

COVE HOUSE

ALWILL

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Strong and contemporary in form, Cove House by Alwill simultaneously embraces its exposed harbourside locale and bunkers down to form a private family home. A successful overlay of site parameters and client brief results in a delicately crafted residence designed to patina with dignity.

Informed by a brief for a family home on a heavily exposed, sloping site with bushland and Sydney Harbour views, Nadine Alwill, Director of Alwill Architecture, crafted a timeless approach that resulted in a rational and straightforward plan. Driven by the desire to mutually balance aspect and a level of privacy, the home embraces its inhabitants, providing shelter to the street while opening to enable maximum views over the water. Surrounded on three sides, with neighbours and a public walkway to the front of the property, Nadine explains that careful curation was the key to creating comfort in exposure. This was achieved through partial orientation away from the harbour and allowing a “sense of separation and privacy” where needed, while “turning the house away from the sun and facing living and bedroom spaces east and south” provided alternate opportunities for interaction with views. This unconventional approach draws the eye into the landscape and traverses the terrain, allowing planning to be split over two levels to encourage different outlooks from zoned areas. Nadine remarks that “the house and the site for [the clients] were not just about the incredible views but also about the aspect into the bushland,” further reinforcing the feeling of retreat and “ensuring all spaces had a connection to nature.”

Framed bush views greet upon entry into the double-height void at the centre of the home, introducing a governing hierarchy in spatial planning and encouraging exploration into more public zones. Recessive massing to the lower level, housing secondary living and guest spaces, beds the building into the landscape and forms a solid base that anchors the floating upper floor. These secondary living areas take full advantage of the site topography, encouraging direct access to terrace and private pool areas within the treetop canopy, cleverly concealed from public view. The upper floor exemplifies the planning approach, utilising angles to provide harbour views from key zones with bedrooms forming the final layer of the home, placed at the most discrete and private edge of the site and typified with bush aspect. Newly landscaped elements are loose yet contained, sitting comfortably within established lush vegetation and large surrounding trees. A collaborative approach with landscape designer Dangar Barin Smith provides the crucial additional layer integrating the residence and gardens, allowing sympathetic placement alongside existing vegetation.







Mass throughout the residence is designed to speak to the ideas of hierarchy, shelter and moments of revelation. The solidity of off-form linear concrete plays against surrounding elements. Crisp openings cast into concrete confer the solid nature of the material, indicating its strength as one passes through public into more private areas of the home. The distinct cantilevered timber-clad stair, with its simple angular handrail, is a testament to the design ethos; moments of monumentality are starkly contrasted by deliberate and delicate detail. Flooded in natural light, marking the progression of time across the day, the imperfect character of the concrete wall is highlighted while a finely framed operable batten screen wraps the upper storey, sheltering from neighbours and passers-by while filtering light into spaces throughout the day and seasons. This combination of screening and large glazed picture windows allows the family to control degrees of exposure and privacy. Furthering the adaptability of the building envelope are large sliding doors opening out to the heavily shaded lower terrace, with continuity of floor and external materiality flowing and blurring lines, expanding the private living areas dramatically.

Designed to emphasise quality and contrast, the home welcomes visible signs of wear and patina over time. This refined approach to materiality weaves a common thread throughout, appearing across multiple planes. Concrete traverses from floors to walls, timber from joinery to walls and ceiling, allowing a slow realisation of detail without detracting from ex-

ternal views. Nadine reflects the use of concrete “as linear elements [that] define the spatial hierarchy and create a tactility” was a deliberate choice to sit in perfect contrast to the responsibly sourced Australian timber panelling. Timber is used extensively, showcasing visible marks of nature and process, enhancing the experiential quality and marking time for inhabitants while enveloping and encouraging rigorous use of the spaces. A continuation of the external approach of curated revelation typifies the dramatic departure from this restrained material palette, evidenced in the kitchen island bench; a solid bronze sheet carefully crafts the feature piece, housing storage and cooking facilities, revealing and closing itself as needed. Again selected for its ability to wear and age gracefully and designed to look beautiful at all stages of life, the bench provides an internal focal and gathering point. Sitting comfortably yet confidently, the island extends the idea of layering and concealment, playing down full-height timber joinery beyond housing practical and functional aspects of the kitchen.

With a primary objective to create a home to live well within, Alwill has effortlessly manipulated volumes, lines and topography to craft a building that will confidently age in place. Drawing on the ever-present dualities of exposure and privacy, solidity and openness, the resultant retreat extends to inhabitants the experience of an encouraging and supportive embrace.







