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Homes

New age

An architect's quest for the feel-good factor

- Suburban snobbery
- New display home
- Silent treatment

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Innovative, functional and providing sculptural interest . . . the spiral steel staircase and the capsule bathroom

Living rooms

It takes a certain open-mindedness and lack of ego to explore new ideas once you have reached the top of your profession.

Architect Ed Lippmann is a man with these qualities.

Renowned as a pure modernist, Lippmann is no longer satisfied with the clinical edginess of his former designs.

He now strives to infuse warmth into his work through organic textures and materials — a big step away from his modernist roots.

"I think there has been evolution in terms of my thinking," says the architect of his 20 years' experience.

"Many of my earlier works were more technically orientated and now I think my work has changed a lot. Recently it's become very important to me to find the qualities in architecture that make people feel good, that are not just technically efficient."

His family home, a one-time maritime fisherman's cottage in Sydney's eastern suburbs, heralds this departure from hard-edge modernism towards creating something softer, more human-friendly.

"I guess the change here is that I started using for the first time a lot more natural materials, such as timber," he says.

"While I am still interested in mass production and synthetic materials I now think the human response to spaces is more important."

The original house, on a small site, was completely demolished.

But the new structure was given a facade similar to its predecessor to blend in with the streetscape and then re-designed to utilise as much space as possible.

An office was created along one wall, a kitchen island bench given wheels so it could be pushed into the courtyard as a serving table and the floor dropped to squeeze a level of mezzanine bedrooms under the roof.

There are no fixed walls downstairs — the only solid areas are the spiral steel staircase and a capsule of curved macassar ebony, a rare timber veneer from Africa, containing a small bathroom.

"I think in design it is important to make simple things perform many functions," Lippmann says.

"So the bathroom creates an entrance and divides the space, as do

the stairs, yet without them the space would be too open."

The house was also sectioned into specific areas with sleeping areas upstairs and all wet areas — the laundry, bathrooms and kitchen — placed at its core.

While the steel frame and Lippmann's trademark glass walls are still present, more textures and organic materials have been incorporated. This is seen with timber venetians that screen the front verandah and timber plywood panels on the exterior and interior walls, ceilings and floors.

"I have become well known for using light-weight materials such as steel and glass that are light and transparent," Lippmann says.

"But now I am also interested in finding the qualities that people respond to in a way that makes them feel warm and satisfied when living and working in a space."

This new direction led him to explore the ancient teachings of feng shui and shapatya veda (the old Indian science of building).

When he designed his home he didn't know much about either, yet found at the end of the project that he had intuitively incorporated many of their principles.

"Let's just say I am expanding my repertoire," he says.

"The ancient people had a lot of knowledge and I think we can learn a lot from them.

"Like I find the idea that space can affect consciousness quite mind-blowing — that the physical boundaries of the space you are in actually affects your brain.

"Few architects would be open to it and I don't consider myself an expert but there is a certain magical quality that good architecture has that goes beyond the physicality."

Lippmann cites as example the uplifting effect experienced when walking into a high vaulted cathedral as opposed to going into a church with 2.4m-high ceilings.

"It definitely creates a different emotional response and that is something most architects would agree — but how do you explain it?"

Regular daily practice of transcendental meditation enables Lippmann to maintain clarity of mind and his vision.



‘I know how to build buildings but being able to really control how people feel in their homes . . . that is something very powerful’

In his work there are no formulas. Innovation and resourcefulness are preferred to repeating good but conventional solutions. "Through meditation I have found a finer level of feeling and it has made me think about things in a more human way rather than just doing things that I have been taught to do or the way the profession does them," he says.

Another difference is the introduction of colour into his designs.

In the past he used a lot of silver metallics and all-white in keeping with pure modernist principles.

"Modernists have a very limited range of colours," he says.

"Architects like Frank Lloyd Wright used nature as their model rather than the machine, which was a more European modernist idea.

"I guess I am learning that even though, intellectually, a clean white space has a certain beauty in its

simplicity, I am becoming more interested in how the human senses adapt and how one actually feels in the space." Red, black, browns and even green, as seen in the plunge pool tiles, provide a broader palette of colours than he would have once used.

"In doing my own house I have done things that I haven't done before and really from that experience I have learned a lot," he says.

"I know how to build buildings but being able to really control how people feel in their homes . . . that is something very powerful that I think has great potential.

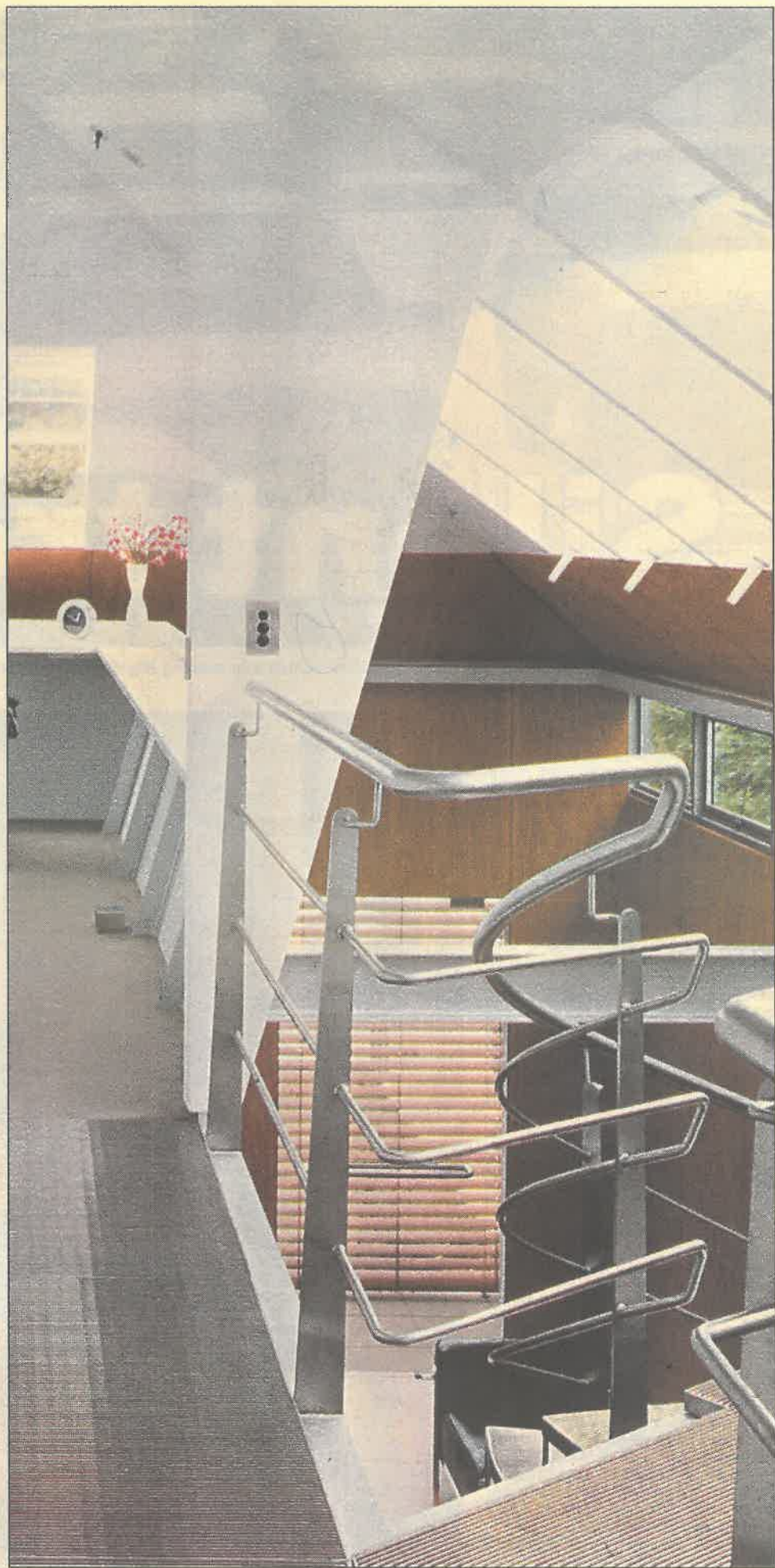
"When I come home to this I find I have a sense of calm and serenity that certainly effects my entire attitude and that is what's important."

■ Lippmann Associates, phone 9318 0844.

JUSTINE OATES



Evolving . . . Ed Lippmann and wife Jenni in their home



Lippmann never short of solutions

No matter how small the space, there are endless ways to utilise existing elements in your home to create extra room.

Ed Lippmann turned a blank wall in the loungeroom into an office area for himself and wife Jenni by running a bench along the wall and adding shelves for books above it.

Under the bench is a concealed shelf, which is used to hold the computer cords so they don't dangle down and look untidy.

The same wall was used to create a galley kitchen further along. To bring definition to the space an island bench on wheels was then placed in front.

It can be used as a prep bench in the kitchen, rolled away to give the area more room or taken outside on sunny days as a serving table for when friends come for lunch.

The coffee table in the television area, by Korban and Flaubert, has been hollowed out on one side and is a great storage place for magazines and children's videos.

A piece on the wall called a bookworm provides an interesting sculptural element and doubles as a place to rest books.

The roof is a much overlooked space. Lippmann decided to utilise it as sleeping quarters but it can be turned into just about anything from a huge family room to a large storage zone.

The upstairs bathroom was built in the centre of the house so it had no windows or natural ventilation. Lippmann solved the problem by giving it a glass roof, which lets in light and opens up to let steam out.

The steel staircase with grate treads also provides an innovative as well as functional purpose. Obviously it's a way of getting upstairs but it also screens the back from the front of the house and provides sculptural interest.

As Lippmann says: "For every problem there is always a solution, if there is the time and the will to find it. That search has become my journey."

Escaping the hard edge of modernity for something more user friendly . . . central living room with capsule bathroom, centre left

Lippmann trademark . . . glass walls, top centre

Stylish way to the next level . . . the spiral steel staircase, above left, helps divide the living room space

Sleeping quarters . . . mezzanine bedroom level, above right, was created by lowering the ground floor

Blending with the streetscape . . . the front facade was inspired by the original cottage, right

