

(u n) s u b u r b a n

g+vhouse

Using a palette of traditional "suburban residential" materials and a concern for crafting, architect Christopher Polly has refurbished and extended a mature suburban "Californian" bungalow in Sydney. He has endowed the house with a startling new energy whilst remaining sympathetic to the conservatism of the existing structure.



text Narelle Yabuka photography Brett Boardman architect Christopher Polly main contractor (Owner builder) structural consultant Mauro G. Polleti landscape consultant Christopher Polly lighting consultant Christopher Polly key materials oregon battens, western red cedar cladding, kauri internal floorboards, golden sassafras veneer, black granite benchtops, jarrah dining bench, recycled Australian hardwood deck framing, merbau framed pergolas and external decking boards, pine garden sleepers, white pebbles, face brick, render floor area 150sqm location Mascot, Sydney, Australia





The Sydney suburb of Mascot is much like many other aged residential suburbs in Australia – dotted with free-standing, non-architecturally-designed brick and tile houses that seem to swim in a sea of barren backyards and relatively treeless streets. The 1930s vintage of Mascot has also endowed many of its houses with small floor areas and dim interiors, most having little fenestration to admit warming natural light. Working against the dominant suburban blandness of Mascot, Christopher Polly has made a thorough transformation to the rear of the house belonging to his brother's family.

Keeping the existing house mostly intact, the rear toilet was removed, and the existing rear kitchen and sunroom were re-modelled into the new laundry and an informal sitting space. A new rear has been constructed, which accommodates living and informal dining areas, a new kitchen and adjoining sheltered outdoor areas. In keeping with an expressed client requirement, the new rear was articulated as an "extension", rather than an addition or an attachment, so as to read as part of the original house. The extended gable roof form indeed reads with the existing house in formal and proportional terms, and lines are carried through from the old to the new in both plan and section. But also, the materials used for the extension are sensitive to the original dwelling, and the suburban context. The use of timber, bricks and glass was requested by the clients for budgetary reasons, yet Polly has manipulated these suburban materials to achieve an impressive non-suburban effect.

Whilst the construction of the old dwelling is enclosed and heavy in nature, the architecture of the new extension enables varying degrees of enclosure and openness. The rear wall is constituted of a double skin; aside from the new double-leaf cavity brickwork (matching the existing bricks in colour), there are two skins of fenestration – an inner skin of folding glazed panels, and an outer skin of folding timber shutters. These enable the boundary between the interior and the exterior to be blurred, inverting the heavy, distinct boundary of the existing house. Outdoor decks, pergolas, and a screen further blur the sense of enclosure and boundary by virtue of their presence, and by way of their treatment.



Just as space is framed and layered with manoeuvres in timber, so too is the timber itself layered. In total, eight species have been used, sanded and naturally finished so their inherent shades and grains are showcased and juxtaposed.

Merbau timber boards line the deck outside the living area, continuing the orientation of the interior kauri floorboards. Meanwhile, battens of oregon, spaced apart overhead, provide sun shelter to the deck. These are placed on the underside of the pergola frame close to the house, and on top of the frame further away from the rear wall, gently unfolding one's sense of enclosure. The pergola beams extend well beyond the battens to create a feathering effect – further breaking down the mass of the house. The same occurs at the edge of the new gabled roof; beams emerge proudly from a wide timber batten-clad soffit, as if reaching for the northern and eastern sun. The deep blue treatment of the external southern side wall, extending out from the long interior wall, provides a relief from the brick and timber articulation.

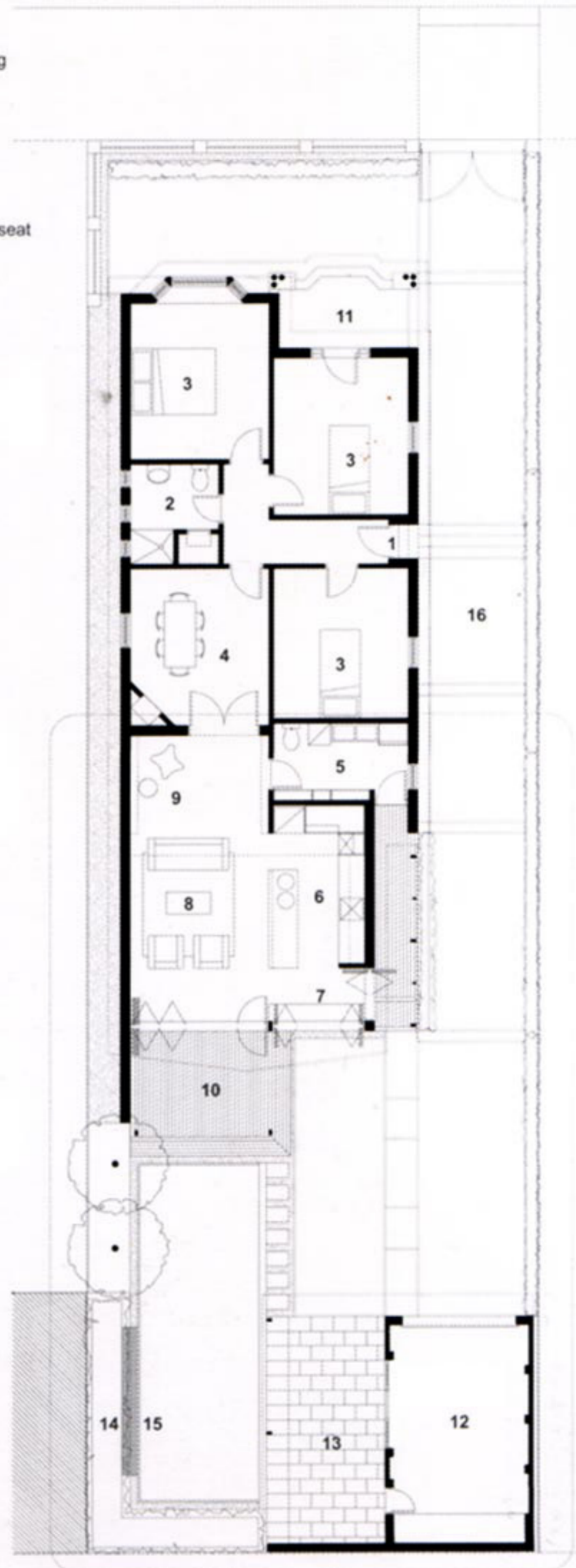
A carefully crafted timber screen shelters the second deck outside the laundry, whilst also serving as a breezeway, enabling cross ventilation through to the middle of the house. The screen is characterised by a sense of play. Differently sized timber members are used (40x40 millimetres and 40x100 millimetres) in a 3:2 pattern. Cut-away sections make breaks in the pattern, creating a sequence of apertures, and also admitting sunlight. The fractured edges give a less harsh feel, and continue the practice of feathering that has already been established.

Just as space is framed and layered with manoeuvres in timber, so too is the timber itself layered. In total, eight species have been used, sanded and naturally finished so their inherent shades and grains are showcased and juxtaposed. The theme of horizontality reflects not only the long, flat and relatively narrow block, but also the flatness of much of Australia's suburban geography – in both physical and intangible terms. The suburban blandness, however, is entirely opposed by the energy achieved through Polly's manipulations, and his modern interpretations of both the suburban house and timber detailing.



ground floor plan

- 1 entry
- 2 bathroom
- 3 bedroom
- 4 dining
- 5 laundry
- 6 kitchen
- 7 informal dining
- 8 living
- 9 sitting
- 10 deck
- 11 verandah
- 12 garage
- 13 carport
- 14 planter
- 15 inset timber seat
- 16 driveway



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