtops; Zucchetti mixer  
**Bathroom** Lavabi basins; Caroma Leda toilet suite; Caroma Liano mixers; Classic Ceramics black glass mosaics upstairs; Signorino rectified tiles downstairs  
**Heating** In slab hydronic system  
**External elements** Exposed aggregate pavers

**TIME SCHEDULE**  
**Design, documentation** 4 months  
**Construction** 6 months

**PROJECT COST**  
\$300,000

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Derek Swalwell

**OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Detail of the glazed entry hall, through to the living area; at night the entry hall is illuminated via a series of wall lights; from the inner court looking toward the street, with the opaque glass balustrade of the bathroom balcony overhead.