

Avoca Beach House

by *Studio Prineas*

FIRST HOUSE

In the early days of our fledging studio, some of our first commissions came through close family and friends. Avoca Beach House (see *Houses 86*), on the New South Wales Central Coast, was designed for my aunt and uncle and was a particularly personal project. The lush site, towering with eucalyptus trees, was engrained with childhood memories of summer days spent at Avoca Beach and playing in the bush with my cousins, and so in designing a new home for the site, I was tasked with redefining a place that was already special to me.

My aunt and uncle had owned the property – a modest, two-bedroom fibro shack – for more than 20 years. Though the original house no longer served the needs of the family, the simplicity of daily life facilitated within those four walls was something to savour in the new build. Given the likely addition of grandchildren in the future, the house needed to be highly adaptable and responsive: cosy, yet also generous enough to accommodate multiple families visiting together.

As we discussed the aspirations for the project, I recall walking around Avoca with my uncle, and agreeing that the house needed to belong to its context, rather than feeling as if it had been grafted from the suburbs. The site, tucked into the lower slopes of the foothills, sits beside a beautiful bushland reserve, which inspired us to pursue a modest design sensibility that would sit comfortably in the landscape. Understanding context and designing with empathy for a site's history and surrounds continue to be important parts of the way we work as a studio today.

The new house is positioned tight against the block's southern edge, camping over the footprint of the old shack. This minimized disruption to the site and allowed the front portion of the block to be regenerated with bushland, shrouding the house from the street. Robust, utilitarian materials gave the house an unpretentious quality and continue to effectively withstand Avoca's harsh coastal atmosphere. Raw steel roofing, balustrades and structure form a lightweight framework, interspersed with a grid-like arrangement of glass and dark fibro cement sheeting – a tender reference to the beach shack vernacular.

In a nod to the Australian tradition of welcoming family and friends through the side door, we created an informal entry sequence to the house. A steel bridge leads

01 The robust and unpretentious design is a reimagining of the humble beach shack.

Eva-Marie Prineas recalls the first house of her then-fledgling practice, a 'contemporary treehouse' designed for extended family that pays tribute to the simple pleasures of living by the coast.

Words by Eva-Marie Prineas
Photography by Brett Boardman



01



02 A steel bridge and large deck are an informal entry to the house.

03 North-facing windows, shaded by the roof, open the house to the landscape and coastal breeze.

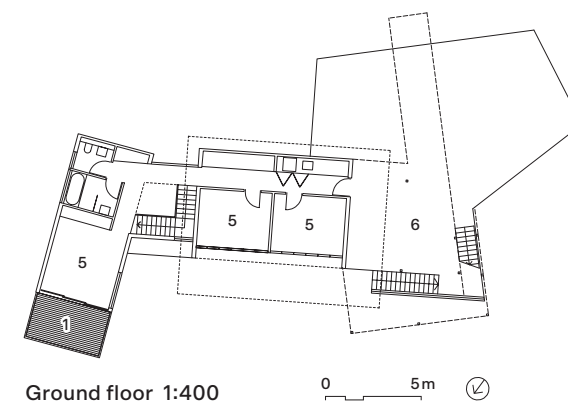
04 Bedrooms are separated from the public living spaces by a glazed stairwell.



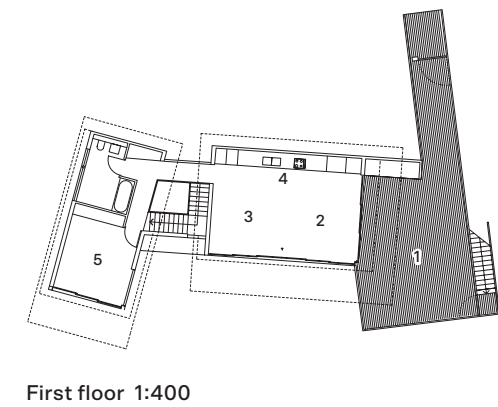
to a broad cantilevered deck, casting views into the elevated home suspended in the treetops. A southern service wall anchors the barbecue, kitchen, laundry, storage and bathroom spaces, while the glazed northern facade is open to embrace the landscape.

A skillion roof lined with clerestory windows provides sun shading yet draws in northern light, which animates the pared-back tones of the interior. Retractable glazing along the northern perimeter gives porosity between the interior and landscape, allowing occupants to delight in views of the treetops and the breeze of coastal air, which also keeps the house cool. A glazed stairwell creates separation between public and private areas on the first floor, and connects to a visitors' pavilion on the ground floor. The overall feeling is that of a contemporary treehouse, open to the breeze, the light and the joy of life's simple pleasures. This sentiment has been a persistent interest as my practice has evolved.

Reflecting on Avoca Beach House as my first residential commission, I recall the amazing team who supported the design vision and participated in the process from beginning to end. Many of them played fundamental roles in the early work of my practice. That drive to inspire a life well-lived through our work remains integral to the practice, and we continue to engage personally with our clients and their specific needs. I think those informal conversations with my uncle around Avoca sparked a very personal approach. We often ask our clients to describe a weekday and a weekend at home – a part of our briefing process that reveals all kinds of insights about the minutiae of their daily lives for us to support through design. ©



Ground floor 1:400



First floor 1:400

- 1 Timber deck
- 2 Dining
- 3 Living
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Bedroom
- 6 Carport

Architect
 Studio Prineas
 +61 2 9332 2006
 hello@studioprineas.com.au
 studioprineas.com.au

Project team Eva-Marie Prineas, David Parsons, Laura Antiohos, Sophie Solomon, Helen Stumbaum **Builder** Cochran Constructions **Engineer** Robert Bird Group **Landscaping** Rolf Den Besten