

# THE LOCAL PROJECT



N°6

Architecture and Design of Australia and New Zealand

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# CHENIER EASTOP ARCHITECTS

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Presenting on approach as a dark box-like form, Chenier is a shadowy, enigmatic presence that seems almost conscientiously apart from the site it hovers above. But the series of rendered blade walls that sit adjacent to and are glimpsed beyond this volume hint to the complex relationship between building and landscape that Eastop Architects has orchestrated, not breaking down the distinction but rather interpolating the two to extend and intensify the experience of both.

With a valley carving through the centre of the site and neighbouring properties on its northern and southern boundaries, the topography and coastal-suburban context provoked Eastop Architects' inherent interest in spatial manipulation and abstraction. Tasked with designing a home for a young family and progressing straight to building permit to avoid a typical six-to-eight-month planning process, "our response was to float a light-weight single level volume through the valley," says Liam Eastop. "We physically stitched the dwelling into the landscape with a series of rendered blade walls. This series of interconnecting blades creates internal landscaped courtyards and a layered sense of privacy."

The fact that a careful control, even limitation, of perception can allude to and enhance a sense of possibility is something Chenier continually draws upon. The selection and application of materiality oft confounds assumptions, and lines of sight are persistently directed and curtailed. Boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces are called into question; hidden pivot doors manipulate perceptions of depth and space, while "corridors and transition spaces have been considered as opportunities

to subvert expectations around the articulation of light and view," Liam says. The result is that, within a modest footprint and a relatively suburban context, Eastop Architects has evidenced an understanding of architecture as not limited to building envelope but rather as an approach to networks of relationships that encompass the built and the natural, the tangible and the intangible alike.

Contrast and containment each have a significant role to play here. Contrast heightens the synergistic interaction of building and landscape, their differences serving to better emphasise how each is essential in the creation of the whole. From the outset, the juxtaposition between the blank, impervious face of the dark volume and the openness of the carport with its pale rendered walls, subtly cranked to draw one in, begins to play with ideas of containment. These walls simultaneously define and obscure the perimeter thanks to the openings at intervals that reveal, via glimpses, how the dune-like landscape is not only brought up right to the edge of the building but seems to continue through and beyond it.





The paths that wend their way through these openings create an underlying sense of movement across the site. As a counter to this, a thin continuous capping plate that joins the walls “seems to act as a string, physically connecting and holding them in tension as the sense of movement pulls them apart,” says Liam. Similarly, the loose and unstructured landscaping, which he explains was directly inspired by the natural ecology of the nearby sand dunes, stands in contrast to the abstracted rectilinear forms of the edifices.

The principal courtyard illustrates this most potently. Here, the high blade walls are joined by a series of lower retaining walls that act as terraces over which soft shaggy grasses spill, creating the sense that the courtyard both contains and is itself contained by the landscape. The courtyard becomes a space whose changes in level, embrace of natural elements, sense of containment on the one hand and strategically placed openings on the other serve to stimulate the imagination. With neigh-

bouring houses predominantly screened from view, the branches of the coastal banksias and moonahs that wave gently over the tops of the high walls, the grasses that tumble over the sides of the terraces, the openings through which sunlight permeates and paths are glimpsed all create a sense of both tranquillity and intrigue.

Similarly, the interior is marked by a careful framing of experiences, abstraction of spaces and play on perceptions, which belie the moderate scale and open nature of the plan. Moving from the front entry into the building, it becomes apparent that the masonry walls make incursions into the seemingly defined and self-contained rectilinear volume. And with them, “the materials puncture through the northern façade, pulling the external conditions inside,” Liam describes. “The front’s black timber cladding is wrapped into the internal corridors and compressed cement sheet interjects the dialogue between rendered walls.”







Lines of sight are directed and curtailed, alluding to myriad possibilities lingering just beyond the walls.











The skylight, softly illuminating the texture of INAX tiles, is the only moment at which the external environment is admitted into the inwardly-focused bathroom.



The entry sequence takes place through an interstitial space that feels neither wholly interior nor wholly exterior, before reaching the front door into a passageway flanked by a wall of dark timber on one side and masonry on the other. At the end of this corridor, a blank wall, an infusion of light from the side, and a change in level marks the point at which one steps up and turns to enter the living, kitchen and dining space. At this junction, the denial of any and all view of the landscape outside emphasises a sense of interiority that creates a moment of pause at the culmination of the journey into the home.

In this main central space, which opens onto the primary courtyard, sits a table of welded steel that Eastop designed for the project. Recalling to the metal capping that links the perimeter masonry walls, it simultaneously gestures to the role of the dining table as a binding element within the space and gently emphasises both the contrast and affinity between the indoor and outdoor spaces. Beyond the table, what appears to be a

continuous run of minimalist joinery is revealed to be simply a wall of cement sheeting detailed to appear as though it were part of the kitchen cabinetry. Further inspection finds a hidden door that leads to the pantry, a functional back of house area that allows the main space to maintain a sense of purity. A wall of smoked mirror behind the cooktop, meanwhile, further manipulates the experience of space and light. Reflecting the landscape opposite and the secret pantry door adjacent, it draws the landscape into the internal condition, interpreting and abstracting it in the process.

Through its layered choreography of building and landscape, Chenier is a coastal home that responds rigorously and with sensitivity to its context. More than this, it is a project through which Eastop Architects has continued to explore an architectural agenda that sets its sights on a realm beyond the purely domestic.





Chenier expresses Eastop Architects' interest in spatial manipulation and abstraction.







High walls contain the primary courtyard that opens off the living space, while lower walls create landscaped terraces.





