

THE LOCAL PROJECT



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FISHERMAN'S HOUSE STUDIO PRINEAS

Words by Millie Thwaites • Photography by Gavin Green • Architecture and Interior Design by Studio Prineas
Styling by Atelier Lab • Landscapes by BUSHY Landscapes • Joinery by Finch Projects





Along the harbour in Sydney's Birchgrove, a little cottage sits at the foot of a sandstone cliff. Originally built in the 19th century for local fishermen, it is the last remaining of a collection of weatherboards – the others sadly falling prey to demolition and harbourside development. Tasked with restoring the cottage and designing a significant extension, Studio Prineas's response is a nine-metre-tall off-form concrete tower, Fisherman's House. Acting as a conduit from street level to the water's edge, it makes sense of this cottage once again, ensuring it is habitable, functional and fit for its future as a family home.

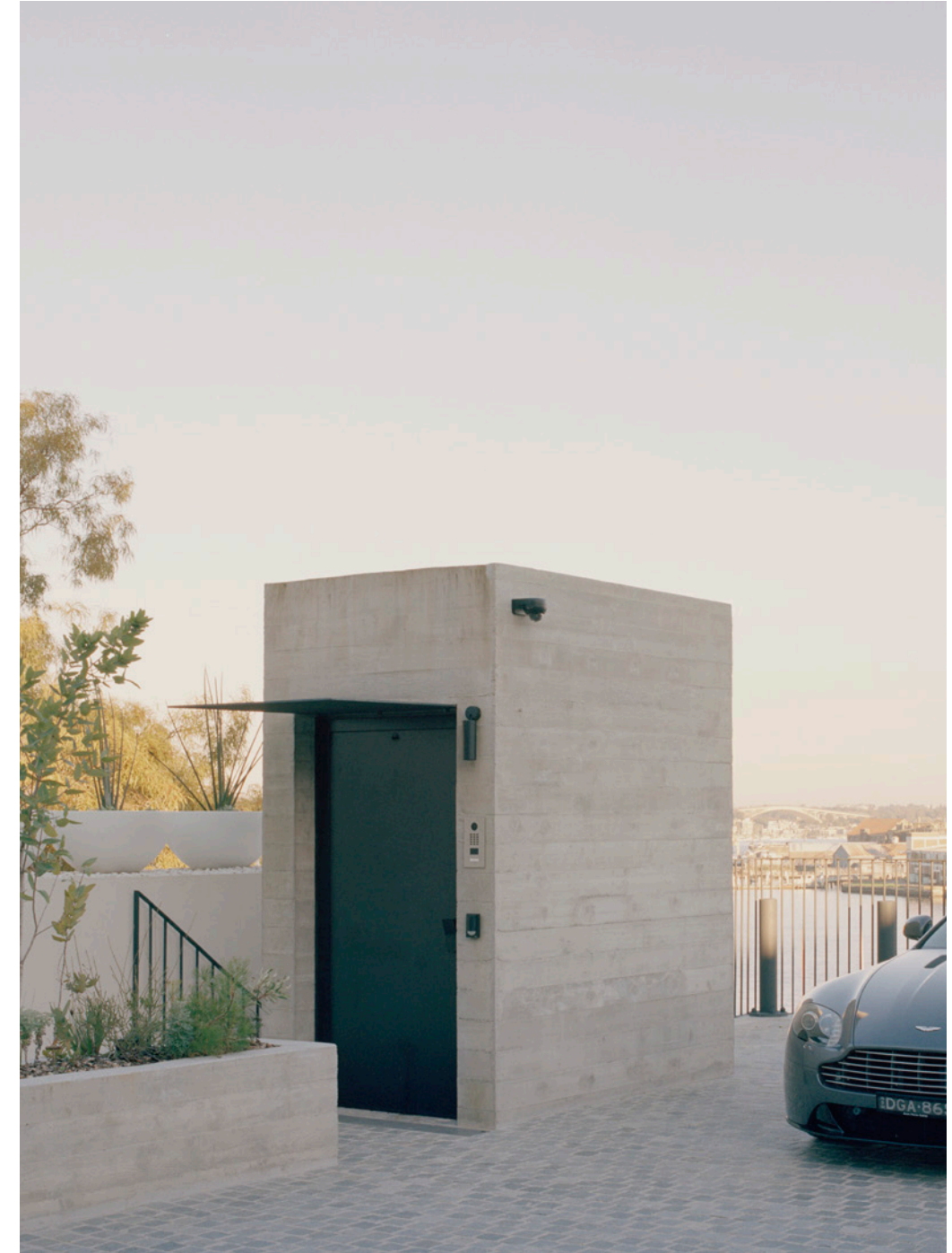
Interestingly, despite its location within a Heritage Conservation Area, the cottage was not heritage protected. As Principal of Studio Prineas Eva-Marie Prineas says, "the family were enamoured by the potential of the unique topography of this harbourfront site, and the decision to keep the cottage was one we made together." This is a fitting response for the studio, which seeks to create "new layers with the existing stories of place and people." Eva-Marie adds, "we believe these layers build an authenticity and character, which is palpable and uncontrived."

Having worked together twice already, the clients engaged Studio Prineas early on, consulting the architects in their decision to purchase the property and ultimately working from "a place of trust and collaboration" from commencement to completion. "A key part of the brief was that our clients wanted their living spaces to be close to the harbour, and we

saw this as an opportunity to reinvent the cottage planning," Eva-Marie explains. Thus, the internal walls of the original cottage were removed, making way for a single open space that now houses the kitchen, living and dining areas. The restoration works revealed original timber weatherboards behind aluminium cladding and internal timber linings under plasterboard. Eva-Marie says, "these delightful discoveries helped forge the authentic restoration of the cottage." Exposed blackened steel framework references the original walls as a "spatial memory of the building's first form"; windows frame views of the water beyond the deck and, below, a new pool area creates further dialogue between the home and the harbour. Similarly, blocks of reclaimed sandstone discovered during the excavation works form part of the pool enclosure; it is an apt reminder of the locale and of the materiality native to the site.



In restoring and extending the original cottage, Studio Prineas creates a concrete form designed to be overtaken with landscaping.



The unusual site is inconspicuous at first glance and features a nine-metre fall from street level.



The restoration of the interior revealed original timber weatherboards and internal timber linings that are showcased in the home's new iteration.





The concrete tower is connected to the cottage by a glazed courtyard link, which “allows each structure to breathe.” This junction has been nicely executed – it enhances the distinction between the two structures, yet the intersecting planes and juxtaposing materials converge in an appealing unison. From here, the new three-storey extension extrudes upwards. It is a striking form; however, extensive landscaping will see nature “reclaim” the site over time. The architects worked closely with BUSHY Landscapes to research and source tube stock of flora indigenous to the area for the hanging gardens across the façade – a nod to the site’s past and a meaningful contribution to its future. “We wanted the building to give back to the harbour and embrace connections with the site – to not solely focus on views from the post-colonial cottage, but embrace the site’s pre-colonial, ‘non-built’ heritage,” Eva-Marie says. This approach to conservation and restoration is inherent to the studio’s

work; it seeks to acknowledge the significance of Country to each project, and here the connection that will be forged between built form and landscape is an example of that process at play.

Inside the tower, the lift core and ceilings are constructed from rough-sawn Oregon, and a textural palette of materials results in spaces that are warm and enveloping, with tailored glimpses to the harbour. “There’s a theatrical element in the use of the bespoke, oversized door handles, custom lighting and heavy velvet curtains, which all contrast to the bright reflective views of the harbour beyond,” Eva-Marie notes. The stairwell is finished in walnut veneer with a custom leather-wrapped handrail and sections of the sandstone cliff face are visible behind glass walls; they are dramatically lit and celebrated as an integral element of the interiority.



With use of a textural material palette, the spaces are theatrical yet warm and enveloping with tailored glimpses to the harbour.



Throughout the master bathroom, carefully considered joinery acts as an elegant room divide whilst connecting to the distinct locale.



Much like the original cottage, the tower is modest in size, each level merely one room deep. As such, Studio Prineas has worked with the site's verticality to create generous experiences, borrowing from the harbour views and cleverly interpreting materials for their ability to create the impression of space. "The interiors strive for a level of ambiguity, where a door can be a wall and vice versa," Eva-Marie offers. Leather-clad sliding walls help rooms to expand and contract whilst mirrored surfaces create the illusion of depth. Joinery has been carefully considered throughout and in the master bedroom, a monolithic solid stone bath is raised behind the bedhead, acting as an elegant room divide whilst also "connecting and elevating daily rituals with the harbour."

Eva-Marie believes the Studio Prineas philosophy of "understanding and adapting places that are already special" is embodied in Fisherman's House. Despite the vastly different origins of these two architectural expressions, they work in pleasing tandem – much like a solid and dependable partnership. Rather than engulf or overwhelm the little cottage, the tower supports it, promising to carry it through the next one to 200 years, unmoving yet enhanced at the water's edge.

