

The past three or four decades in Sydney have seen signal advances in the arts. As a city, we can boast one of the finest opera companies, world-standard ballet, and artists, authors, composers producing major works unique to Australia. As this was happening in the arts, the seeds of unique house design sown by Sid Ancher, Arthur Baldwinson *et al* were cultivated and reaped by a group of Sydney architects into what may be the only heroic period of architecture this country had and, regrettably, may ever have.

The fifties and sixties saw notable, innovative buildings by Richard Leplastrier, Bill Lucas, Peter Muller, Bruce Rickard, Ian McKay and some few others, including, perhaps, myself. An explosive, creative time that regrettably is now in the past.

The buildings of those times embraced new tectonics, new materials, new social problems—a new aesthetic. The architects battled councils, builders, materials suppliers and very doubting clients. In spite of these myriad problems, a number of significant buildings came into being.

The past decade or two has seen all that creativity thrown on the trash heap with so-called good architects producing crass brick pseudo-mansions or garishly painted steel and corrugated iron, curved-roof buildings devoid of any appreciable understanding of space or place, the essence of architecture. These buildings are devoid of experiment, barely satisfying basic human need. Most architects have lost the plot.

With these images in mind, and some hope because of past knowledge of Ed Lippmann's small buildings, I accepted *Architecture Australia's* invitation to comment on the Cashman/Pickles beach house near Wombarra, a seaside village near Stanwell Park, NSW.

On the day I visited, the heavens opened to deliver our drought-stricken land a welcome deluge—not the best weather to enjoy a beach house, but enjoy it I did. The house is approached down some indifferent steps overhung with tangled growth, across a modest timber bridge to an almost horizontal clearing. There suddenly one experiences a calm, steel, glass, aluminium and stained waterproof plywood structure. Simple, elegant, understated, it defines a grass court between a high hill to the north and planting to the south and west.

The building's entrance is clearly defined; a dark recess. Moving into the house is deliberately calm. Appropriately for a modest beach house, the lobby is small. It is also slightly disconcerting as it leads more directly to the bedroom wing than the living space. However, as one moves into the living space, the cool calm of the west front is replaced acoustically by the roar of the surf and visually by the beautifully fabricated stacking and sliding glass walls,

Another sparkling house by Ed Lippmann has been delivered to a remote NSW

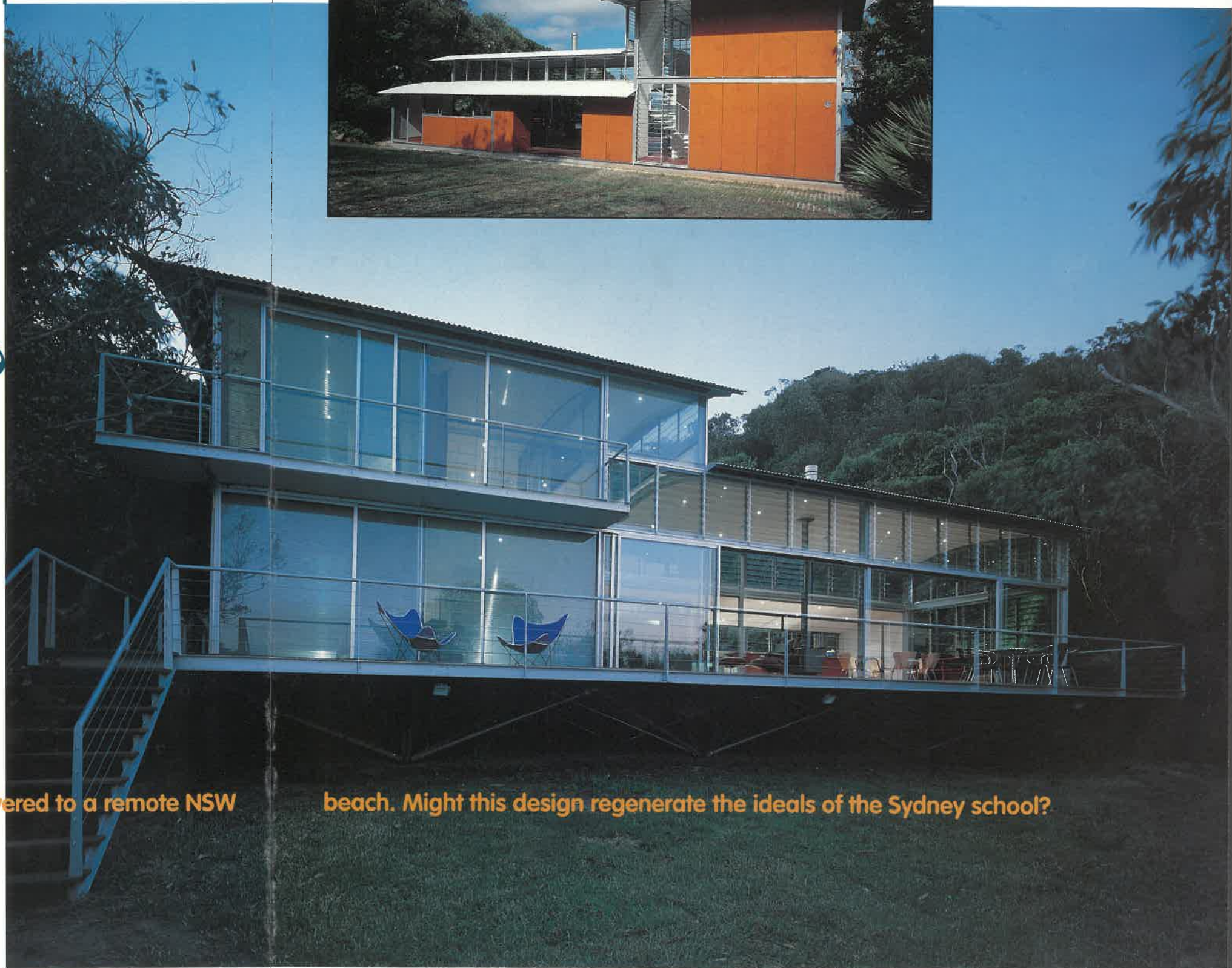
which thrust the visitor into primeval vegetation, sand and surf.

The living space has the feeling of a glass pavilion which encloses the user by its curved white ceiling, by the hillside visible through the north glass wall, and, to a lesser extent, by the timber deck to the east . . . extending towards more plant material, sea and sand. This is a very simple space for seaside living, cooking and eating.

Its simple nature is established by the prefabricated steel structure (bolted to maintain the factory-applied galvanising), the ele-

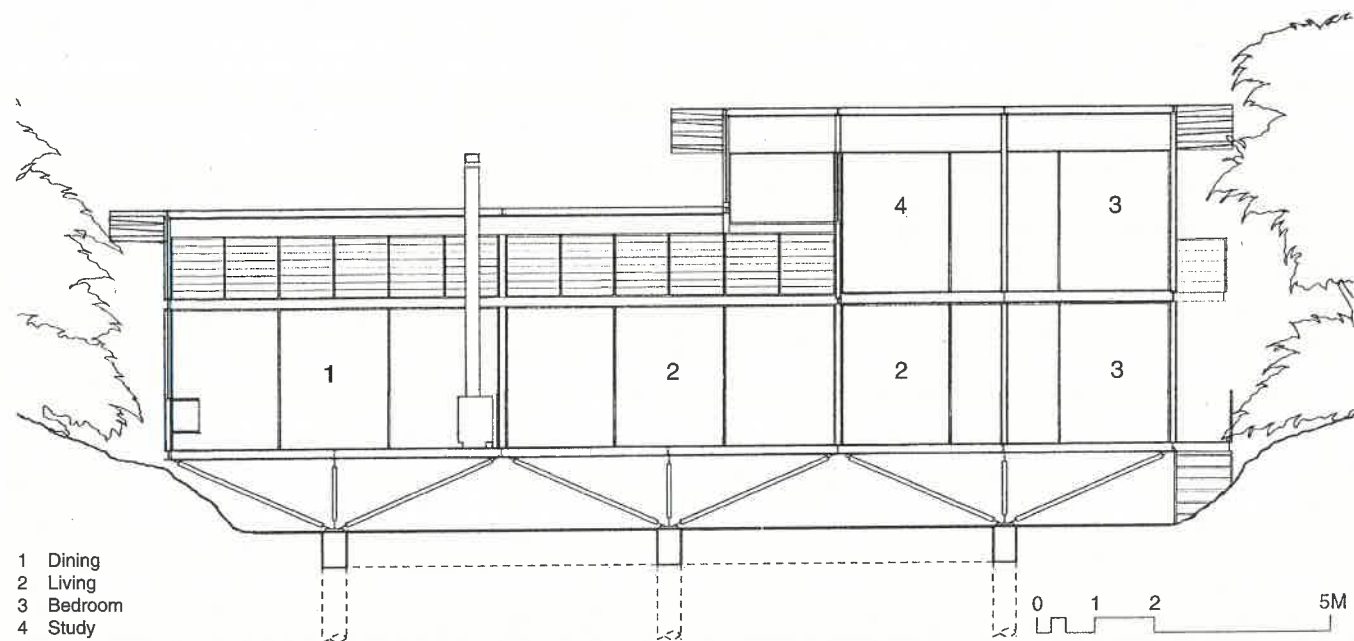
Main photo, east facade. Small photo, west (front) facade.

Glimmer of Hope



beach. Might this design regenerate the ideals of the Sydney school?

Review by **Neville Gruzman** Photography by **Farshid Assasi**



- 1 Dining
- 2 Living
- 3 Bedroom
- 4 Study

gant, well-proportioned, sliding aluminium doors and many adjustable glass louvres. With simple furniture, a well-made stainless steel and timber kitchen that relates to the brushbox-boarded floor, this is an effortless, eminently appropriate, part-inside, part-outside beach living space.

Budget restrictions produced neat—minimum but adequate—bedrooms and bathrooms which are stacked at the south end of the building. Though the budget was low, Lippmann's detailing is simple and elegant, making these minimal spaces more than adequate for their purpose.

Apart from the dramatic experience the building engenders in relating user and space to the site, there is another great gift for the visitor. This is the east, waterside view of the dwelling. Here, the architect has created a dynamic sculpture of well-proportioned components that come together in a splendid way. This is one of the few good architectural experiences I have had for a long time.

In part, the dynamic quality arises from the subsoil. Known as talus, this unstable material consists of rock floaters in an almost liquid clay matrix. Six metres below this mixture is a solid coal seam. To minimise excavation, the building therefore is supported on six RC columns from each of which sprout four galvanised iron struts like hands supporting the floor—a powerful but subtle device that exploits a difficult site problem.

There are some matters of detail that concern me—the tapered beam end for example—but the major problem for me is the long section. I wonder why Lippmann didn't carry the high roof of the living room two bays further to the north and thus admit ample sun. It is also disappointing that the building is not raised a metre or so

higher to allow the site to flow under it and to magnify from the foot of the site the floating quality that is so effective from the east. Perhaps these propositions were not appreciated by the client.

Even with these queries, I found this a very good house—technologically of its time, aesthetically of its place and mostly satisfying the needs of the user.

With the work of young Sydney architects like Lippmann, Peter Lonergan, Julie Cracknell, Sam Marshall and some few others, the path of aesthetic and tectonic pioneering that characterised architecture in the fifties and sixties is being retraced, not in its image but in spirit. The community needs architects who pave new ground by designing buildings to clearly, concisely and beautifully express the physical and spiritual needs of their users and in their time. We need architects who will experiment with new means of enclosing space in the most beguiling and useful ways. Only with such practitioners will our profession remain relevant to our community. As a practising architect, teacher and local government councillor, I have had reason to predict the demise of our profession—yet every now and then, as with this house and some other small works, I perceive a glimmer of hope.

Cashman/Pickles House, Wombarra, NSW

Architect Lippmann Associates—project team Ed Lippmann, Phillipa Bowling, Kate Dewhirst, Phillip Nobis. Structural and Geotechnical Engineers Ove Arup—Tristram Carfrae, Tony Phillips. Civil/Hydraulic Engineers Philip Allen & Associates. Builder PJ and LM Novotny. Quantity Surveyor Bayley Davies Associates.

Neville Gruzman is an architect and critic who lectures at the University of Sydney.

This page: top, north-south section. Opposite page: 1, west facade with front entry and living room beyond. 2, deck and living area, looking south. 3, living area looking south east to beach. 4, entry lobby and stairs to upstairs bedrooms and study. 5 and 6, louvred clerestory over kitchen.

