

DREAM SHACK

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It stands in a long line of beach shacks. But with the Johnstone House at Pearl Beach on Broken Bay north of Sydney, Ed Lippmann has extended the tradition. Philip Drew sees the house as part of a dialogue which includes the physical, cultural and emotional context.

Analysis
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Dissection
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The house is a catalyst of awareness and a mediator which draws the ocean and its surroundings inside to its core

□ 'He knew exactly what he was looking for. It must be the genuine article. It had to put the city at a respectable distance, but be close enough for comfortable weekend commuting. However, the locale was only part of it. Anyone of his generation would know what he wanted. No transplanted bourgeois suburban brick – and – veneer tile villa would do. The spirit of the shack had to be right...' - Robert Drewe, *The Bodysurfers*, 1983.

On a day when a high swell is running from the ocean into Broken Bay at Pearl Beach, the fictional character, David, finds his dream shack on a sunny spring morning. Many other people have followed his example in the years since, with the result that the beach front is now jammed tight with expensive up-market properties all in a line vying for a slice of elusive surfers' paradise.

The surf at Pearl Beach isn't much – Box Head blocks the northeasters and Lion Island the southerlies. But we never tire of the surf, wanting and willing that delicious feeling of being at one with nature and the ocean, and more deeply at peace with ourselves where the bush and sea are comatose.

The Johnstone house is at the north end of the beach. Ettalong Mountain rears up over it, terminating the stretch of orange sand abruptly and veiling the bush in its dark shadow. It is much quieter, isolated from the weekend traffic during the busy summer period away from the crowds and shops at the southern end. This largely forgotten secluded section of Pearl Beach is the best part.

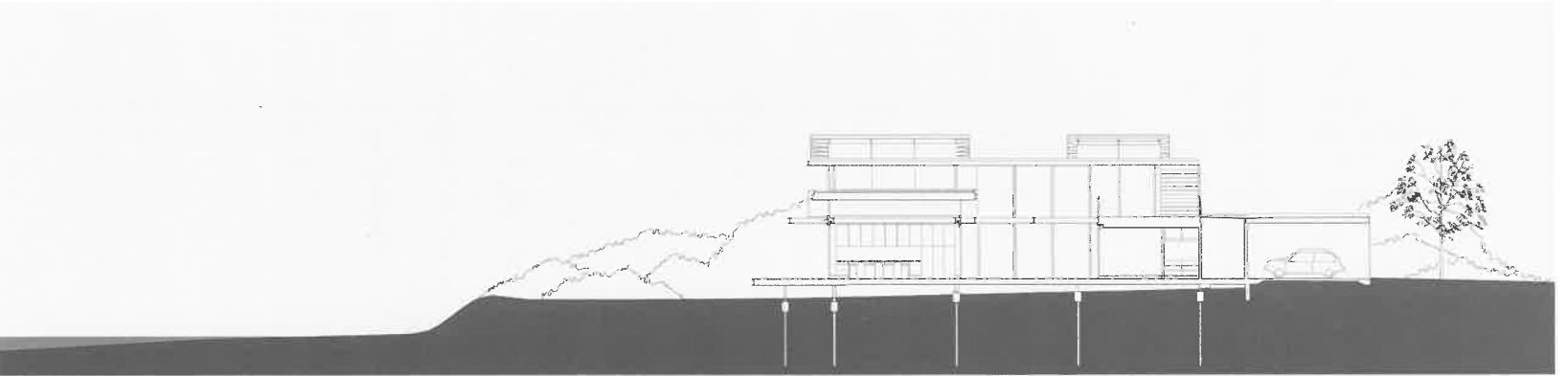
After two decades in practice, Ed Lippmann's architectural approach has changed. At the start he built minimal steel and glass houses, often very economically, that maximised the use of standard industrial materials, much as Charles Eames did in his famous 1949 Pacific Palisades house. Space was not his primary concern at this stage. Instead, his energy was directed towards making rational buildings and his houses resembled elegant pre-fabricated factories. The results were emotionally cold. These days he is much more likely to include natural materials such as stone, timber and plywood that lend warmth to his interiors. Having worked for Marcel Breuer in his Manhattan office, Lippmann favours strongly sculptured forms. But he retains the preference, of lightweight detailing, steel framing and visual transparency that some conventional clients find unsettling.

His work has become softer and warmer; more open, and responsive to human experiences. Buildings can give their occupants so much. They enlarge, sharpen, and give the experience of living an aesthetic edge in ways that sensitise us to our surroundings by making us more aware of where we are.

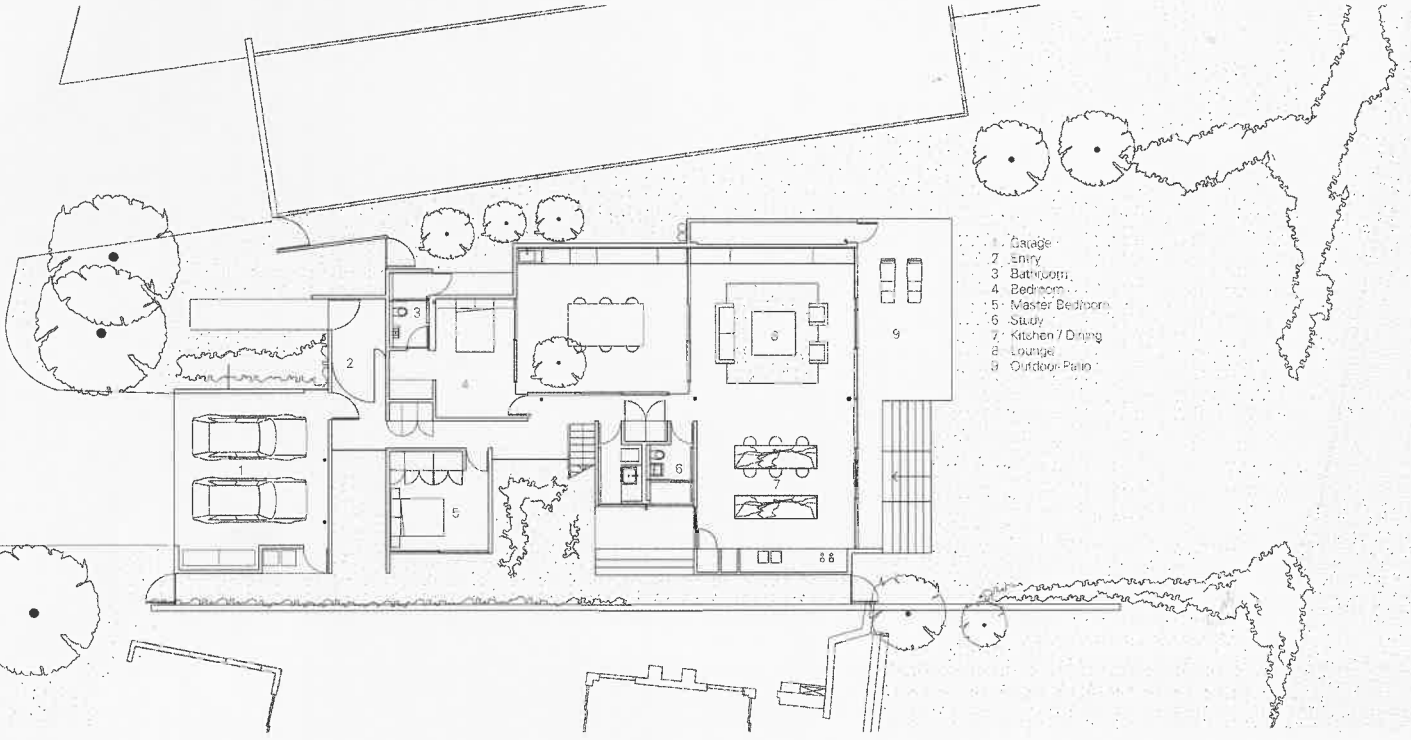
This is true of the Johnstone House. It is all about the ocean and the beach edge. There are not just two occupants living in the house. Apart from the clients, Grant Johnstone, Lee Ausburn, the ocean is a third and nearby Ettalong Mountain a fourth resident. The ocean and the mountain are omnipresent and daily companions to life in the beach house. Its design is about all four. The house was originally intended to be a weekender in the classic sense, but it will become a permanent residence. At Christmas it must survive the annual family invasion. But beyond this it must be on good speaking terms with the ocean out front and the mountain towering over it. It needs to introduce its two residents so that they warm to the powerful natural presences around the house. >







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