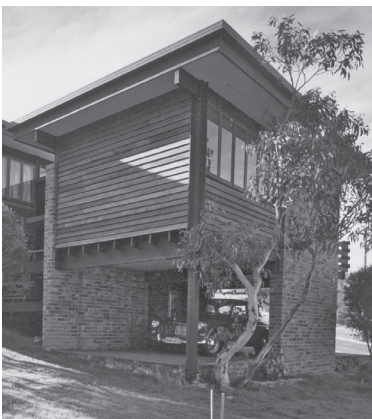




Document title: House at Killarney Heights, Middle Harbour, Sydney, 1964

Author/s: Ross Thorne, architect; Wooding Bros, builders.

Summary / abstract:



A cousin and his partner asked me for a house design on a new sandstone and bush sub-division. The site had typical Sydney sandstone fauna of fine grasses, banksias, grevilleas, low straggly eucalypts, and pink and grey-barked larger angophoras, all growing on a shallow sandy soil with few nutrients. The clients wanted three bedrooms, plus study, living room, etc., for no more in cost than a good project house of the time. Least expensive design would be a timber-clad house but the sub-division had a covenant requiring one third of the exterior walls (excluding windows and doors) to be in brick. It was, for cost reasons, decided to use repetition of design elements where appropriate. To retain the topography and environment as much as possible it was decided to build the house on posts and leave the land flow freely beneath it. The bedroom wing was raised above a huge weathered sandstone boulder. Apart from the posts the only parts of the structure to touch the ground were the covenant-required brick walls. They amounted to four panels that conformed to the 12 feet grid of posts. Otherwise, with the hope that repetition of elements would produce economics of scale, all window sashes were to be made of identical size.

Although the house “touched the (original) ground lightly”, the Australian landscape gradually became obliterated. In particular, nearby new houses were built identical to any in suburbs on former agricultural land with exotic gardens (of imported soils) the style of which had been previously imported from Europe. The house was not submitted to journals or for exhibitions but a few years later a popular magazine published it (*Australian Home Journal* December 1969, pp.71,72) saying that “the house evokes a strong Australian image . . . the clinker brick and red cedar structure seems to rise out of the rocks . . . This is a warm friendly house which can take its place among the best of the moderns”.

Key words: Architecture; House design.

Illustrations: Clive Kane

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*Above: An angled view of the front showing two of the four brick panels as required by the covenant on the land. The panel immediately to the left of the balcony is the brickwork shown in the interior view of the Living room, at right. At the extreme left of the above illustration can be seen the windows to the Study that has its access from the Living room.*



*The illustration at right is from the Australian Home Journal, December, 1969, pp. 71,72.*



*A view of the rear of the house with the bedroom wing at the left, and the study at the right, over the rear half of the Car port. The stair up to the Entry door is tucked in between the two visible wings. There are no brick panels at the bedroom wing and one of the (corner) posts can be easily seen. It is quite high; the next post, just visible half-way along the end wall, is sitting on the huge sandstone boulder, and is less than a metre high, while the post at the left extremity of the house -- also on the boulder -- is barely a half metre in height. It demonstrates how the topography of the native landscape was allowed to remain beneath the house.*