

MONUMENT ⁷⁰

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

Float Like a Butterfly

LIPPMANN SPREADS HIS WINGS

ALL THAT GLITTERS
WOOD MARSH TOWER V

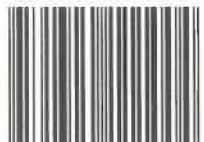
STREET MACHINE
NEIL + IDLE TRIPLE FRONTED

MEXICAN MASTER
RICARDO LEGORRETA

NEW GENERATION
DESIGN TOP 40

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Float Like a Butterfly

Nine years in the making, Ed Lippmann's Butterfly House in Sydney's Dover Heights is inspired by its environment but also has an otherworldly quality that extends across time and space.

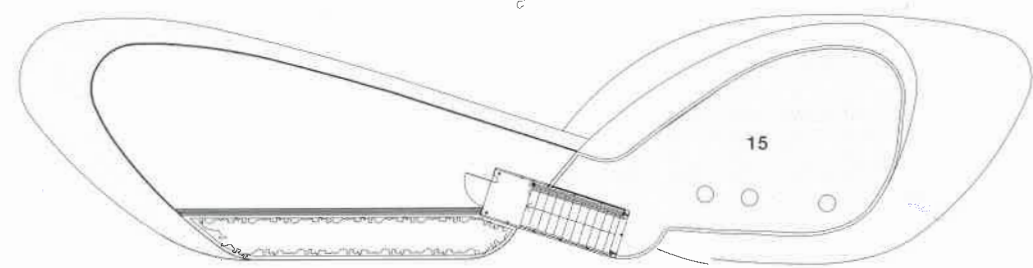
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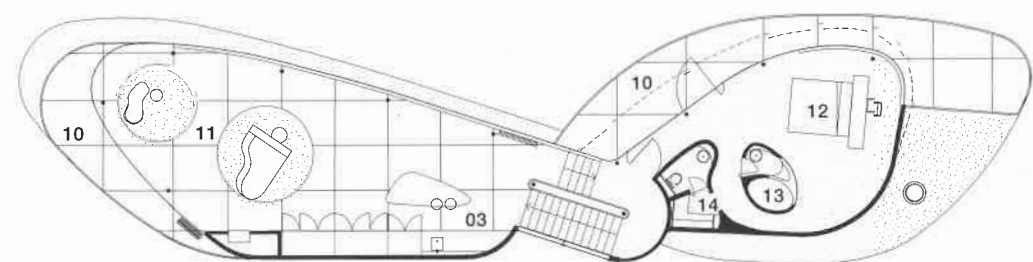
01 View from street
02 First-floor kitchen/living/terrace
03 Light-filled circulation space
04 Master bedroom en suite



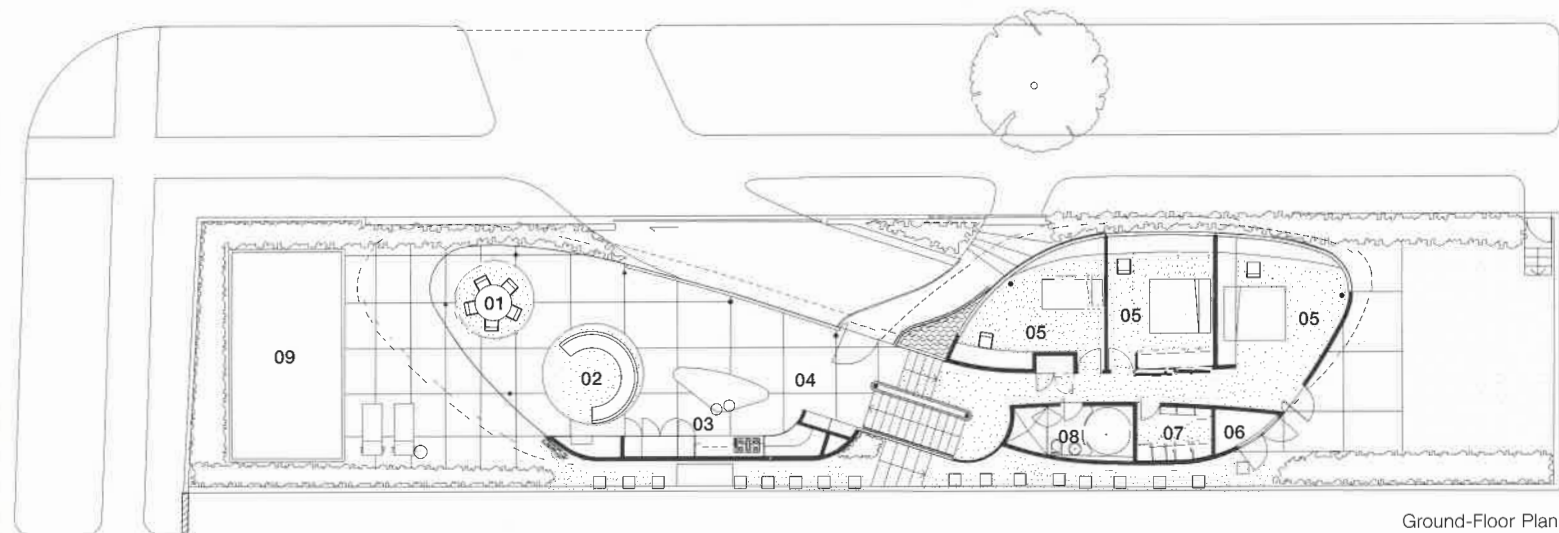
- 01 Dining
- 02 Family
- 03 Kitchen
- 04 Entry
- 05 Bedroom
- 06 Store
- 07 Dress
- 08 Bath
- 09 Pool
- 10 Deck
- 11 Living
- 12 Master bed
- 13 En suite
- 14 Robe
- 15 Roof terrace



Roof-Floor Plan



First-Floor Plan



Ground-Floor Plan

LOOKING LIKE AN alien craft that has crash-landed near the cliffs of Sydney's South Head, Ed Lippmann's Butterfly House has two petal-shaped wings and a vertical tower in the middle outstretched like a bow-tie. From the shorter end, the wings swell out voluptuously, like breasts swinging out powerfully over extended hips. It is also reminiscent of Velázquez's reclining nude, *Venus at her Mirror* – or, more in keeping with the 20th century, a fractured abstract by Picasso. Not surprisingly Lippmann's unusual house turns heads. Even during construction its unconventional form caused a traffic accident.

The house appeared in a recent Telstra television commercial. The ad begins with a dad flying a kite with his son on an ocean cliff. In the distance we see the house mysteriously isolated with the wife advancing. The message is obvious: in the era of digital communication, the world outside is never distant. Telstra links us to the cosmos. Such a communications utopia is not a future vision, the ad intones, but is today.

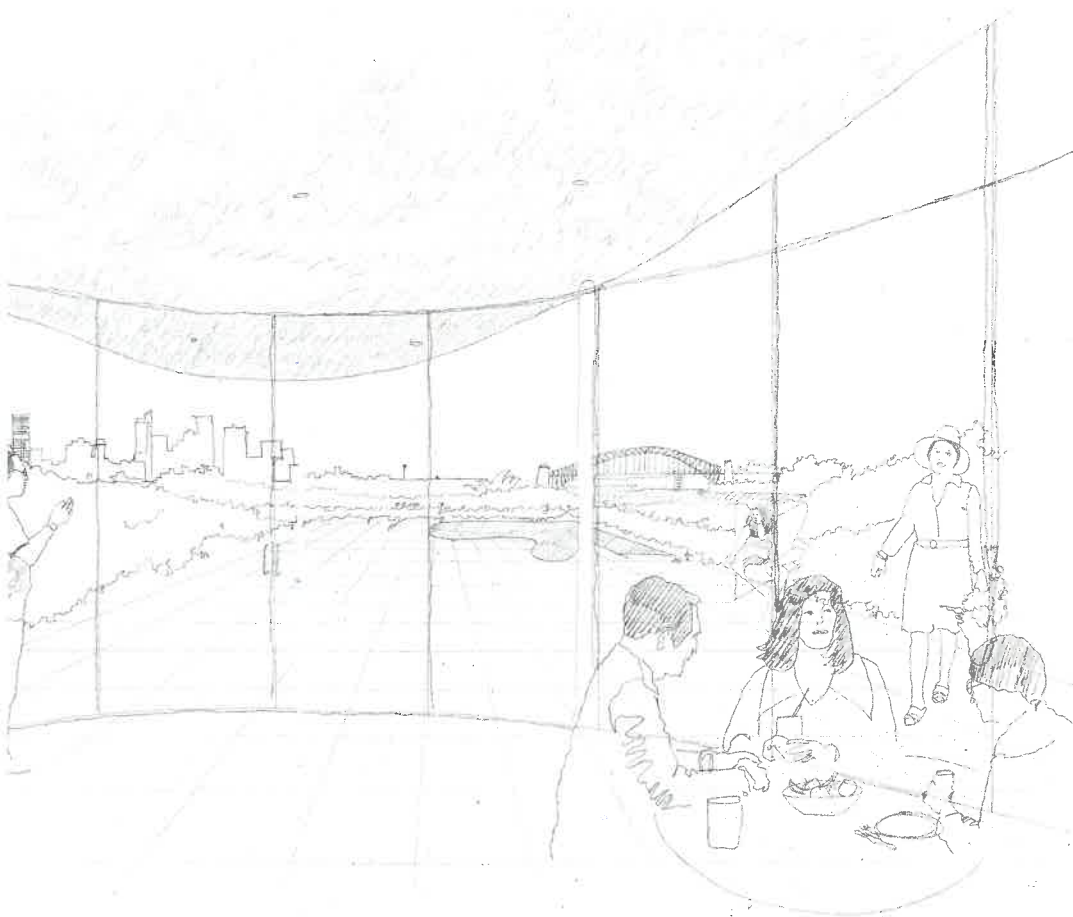
The house was commissioned in 1996 by a Chinese/Malaysian property developer whose only request was "the house has to have no straight lines", since he firmly believed in *feng shui*. Throughout its design the house was vetted by the owner's *feng shui* master in Malaysia. Meanwhile the client's minder, a burly Yugoslav who also doubled as builder, and came with a reputation for gratuitous violence, acted as project manager. A large gold medallion strung round his neck indicated his taste in design. Lippmann was ordered to present his scheme the following week. In spite of these discouraging portents, the site and brief were so challenging Lippmann prepared preliminary sketches. Normally Lippmann would not have accepted a project without a financial consideration and discussion about his fee and a signature. But at that stage there were no financial limitations. What would a house be like with no straight lines? It was an intriguing proposition. There was also the stunning location astride a long sandstone rampart holding back the in-sweeping ocean that halted abruptly at South Head, while in the other direction

Lippmann developed the propeller-shaped bow-tie scheme in a matter of days, from his initial perspective view looking towards the city from on top of the raised podium which obscured the street in front. The plan evolved from this idea. The combination of serpentine glass walls on a rectangular podium recalls the paradoxical Opera House combination of free geometry roof shells on a stone platform. Like the Opera House, the actual definition of these shapes took longer; at first it was a figure-eight, gradually this evolved into the present attenuated asymmetric arrangement of loops. The perspective sketch became the house. Except for the void opposite the entrance, few significant changes were made to this early sketch. The curved building form presented difficulties – curved glass was available only from Canada and Belgium. But... since cost was not a consideration.

The client's reaction was nothing if not decisive: "This is what I want!" he bellowed.

The house had two curved wings (a basement with a six-car garage and two levels above), the larger extending west towards the city containing living areas, and a smaller wing extending east with the bedrooms. A thorax linked the two. This thorax contained a stair and was the house's lungs. Above the roof terrace, glass louvres exploited the Venturi effect in a modern version of a Middle East Malkaf, drawing air up and venting it out. This was crucial to Lippmann's idea of a fixed, transparent envelope comprising fixed curved-glass floor-to-ceiling walls protected from the sun by generous overhangs that were ventilated through slots in the spandrels.

Set back from Military Road towards the back of the site, Lippmann's unorthodox free-form scheme avoided ugly side yards and opened the harbour view up to its neighbour. However, while Council could not object to the building's novel form, since it complied with the Local Development Control Plan, they nevertheless forced him to move the house forward to within 10m of the street



y sketch

- 05 The 'wings' of the house reach out towards the city views.
- 06 The interior seems to stretch out beyond the curved, floor-to-ceiling glass
- 07 Entry to ground floor
- 08 The house appears to float over the city skyline at night

Project name Butterfly House
Architects/interior designers Lippmann Associates
Principal architect Ed Lippmann
Project team Ed Lippmann, Gerhard Abel, Rolf Ockert, Brian van der Plaats, Nicole Robinson
Construction manager Aqupa Pty. Ltd.
Structural engineer Alba & Associates
Hydraulic engineer Thomson Kane
Mechanical engineer MPI Consultants
Electrical engineer Barry Smith & Associates
Time to complete 1996-2005
Council Waverley Council
Client EJ Ang - concept, Michael Canturi - construction
External materials G.James toughened curved clear fixed and operable silicone jointed frameless glass; Hafele frameless stacking glass/pivot doors; Breezeway louvres, electrically operated glass louvres; Symonite curved/flat aluminium cladding panels; anodised aluminium cover plates over slab edges
Interior materials Terrazzo floor finish - Western terrazzo; carpet - Alex Bowen; set plasterboard ceilings - Sydney Metro; polyurethane sprayed joinery units - Tirreme
Joinery Hafele Smove dampening system



The house's free-form organic shapes represented a radical departure from Lippmann's hitherto customary Rational architecture of lightweight steel frame and standard industrial panel-and-glass construction. Up until 1996, his architecture had been practical and pragmatic, and very cubic. His rationalism persisted but was applied to a totally non-rectangular geometry. He worked hard to make everything function well. Each detail of the house presented a challenge; nothing was standard or could be assumed beforehand.

A year later – by which time the concrete slabs, basement and columns were cured leaving an exposed structure – the client announced he was selling the property. Following a pause, in 1999, it was purchased by Michael Canturi and Dominic Ardino, who patiently set about completing the house after the original owner. They wisely asked Lippmann to stay on and advise. But instead of one family, the house now needed to accommodate the Canturi and Ardino families, each on a different floor plate. Six years later, in 2005, the house was finished. The extended construction time over nine years gave Lippmann time to work through the details. The design also transformed Lippmann's architectural orientation, taking him into unexplored territory. These days he is much more conscious of the emotional and psychological effect of space on human consciousness.

Lippmann admits: "I am very interested in Rationalism focused on the practical and pragmatic aspects of architecture, but that is far from the full story – I practice meditation which is where the Veda thing (Sthapatya Veda) comes in." Her well-being is affected by light and shape and contributes to the ambience and emotional impact on us of architectural space.

But Lippmann's house also resonates back 80 years to the Viennese visionary, Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965), possibly best known for his moving pottery-shaped Shrine of the Book, Jerusalem, 1965. In 1923 Kiesler presented the idea of the Endless House. Kiesler's concept of 'endless' space assumed a kind of environmental sculpture of free continuous shapes:

Although a building may be a complete protective structure, there are many ways to give the impression that the outer and inner worlds meet there, and that the inhabitant is part of a cosmic world – not only part of a street or a plaza or a community.

Lippmann's Butterfly House also departs from what Kiesler termed the "cube-vision tradition". Inside, instead of enclosed space, the space is "disclosed" to the outside. More so in Lippmann's case where the level of transparency is considerably greater than Kiesler envisaged. Kiesler labelled this "galaxies of disclosed spaces for living". To achieve his aim in the Endless House, Kiesler invented a shell of continuous tension and eliminated the sharp division between floor, wall and ceiling of box. Instead of the curved continuous surfaces that Kiesler proposed, Lippmann's curved-glass walls meet his horizontal floor and roof planes sharply at right angles.

Not only does the space inside overflow, it reaches out beyond the glass into its setting and beyond to the universal and galactic and becomes a kind of cosmic architectural communicator. It was Marshall McLuhan in 1962 who claimed that communications media would reduce the world to a single global village. We live with the consequences. Everyone today is a semi-nomad, constantly on the move, yet in touch with the world. Life has acquired a cosmic dimension: a micro-chip engineer visits Australia, sees the Butterfly House, and commissions its sister for Santa Cruz on the Californian Pacific coast. At 37° north, it is the same distance from the equator as Sydney.

Sydney, shielded by a blank wall of sandstone, its entrance blocked by Middle Head, is an invisible city from the sea. Its narrow entrance is easily missed. Beyond its ocean ramparts, the city loosely sprawls westward to the Blue Mountain escarpment.

I can think of no more salient testimony to Sydney's strategic geographical location than what is offered by the Butterfly House atop the cliff at Dover Heights. Its two liquid bows pulled out along its harbour-ocean axis, the longer by the harbour and city, the shorter compressed by the ocean. Inside, it seems an endless swirl within itself, cosmic in its stretch outside through the transparent curved glass, which offers no barrier – it runs on forever and ever as if stretched and pulled apart by the cosmic forces of its location. [m]

