

natural selection

Taking cues from the surrounding trees, Leeton Pointon Architects + Interiors and Allison Pye Interiors give organic form to a family villa in Melbourne, Australia

*text: jeff book
photography: lisa cohen/living inside*

Previous spread: A flying-saucerlike porte cochere appears to float above the garage and front entrance of the house.

Below, from left: A pair of Bart Schilder sofas flank Lorenzo Arosio's Atlantis glass coffee table in the formal living room, which has a cabinet niche lined with bronze mirror. In the entry gallery, a work by Sydney artist Jonny Niesche hangs near linen curtains concealing the glass front door. **Opposite top, from left:** The sweeping central staircase, which is broken into two sections, sports custom steel-plate balustrades. Overlooking the pool, the sunken family room has white-oak cabinetry, ceiling, and floor, and is furnished with Diesel's Cloudscape armchair, Sanja Knezović's Cloud sofa, and Tom Dixon's Off Cut stools.



"The form explores the delicate balance between mass, weightlessness, and materiality"

Almost inevitably, calling a building *sculptural* arouses the suspicion that function played second fiddle to the architect's shape-shifting vision. In designing a house worthy of the epithet, however, Michael Leeton, principal of Leeton Pointon Architects + Interiors, kept form and function in equilibrium as deftly as a juggler spinning plates. Blending sheltering solidity with airy transparency, the 9,365-square-foot, two-story villa responds not only to its environment—a leafy suburb in Melbourne, Australia—but also to the needs of its occupants, a couple with three children.

With its shade-giving projections and curvilinear volumes, the so-called Canopy House reflects its setting, a neighborhood of large plane trees. "The house is an extension of the adjacent street-tree canopies," observes Allison Pye, whose namesake design firm was responsible for the project's interiors. "The form explores the delicate balance between mass, weightlessness, and tactile materiality."

The interplay between straight and curved lines starts in the front yard, where a horseshoe driveway leads to a rectangular garage above which a cantilevered porte cochere hovers like a docked flying saucer. A curving wall on the right side of the driveway screens the rest of the property from sight. The front entry—a clear-glazed pivot door with sidelights—welcomes a view of the street but can be cloaked by linen draperies if privacy is wanted. At once massive and malleable, the near-white facade, punctuated by windows, wraps around the second floor before coming to earth in arcs that recall flying buttresses.



The villa's organic character springs from its biomorphic forms (chalky sand-and-cement plaster over a brick substrate), interior palette of natural materials (oak, limestone, polished plaster), and openness to the verdant setting. Expanses of glass, especially on the ground floor, frame views of the ¾-acre site. Designed around two existing elm trees, the landscaping includes neighbor-screening foliage and a mix of lush beds and lawn. Connecting house and garden are broad aggregate steps and terraces, one ➤

In the kitchen and casual dining area, Bonderup and Thorup's pendant fixture hangs above Agostino & Brown's Tambootie oak table surrounded by Nitzan Cohen's She Said oak chairs; white-oak floorboards clad the wall behind the staircase.



of which is adjacent to the elevated, elliptical swimming pool.

Appearing to float above the glass-swathed ground floor, the more solid volumes of the second story project to provide shade to rooms below and even the pool. On the upper level, deep window reveals and bamboo sliding screens that retract into wall pockets help deflect the strong Australian sunlight. The steel-framed bamboo panels offer a pleasing contrast with the crisp off-white-plaster cladding "while providing soft dappled light and privacy to the bedrooms," the architect reports.

All four bedrooms are upstairs, while the main living areas—which include a formal living room, formal and casual dining areas, a large kitchen, and a sunken family room—occupy the ground floor. Within that general division, the design unfolds as a series of zones, pivoting around a sinuous staircase that curves upward in two sections. The stairs separate the master suite from the children's bedrooms, which have their own lounge area. "Internally the house is zoned through the careful placement of circulation spaces that widen into more communal living areas," Leeton explains. "Changes of level inside acknowledge the topography of the site and create further subtle zoning in the building. Changes in floor materials, from limestone tiles to timber and carpet, subtly reinforce the different areas." Oak floorboards also crop up on walls and ceilings and in custom-made seating, providing continuity while contrasting with the sleek plaster.

"The interior inspiration for the project was both the family and the architecture," Pye says. "The aim was to provide an inviting, calm backdrop to busy family life. The interiors sit simply and quietly within the context of the architecture, which is always so beautifully considered and sculptural in form." The furnishings, from international touchstones such as Tom Dixon and Bart Schilder as well as Australian designers, strike a note of relaxed, contemporary elegance. Cooling shades of blue prevail in the formal living room, warmed at one end by a cabinetry niche clad in bronze mirror and a rounded corner of raw brass "that will develop a patina over time similar in color to the mirror," Leeton notes. ➤

Below, from left: The second-floor master bedroom on the left and children's lounge on the right both have deep window reveals to help shield them from the fierce Australian sun. In the latter room, Kip & Co. velvet beanbags and custom benches piled high with pillows provide comfortable seating. **Opposite top, from left:** A bench made of oak floorboards sits in the master bedroom window, while a Benedini Associati Spoon tub occupies the same position in the adjacent bathroom. Philippe Starck's Gnome table joins Mono's solid-surfacing pedestal sink in the skylit powder room.



"Light filters throughout the house and constantly changes during the day"

"Michael and I have worked together for many years now, and we like to think we blur the boundary between architecture and interiors," Pye says. "We don't see 'challenges in design,' but instead enjoy the processes of discussion and drawing—most often by hand—as the path to the perfect resolution for our projects."

The house was designed to interact with its setting, from outdoor living areas to garden views and carefully placed skylights. "Light filters throughout the house and constantly changes during the day," the architect reports. Its environmental awareness extends to a 22,000-gallon tank that harvests rainwater runoff from the roof, where solar panels are concealed. "Sustainability is seamless within the building, where everything is integrated yet remains unseen," Leeton maintains.

This year the house earned a commendation from the Victorian Chapter of the Australia Institute of Architects. "It serves the family well as a nurturing refuge," Leeton says. On its website, Leeton Pointon calls itself "a practice focusing on design excellence and exploring the poetic potential of architecture." A worthy ambition, and one realized in this singular, sculptural house. 🏡



PROJECT TEAM KATE POINTON, STACY AMBELAS, TONY MUSSEN: LEETON POINTON ARCHITECTS + INTERIORS. SOPHIE LINDBLOM-TAYLOR: ALLISON PYE INTERIORS. AYUS BOTANICAL: LANDSCAPING CONSULTANT. PLANCOST: QUANTITY SURVEYOR. WOOD GRIEVE ENGINEERS: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN CONSULTANT. URBAN INTELLIGENCE: AUDIO-VISUAL CONSULTANT. CLIVE STEELE PARTNERS: STRUCTURAL, CIVIL ENGINEER. DAVID BROAD ENGINEERS: HYDRAULIC ENGINEER. LBA CONSTRUCTION: GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES
FROM FRONT MOODI: SOFAS (LIVING ROOM). GLAS ITALIA: COFFEE TABLE. E15: ROUND SIDE TABLE.

VALSECCHI 1918: SQUARE SIDE TABLE. STUDIO HENRY WILSON: SCONCE. ARMADILLO & CO.: RUG. GUBI: POUFS (LIVING ROOM), PENDANT FIXTURE (DINING AREA). VICTORIA CARPET: STAIR CARPET. LUCEPLAN: SCONCE (FAMILY ROOM). PROSTORIA: SOFA. MOROSO: ARMCHAIR. TOM DIXON: STOOLS. CAMM UPHOLSTERY: CUSTOM CUSHIONS. STONE TILE INDUSTRIES: FLOOR TILES (ENTRY). MATTIAZZI: CHAIRS (DINING AREA). AGOSTINO & BROWN: TABLE. AGAPE: TUB (MASTER BATHROOM); MIXER (POWDER ROOM). OMVIVO: SINK (POWDER ROOM). KARTELL: SIDE TABLE. KIP & CO: BEAN BAGS (CHILDREN'S LOUNGE). FLOS: SCONCE. **THROUGHOUT** CLEARVIEW SUN CONTROL: CURTAINS. ROYAL OAK FLOORING: FLOORBOARDS.