

HOUSES

HOUSES ISSUE 22 2000 \$A10.94 (\$NZ 13.50 incl. GST)

**ED LIPPMANN
IN PROFILE**

HOUSES & APARTMENTS

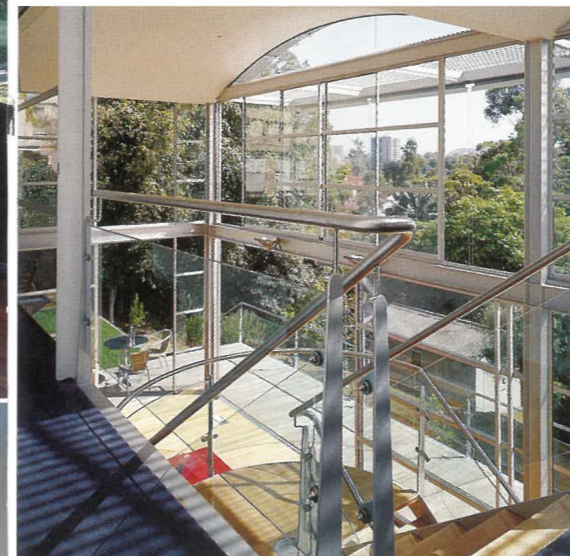
BLIGH VOLLER NIELD
BANDY
CANDALEPAS
JPR
KENNEDY
MELOCCO AND MOORE
NATION FENDER KATSALIDIS
PRITCHARD
RIJAVEC
SWANEY DRAPER
TROPPO
WOOD / MARSH

FLOORING, PAVING, KITCHEN ZONES



architecture of its time

TRACING THROUGH HIS SIGNIFICANT LINEAGE OF HOUSES, KATE STEWART TALKS TO ED LIPPMANN ABOUT DESIGNING WITH STEEL AND GLASS AND WHY ARCHITECTURE SHOULD NEVER LOOK BACK.



Ed Lippmann does not subscribe to a nostalgic view on architecture. On the contrary, he has an ongoing interest in advanced technology, with his lightweight steel and glass houses instantly recognisable for their cutting edge design and engineering. The title of his recently published monograph, *Architecture for a New Millennium*, highlights his central philosophy, that architecture should be a reflection of the environment, the social concerns and the technology of its time. Building on the foundations of the Contemporary Modernists he admires, Norman Foster, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, Lippmann's houses are highly transparent containers, responsive to the Sydney climate, light and landscape. Fundamental to his work is a strong connection between inside and outside. Working with steel, his reputation is for expert craftsmanship and detailing. Interestingly, his most recent work shows another dimension making its way in, with the use of warmer materials in addition to his trademark blend of glass and steel. Lippmann's mature work is recognising more the human response to space, with his investigations into the ancient Eastern philosophies of Veda and Feng Shui playing a key role. Like all good modern architects, Lippmann's work is sometimes controversial, sometimes misunderstood. He has fought many battles with councils, builders, and the Land and Environment Court on behalf of his clients. Unlike some of his contemporaries though, Lippmann is aiming to make his work more inclusive. He is critical of the over-intellectualisation of architecture to the exclusion of those outside the profession. To Lippmann, the real test of success is when somebody who knows nothing about architecture can enjoy being in one of his houses.

The following is an edited transcript

KS: Tell me how your practice was set up.
EL: I started on my own 14 years ago. I was approached by somebody who had seen some designs I'd done for an alteration and addition and he asked me to undertake a shopping centre in Moree. I resigned from my job and set up a practice on the strength of that commission. The shopping centre got me started, but it came to nothing, the job just fell over, there were problems with overseas funding. So all of a sudden I didn't have any other work except a small commission to do an alteration to a house. It was just barely enough to keep me going. I can remember going home and pouring myself a scotch, staring out at the harbour and thinking 'what am I going to do now?' The interesting thing was that I'd never designed a house before – I didn't have any experience in residential architecture. I learned from my own experience, my own mistakes as well, hopefully my

Practice Profile:
Lippmann and Associates
Director / Ed Lippmann
Associate Director / Rolf Ockert

Practice size:
 Small to medium, 8 people

Design philosophy:
 "Architecture for a new millennium"

Featured projects:
 Cashman House, Wombarra, NSW, 1993-1995
 Taylor House, Mosman, Sydney, 1994-1996
 Tree House, Mosman, Sydney, 1995-1998
 Lippmann House, Vaucluse, Sydney, 1997-2000
 Djudin House, Paddington, Sydney, 1998-2000

Awards:
 2000 RAIA Boral Timber Award, Lippmann House
 2000, Belle House of the Year Award, Lippmann House
 1999, RAIA Award for Outstanding Urban Design, King George V Recreation Centre
 1999, BHP Metal Building Award, Residential, Tree House
 1995, BHP Metal Building Award, Residential, Cashman House
 1991, RAIA Merit Award, Herman House

Competitions:
 2000, Winner, RAIA Emerging Practices Competition, RTA Footbridges
 1998, Winner, City of Sydney, Andrew "Boy" Charlton Pool Competition

Publications:
 Lippmann Associates, *Architecture for a New Millennium*, Published by l'Arca Edizioni, 2000

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OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: Cashman House; Lippmann House; Tree House living area; Tree House exterior. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Djudin House; Taylor House.

CASHMAN HOUSE, WOMBARRA, NSW, 1993-95



Project Team:
Philipa Bowling,
Kate Dewhirst,
Ed Lippmann

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Farshid Assassi



ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

The site is accessible from a gravel track concealed by dense vegetation and provides direct access to a beach to the east and public nature reserve to the north and west.

The house contains three bedrooms and a guest room/study, with generous casual living areas providing access to decks.

The house was conceived as an open plan glazed pavilion, which could easily expand into extensive external decks and living areas. As the house is used mostly in summer, all living rooms and bedrooms face east to the ocean.

A service spine runs along the western rear zone. The eastern facade is completely glazed and the western entry facade is wrapped in plywood panelling to provide privacy and reflect the solidity of the mountain ranges to the west.

High bay louvred glass provides cross-ventilation and heat reduction during summer while a slow combustion steel fireplace provides winter heating.

successes. It was a hard way to learn, but probably a good way to learn. Since then, over time, I have built many houses.

KS: What would you consider to be the ideal client/architect relationship?

EL: There are three types of clients. Firstly, there are clients that don't know much about what we do, just call out of the blue. They're the most difficult clients to work with because sometimes there's a big gap in their expectation about design and my approach to design. The second type just says, right, here's our site, here's our budget, just do it – and in my experience that's quite rare. The third sort of client is one who works *with* you. This is generally the most rewarding situation for both parties. It's really important that the architecture is the hallmark of this office, but also that the people with whom we work, or perhaps *for* whom we work, are satisfied with the result – it's not just another design, stamped out of here.

KS: So you prefer a more collaborative relationship?

EL: Renzo Piano has said much about architects serving their clients. Sometimes we think that a project is an exercise in developing our design approach, but we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the design is for the client, and ultimately it needs to serve their needs and desires.

KS: What are the principles that you work to when designing a house?

EL: Some of the principles I work to probably won't change much. They're fundamental ideas. For example, the attitude to space and the relationship between inside and outside is fundamental.

KS: A lot of people say what they recognise in your work is the steel and glass.

EL: The real reason for using those materials is that it provides the capability to de-materialise states, so the barrier between inside and outside becomes minimal. The transparency of my houses is really a response to the Sydney climate and the landscape. In Sydney there's a great opportunity to create limitless space where inside becomes outside. The distinction between living areas and bedroom areas, private and public, is also important.

KS: Why do you like to work with steel?

EL: The nature of steel is that it is very strong and light, which means it is useful for achieving long spans using very little material. The idea of limitless space without walls and barriers that separate rooms is wonderful. In my case, it's not just an aesthetic, it comes from a desire to achieve certain spatial relationships and the material is just a way of doing it. At this point in time, steel is the best material for achieving that dematerialisation, but there may well be other things we use in the future.

KS: Are there elements of your work that are specifically drawn from the Sydney landscape and natural geography or are you more influenced by the urban environment?

EL: I think architecture needs to belong to its place. In the first 10 years, virtually all my projects were around the city. A lot of them were in urban

Project Team:
Scott Lester, Ed Lippmann,
Brett Sperling

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Farshid Assassi



TAYLOR HOUSE, MOSMAN, SYDNEY, 1994-96



ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

The site is on a steep slope offering views to the west of the city skyline and over Sirius Cove, a small harbour inlet. A two-level design was developed with three bedrooms on the upper level. Living, dining, kitchen and family room were located on the lower level. The north-western aspect over Sirius Cove and the city is a panoramic vista which generated the form of the internal volume. The upper level was hollowed out providing a generous two-storey living room which was overlooked by the bedroom mezzanine. The organisation of the house is revealed in the roof profile, consisting of three vaulted forms corresponding to children's bedrooms/family room, service stack, master bedroom/living. Substantial use of glass stacking and sliding doors is used to provide continuity of internal space to external gardens and decks. The two-storey living room is wrapped on two sides by a timber deck and enjoys the western view through a two storey glass wall. A bank of motorised fabric blinds prevents the intrusion of afternoon sun in the summer. Substantial use of louvres also restricts north facing sun in summer.

and heritage conservation areas, so there wasn't a landscape to relate to. They were urban houses and the issues were to do with privacy, security, and the expansion of space within very tight constraints, where neighbours were terrace houses. All of those early jobs were very small spaces. They were good projects to cut my teeth on because you have to make the most of very little means, which requires skill. When you've got a big site with trees around it, it's a lot easier in many ways.

In 1993 I had a project in Wombarra, outside of the city, and that was wonderful. It was this spectacular site overlooking the Pacific Ocean and a totally different concept in context. The relationship was to the mountains and sea ... I like the city but I also appreciate nature. I don't think it's appropriate to design the same house in the city as you would in a natural environment.

KS: A lot of people would see the use of steel and glass in your houses as a very industrial aesthetic. Can you explain about how you integrate this aesthetic into a more natural environment?

EL: Well, I don't see steel and glass as an industrial aesthetic. What is happening now is we're domesticating those materials so that we can achieve high quality steelwork, which is acceptable to look at. In fact it can be beautifully crafted. A steel staircase like the one in the house in Paddington, is actually quite a beautiful piece of industrial design, so the term 'industrial aesthetic' hopefully doesn't have a negative connotation. In 1982 I wrote a thesis about advanced technology in architecture and I was very interested in work of Norman Foster and Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano. I was interested in the capability of new materials and structures and pushing the limits of technology, and I've been exploring those ideas through the work of my office. It's interesting that I'm now returning to the use of natural, organic materials, which are being used in conjunction with 'synthetic' materials ... But it's a matter of finding the appropriate materials and the appropriate technology. I guess I have a reputation for using modern materials, but crafting them really well.

KS: What about environmental considerations?

EL: They are important. Our general approach to the Sydney climate is that we shouldn't have to air-condition a house. The temperature variation between winter and summer is not that great, and so we are developing our designs so that there's sufficient overhang with the right orientation so we get shade in the summer and enough sun in winter to provide natural heating. We can also provide stack cooling so that natural ventilation is easily achieved. When you use lightweight materials there is a risk that houses are going to be very uncomfortable to live in, so it's important to make them work.

KS: You talk about making connections between the inside and the outside. How do you actually go about doing this in the design of your houses? I know that the Tree House was particularly successful in this regard.

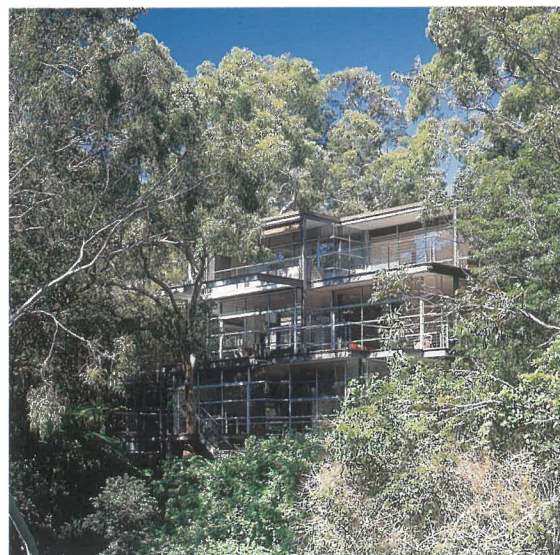
EL: Well, it's a question of relating to the context, understanding the site physically. The orientation is very important, the fall across the site, the

THE TREE HOUSE, MOSMAN, SYDNEY, 1995-98



Project Team:
Gerhard Abel, Scott Lester,
Ed Lippmann

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Ross Honeysett



ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

This steeply sloped site is located in a thickly wooded reserve in close proximity to Middle Harbour in the northern suburbs of Sydney. Access from a gravel track at the top of a steep slope allowed all the living areas and bedrooms to fan out to the sun and views. The house relates to the terrain, stepping down and across the site over five levels. On the top floor the master bedroom and office float in the tree-tops. The entry level accommodates kitchen, dining, sun-room with a living area on a sunken/split level. A two-car garage is also provided at this level. Two split lower levels accommodate the children's bedrooms and play areas. All living areas are oriented to the north with substantial timber decks adding a further extension of space into the trees. To minimise the intrusion on the site, a steel framing system was developed which allowed the house to hover above the terrain. The structure and envelope – the skin and bones – are intentionally separated to give the house greater legibility.

vegetation, also the ambience of the site, the nature of it, whether it's the city or the country. The Tree House was actually in many ways unusual, the house was isolated from the ground and I provided it with a lot of outdoor spaces, which were decks, hovering above the ground, which is the most dramatic way to observe nature, it offers great surveillance. For a whole lot of other reasons it was better to elevate the house, let the water run underneath.

KS: I'd like you to describe your working methods for developing design concepts?

EL: There isn't a project that comes into my office that I don't personally work on. I tend to do most of the design work, and depending on the size of the project, in conjunction with other staff. Generating the early sketches, discussions with the client, and negotiations with Council. When we get into the stage of working drawings I pass it on to my assistants, but I don't leave it, I'm checking everything, I'm very involved the detailing and construction stages. I'm particular about detail, I spend a lot of time getting it right.

KS: The title of your monograph is *Architecture for the New Millennium* – I'd like you to explain what you mean by this.

EL: I think that good architecture should respond to the conditions of the day. Social conditions, technical conditions, materials, and that goes for any period of time. One can look back at the Renaissance or the Gothic period and the finest examples of architecture at that time were the ones where the architect was pushing the boundaries, aesthetically, structurally, technically and spatially. Significantly, at this stage in history, at the beginning of the new millennium, we have the potential to produce revolutionary and innovative solutions to our environmental requirements. I hope that the work that I do will be seen as architecturally responsive to its time, historically relevant and evolutionary.

KS: You talk about the importance of architecture 'of its time'. I'd like to then to ask you about historical context. When you were commissioned to design the King George V Sports Centre in the Rocks precinct in Sydney, how did your design respond to the surrounding historical context?

EL: I'm very much of the view that cities are a living entity and they grow and evolve. If one goes to Barcelona or Paris, one can experience such rich cultures. There are so many buildings of many periods which constitute the fabric of the city, and that's what makes these cities valuable. They're not boring, they're not a repetition of 17th or 18th century attitudes.

A lot of people thought the Sports Centre should look like a stone bond store, but that was totally unsuitable. As well, we had the Harbour Bridge, which was built in the 30s ... Some of the local authorities were very blinkered and didn't really see the context as fully as I wanted them to ... But it wasn't really about the materials, it was more about how to develop architecture, which is human and is 'respectful' of its context. Because it was never my view that we should go in there and demolish The Rocks, but I think it's totally appropriate that we should add to it in a modern way. So I looked at the streetscape, the height of the buildings, it was important

Project Team:
Ed Lippmann, Nerida Bergin,
Rolf Ockert

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Ross Honeysett

DJUDIN HOUSE, PADDINGTON, SYDNEY, 1998-2000



ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

The design of this terrace house in Paddington is an inner-city reinvention. A transformation of space in old housing stock has made the house more pleasurable and workable for a modern lifestyle. The fundamental aim was to bring light and a sense of space into a narrow, cramped environment. Originally a working class house that has become gentrified, the client's expectations of comfort needed to be addressed. The new work is intended to maximise natural light and ventilation and create a sense of spatial generosity.

that the scale of the building shouldn't belittle the other buildings, which it doesn't. It's quite an intricate piece of design and I compare that to the detailing of brickwork and stonework in the other buildings around it. It was a matter of trying to interpret that and not just imitate it. When it was being built there was a lot of negative press and it was criticised as being, an 'act of vandalism', but it actually won the 1999 Urban Design Award.

KS: You seem to be entering a new phase with the design of your own house with the use of more natural materials. Can you explain how your design philosophy is changing or evolving?

EL: I think I'm starting to appreciate more the importance of the human response to the environment. I've always explored in my houses a sort of plastic quality, a three dimensional aspect of volume and the manipulation of space. Now I'm moving away from a kind of minimalism, a very limited range of materials where everything is white and silver. I'm still incorporating that, but I'm expanding the repertoire.

A lot of architecture is unfortunately to do with a language that only architects appreciate. The litmus test is the unintellectual human response – a person who knows nothing about modern architecture can come into a space and experience the elevation of their spirit. That's more important than whether or not you've got the right light fittings and furniture. There's got to be something fundamental that we humans respond to and feel enriched by. That's what I'm trying to identify. I'm studying the nature of space, the idea that space has an energy.

KS: The criticism a lot of people have about modern houses – the archetypal modern house – is that they are too austere. How do you react to this criticism?

EL: I can understand the criticism. Because I understand the language of Modernism and with my formative experiences working in Marcel Breuer's office, I understand the philosophy and I appreciate it. But I can also understand somebody who hasn't had that training. We've got to be a bit more inclusive. Some modern architecture has been very exclusive.

KS: So do you think architecture is still too elitist in this country?

EL: I think there's a healthy energy in Sydney particularly. Sydney is a very international city and it has become very open-minded. So design is something which is being embraced and recognised here. Not just the houses we live in but the urban landscape as well. People are starting to appreciate that design is something that does affect their day-to-day existence.

A few years ago I developed an idea of low cost housing, which was another reason for using so-called industrial materials. They can be prefabricated, which means they're economical and not expensive, labour-intensive buildings... Unfortunately we didn't get these alternative project homes off the ground, although the idea is a very valid one, because I think good design should be affordable for everybody.

KS: It's a shame.

EL: I agree. The reality is that most people, 95 percent of the population



Project Team:
Ed Lippmann, Jenni Lippmann,
Nerida Bergin, Rolf Ockert

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Ross Honeysett



ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

This house involves the replacement of a semi-detached weatherboard cottage, amounting to a completely new interior environment. While the house is only 160 square metres, a generosity of space is attained by the fusion of internal spaces with one another and with the exterior. The lower level consists of a series of loosely defined living spaces with upper level bedroom mezzanines looking down on them. The master bedroom at the front of the house overlooks a living area and study, while the children's bedrooms at the rear overlook the family room. The service core is located in the centre of the house allowing all the served habitable spaces to occupy the perimeter, where they benefit from external aspect. The external spaces are designed as extensions of the interior. The rear courtyard opens off the family room through large stacking glass doors. A level deck plunge pool extends as a pond through a glass screen into the corner of the family room.

live in poorly designed or just undesigned environments. Buildings that don't respond to topography and climate. They're dysfunctional. Architecture has the capacity to affect your consciousness if it's designed to the principles I'm referring to. I think it has the capacity to really heighten our quality of life. The project home that has windows to the west and bathrooms in the wrong place, it would actually create complete chaos in your life. Unfortunately, people just accept it, they don't question.

KS: Since 1985 you've been to The Land & Environment Court around 14 times. Why have there been so many battles with Council? And how do you help clients understand this process?

EL: It's the least enjoyable part of what I do. I don't like arguing and haggling with Councils, but the reason I've been in there so often is because I'm not prepared to compromise if I think something is right – if it's reasonable and good for the environment. Not just for my clients, but for the broader environment. Codes are often prescriptive, but unsuitable for particular cases. The houses that I've been designing and the design I'm pursuing is not traditional. They have been in the past, not the kind of houses that are enshrined in council's policies. The codes tend to encourage repetition and mediocrity. They often prevent bad things happening, but they also prevent very good things happening, so the problem is, I'm not prepared to go to the middle ground – we're pushing for change, improvement and innovation.

KS: How do you envisage the design of houses will change in this country over the next 20 years?

EL: I think there's a much greater confidence in developing models, which are part of this place. If you go back to the beginnings of residential design in Australia, the early terrace houses and 19th century houses are just copies of English models, working class slums basically. And even though they've become desirable status symbols to some, they're not very well suited to our environment, both culturally and climatically. In the 20th century we copied the American model – a freestanding house on the residential block. But these days Australian architecture is very diverse. The common denominator in all of our work – I'm talking about Sydney architects – is that there's a response, in most cases, to the climate and the landscape, and the way people live, and that's a very healthy basis for architecture. The relevant issues today are the expansion of space, getting away from breaking up houses into little boxes and actually making space free. The desire for living outside and inside is the Australian character, which comes out of the landscape and the climate.