

HOUSE AT RUBY

HOUSED ARCHITECTS

Words by Millie Thwaites • Photography by Murray Fredericks • Architecture and Interior Design by Housed Architects
Build by The Construction Connection • Landscape by Dangar Barin Smith



House at Ruby is all-encompassing; there is a sense one would want for little after a period spent within its walls. Yet, this impression of effortless belies its deep complexities – it is a layered home permeated by intricate detailing, an intense consideration for context and natural light and moments of true artisanship. Nanna Lesiuk of Housed Architects has considered these elements for their ability to bring value – be it material or experiential – with every detail analysed, questioned and beautifully resolved.

There are many layers to the genesis of House at Ruby. Nanna and her clients had previously worked together across several projects, meaning an understanding – an unspoken language of sorts – already existed. Further, the clients lived in the neighbouring home for many years and purchased this site with the intention of building a contemporary home informed by their prevailing knowledge of its context. Nanna explains, the existing home “was not heritage listed and had been brutalised over the years from previous renovations.” Hence, it was demolished. The new residence “is very clearly of now but sits comfortably with the traditional Federation buildings of the area,” she says. It speaks strongly to Mosman’s vernacular through a considered material selection, namely re-used sandstone from the original building with traditional ribbon pointing, meticulously laid handmade Danish Kolumba bricks and a contemporary interpretation of Welsh slate roofing, with reversed ridge capping and hidden gutter details.

However, as Nanna says, “a good home is not just about bricks and mortar, it’s about its relationship to landscape and creating an environment for it to sit in.” This project could have easily been defined by its view of the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, yet its

strength lies in boundless meaningful moments informed by the natural environment. Not only does the materiality reference the architectural language of the area but the landscaping by Dangar Barin Smith also creates a seamless dialogue between built form and greenery, settling the home into its surrounds.

The material palette and form also take cues from Sydney’s harbourside locale and history. “I really wanted to weave in this maritime feeling,” Nanna reflects. “It’s not nautical, but it uses elements [that] belong to the harbour, such as steel, sandstone, polished chrome and teak.” This maritime influence has a distinct presence, but it has been elegantly tempered. The identity of the home leans further towards Danish and Japanese design ideals in its meticulous balance of crispness, warmth and extensive use of timber. The material palette is intentionally minimal, defined by solid oak, Siberian larch and natural stone. “The interior is really an extension of the primary architecture – it’s all harmonious,” Nanna offers, noting that the tiles laid in the upstairs galleria, which were selected to reference the exterior bricks on the adjoining terrace and cut to the same scale, create a seamless transition between indoors and out.





The open plan kitchen, living and dining area is defined by a pitched roof with exposed trusses reminiscent of a ship's hull, adding a luxurious volume and luminescence to the space

Much like the informed materiality, the layout of this two-storey home was guided by a nuanced combination of “client briefing, the concept of the building and environmental factors.” As a result of the sloping site, the western façade is elevated and has a strong presence from the street while the back of the building is nestled into the earth. As such, Nanna designed a courtyard to penetrate the building, bringing natural light and ventilation deep into the lower level. “The ground floor living room was a by-product of lifting the main living and sleeping pavilions up,” she explains. “It’s a lovely room, however, it’s bunkered into the ground, so by pushing the stone wall further out into the back garden to create a light well, suddenly this room has a beautiful light quality and connection to landscape.” This room – from its conception to its identity – demonstrates a pillar of Nanna’s practice with fervour, as she says, “to me, the essence of feeling good is light quality.” She adds, “it doesn’t bother me if we’re pushing materials towards one palette or another. Of course, I want to make it harmonious but that’s not the driver; the driver for me is to create beautiful light quality in a space.”

A sculptural staircase with treads crafted from single slabs of stone and a custom mild steel plate balustrade with a glossy finish sweeps upwards and links the ground and first floors. Of the beautifully crafted treads and rises, Nanna says, “there’s this seamless, clean feeling but you can’t quite identify why. I love that sort of thing – no awareness of what’s gone into

something, but you have an appreciation for it. That’s when I feel like I’ve succeeded.” At the top of the staircase, the open plan kitchen, living and dining area unfurls to the left; it is defined by a pitched roof with exposed trusses. Clad entirely in Siberian larch, this roof is reminiscent of a ship’s hull. “We wanted to create volume in a qualitative way, so we have this big, beautiful hat, clean lines and a pitched roof with the chimney, which anchors it all at the end,” Nanna recalls. This space is flanked by a generous deck taking advantage of “the panoramic view back to the city” and, on the other side, an intimate garden leading to the master suite.

“The idea was to have a living pavilion at the front with the main bedroom pavilion at the back as a retreat,” Nanna explains. These two pavilions are separated by the garden and linked by a galleria to the east with guest bedrooms, which open out onto the lush grassy enclave. “This garden area is protected from the wind and catches the sun so it just feels delicious – you could have the doors open all year round,” she reflects. This back pocket of the residence is defined by its proximity to the outdoors and its ability to be open or closed depending on the order of the day, beautifully illustrating a holistic and informed architectural response. “If you only focus on the view, you miss all these amazing opportunities that you can create with the building and the landscape informed by orientation,” Nanna says.



As is evident in the resulting building, an easy synergy existed between Nanna and her clients. “These projects – where you get a client that’s engaged but also trusts your knowledge base – don’t come around every day,” she reflects, adding that she loves detailed client briefing and involvement as it “adds another layer.” Nanna and her clients had also worked with the same team of contractors prior to House at Ruby. To initiate a project with strong foundations between architect, client and contractors is a rare thing, and here, it allowed for invaluable exploration. “We were really building on that collaborative team approach and it just meant that for the most part, it was fun – site meetings were full of laughter,” Nanna reflects. “When you get that kind of harmony in a team, everyone really steps up and wants to do their best. I suppose it’s all about having pride in your work – not just simply doing the job.”

Considering the heightened level of artisanship and execution within this project, such a sentiment was essential. Yet, behind all these intricacies and highly developed ideas is a simple intention – to create a place to pause and feel connected, to go about one’s day and to digest the surroundings. The foundations of House at Ruby lie in the concept of simplicity done well, and life in this home will be lived to that exact tune.