

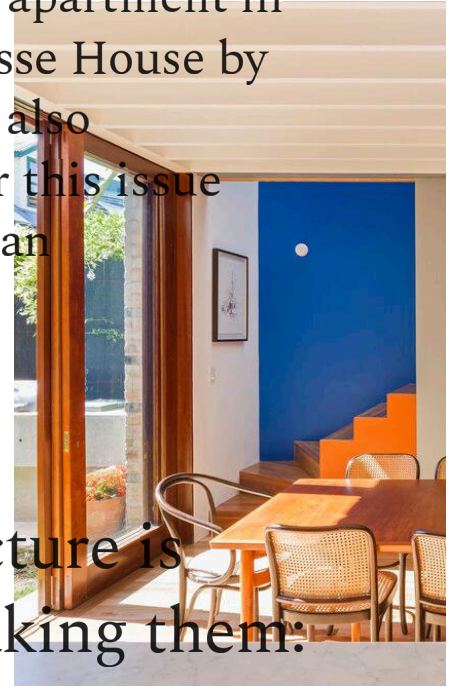


## A Short List

**Guillermo Fernández-Abascal & Urtzi Grau**

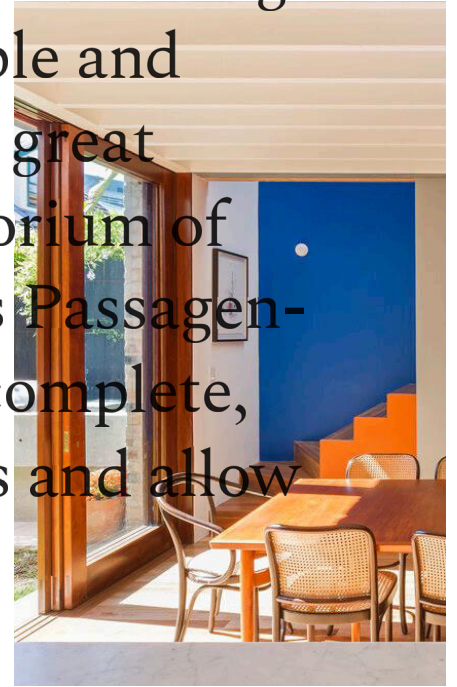


\*“A Short List” was originally published in Spanish in PLOT 71 (Buenos Aires: Grupo Kinexo, 2023). This issue extensively featured Glencairn by Trower Falvo Architects, Pablo House in Paddington by Aileen Sage, O... with a garden by Baracco+Wright, House AB by Office Mi-Ji, House with a Guest Room by Andrew Power, a refurbishment of an apartment in South Yarra by Kate Finning, and the Vasse House by Joshua Duncan Architect. The magazine also translated “A Long List” into Spanish for this issue dominated by the contemporary Australian architecture scene.



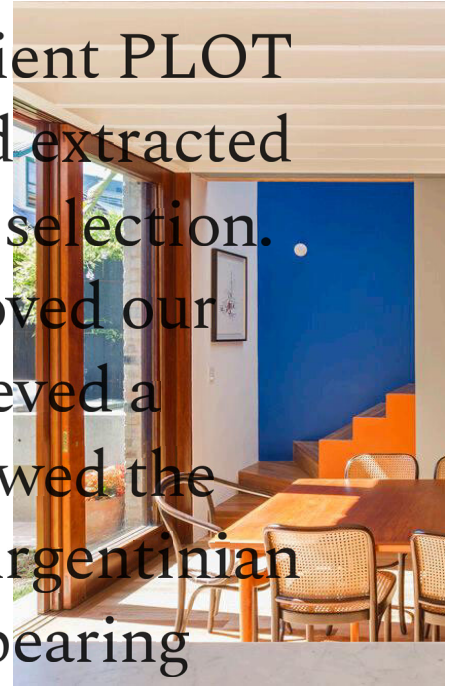
We like lists. As far as architecture is concerned, we seldom stop making them: offices, projects, documents, photographers, renders... Two kinds stand out. The most pragmatic resembles to-do lists: buildings to visit, reviews to write, recent publications, or projects to upload... In short, obligations that can be crossed out and surely forgotten once carried out. The other type seems to imitate the exhausting and omnipresent classification obsession that populates the internet: ten best places to eat entraña in Buenos Aires, the best twenty-

five movies according to Dolly Parton, a hundred essential books to be reasonably happy, or Marina Abramović's two hundred songs playlist. Don't get carried away by appearances, they do not belong there. Our lists are unreasonable and contingent. They continue the great tradition of the Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge, or Das Passagen-Werk. Unfinished but always complete, they order the world around us and allow us to inhabit it.



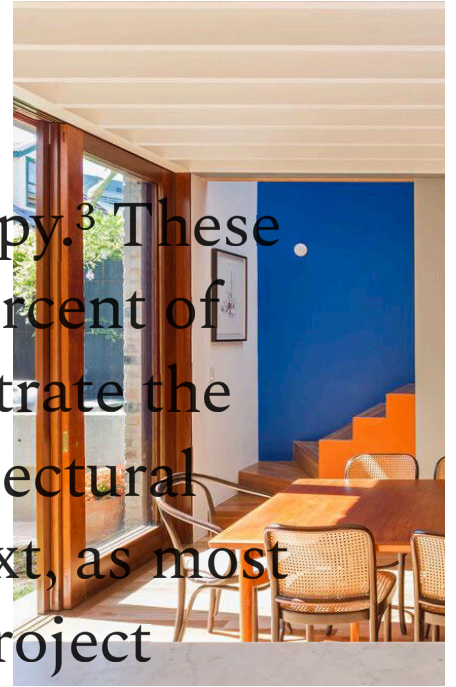
The list of works of contemporary Australian architecture that follows is an exception. It does not fit into these two categories, perhaps because it could belong to both. It results from a collaboration, a condition to which our lists, relentlessly personal, are usually allergic. In 2023, the editors of the Argentinian journal PLOT wanted to publish "A Long List"<sup>1</sup> an article listing

contemporary trends in Australian Architecture from 2019. We, in turn, proposed an inventory of offices and projects that, taking into account the time that had passed, could update the selection. The enormously patient PLOT team accepted our new list and extracted from it a more comprehensive selection. Such an act of generosity removed our idiosyncratic criteria and achieved a degree of consistency that allowed the works to be published in the Argentinian context without the fear of appearing excessively incongruous. Perhaps for that reason, all the works share a commonality. They have been carried out by relatively young offices, or at least, have been pictured by a photographer of the same generation (like in the case of Baracco + Wright Architects Garden House's images by Rory Gardiner).<sup>2</sup> Their youth may also be the reason why they are all small-scale offices —a rarity in the corporate-office-dominated Australian architectural scene



monopolising public commissions and projects of a certain scale—, and also why all the featured projects are houses, detached, attached or otherwise.

PLOT's selection made us happy.<sup>3</sup> These might be homes for the one percent of the population. Still, they illustrate the good health of domestic architectural production in a difficult context, as most houses built in Australia are project homes—or similarly procured by builders and developers without the architect's intervention. At the same time, these examples allow us to discuss the essential role home played in the colonisation of Australia. As the suspiciously erroneous assumption that Aboriginal people lacked permanent dwellings<sup>4</sup> supported the declaration of Terra Nullius housing, together with grazing and language, became some of the most critical tools to install a system



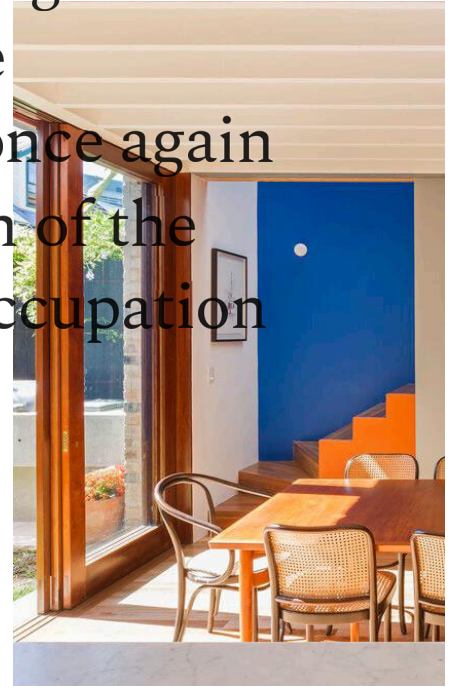
of settler colonisation on stolen land. Subsequently, houses defined the geometry superimposed onto Country. The units of a quarter of an acre, around a thousand square metres, designed to host a house on one level with three to four bedrooms, subdivided the Australian territory during the expansion of residential neighbourhoods after the Second World War, and still define most of the urban growth. Maybe because of its structural role in the occupation, the detached house is undeniably a part of the Australian architectural imagination. The idealised sheds of corrugated iron and the colonial bungalows, inseparable from the myth of the good life around the barbecue and surfing, are essential both for the critical regionalism in the 1980s and for the architectures that led Glenn Murcutt to be recognised with the Pritzker Prize in 2002.



The projects in this list may be more or less aware of this past, but surely, they cannot escape shared present conditions such as climate warming or the impending Australian housing crisis. In many cases, they are the result of the latter. The policies encouraging middle class real estate investment, which have been in place since the post-war period and exacerbated by recent Liberal governments, and the promotion of Australian housing as an ideal product for international investment, have resulted in a real estate bubble of immeasurable proportions. While Millennials and Generation Z are unable to own a home as their parents and grandparents did, the effects of the war in Ukraine on interest rates and local loans are having a devastating effect on the barely regulated Australian rental market (Ex. In 2023, Sydney entered the fateful club of cities with the most expensive housing on the planet). Finally, closing the circle, the recent defeat of the



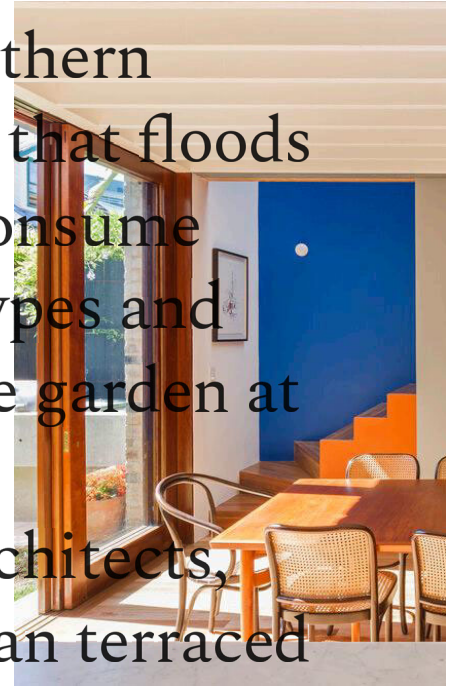
referendum to the increase of Aboriginal representation in the Australian Parliament conceived as a first step towards a treaty between the Aboriginal peoples and the state, which might start correcting the injustices in the foundations of Australia, has once again delayed the official recognition of the active role of architecture in occupation techniques.



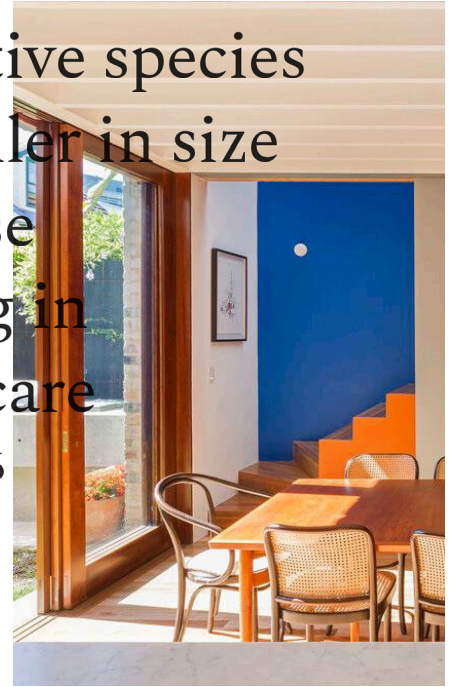
When you review the images in this list, please do not lose sight of this context. Let's take Glencairn, for example. Initially, it looks like an elegant extension of a house in the suburb of Coburg, Melbourne, built by Trower Falvo Architects. But Ben Hosking's photographs reveal an ambiguous room —sometimes an interior, sometimes part of the house's garden. Its hedonistic commitment to outdoor life, Australianness at its best, takes the form



of a deck surrounded by brick walls of Mission ambitions. At the same time, the constructive resolution of the large glass doorknobs from Brussels, as do the photographs' beige tones, which transport us to the light of northern Europe and to a colour palette that floods much of the architecture we consume today.<sup>5</sup> Conflations of global types and local conditions also define the garden at the core of the Patio House in Paddington by Aileen Sage Architects, which transforms the Australian terraced house, imported from the English regulations of the 19th century, into a more suitable dwelling for the climatic conditions of Sydney. In Tom Ferguson's images, the domestic nature of the patio contrasts with the garden cover over the piano room, designed by Sue Barnsley using endemic plants, which imagines a fragment of what the original landscape could have been before the arrival of European settlers. The extension of Baracco+Wright Architects, in the

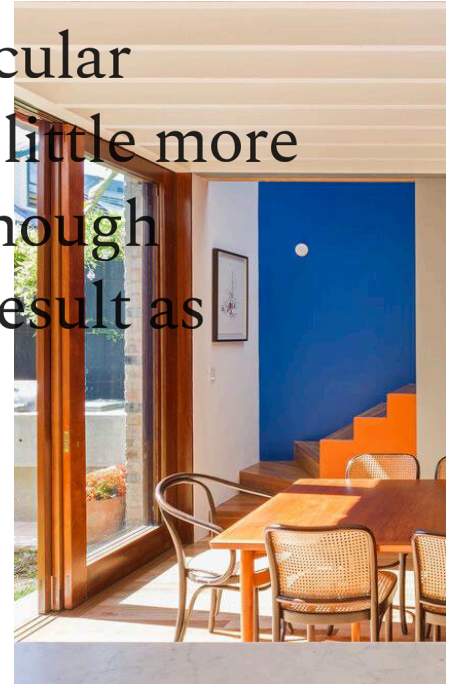


vicinity of Edinburgh Gardens in Fitzroy North in Melbourne, operates similarly. An independent two-story pavilion made of glass blocks is light and subtle, separated from a good house from the 80s, is surrounded by a few native species and some local-ish rocks. Smaller in size but ambitious in its goals, these landscapes reveal that building in Australia requires an ethic of care essential for the local ecology.<sup>6</sup>



The small garden of House AB by Mi-Ji, located on the Bellarine Peninsula, also includes rocks and endemic plants. Photographed once again by Hosking, it has been quite popular in magazines and at Australian awards, perhaps due to its ability to combine global contemporary trends with the lineage of corrugated sheet architecture and movable panels of Glenn Murcutt or Sean Godsell tastefully... or even too tastefully at times.

The house suffers from some of the favorite tricks of this generation, especially when we compare it with the house that, in a way, Richard Stampton built a few years ago. Also rooted in the Australian vernacular tradition, Stampton's house is little more than a beach bungalow with enough design decisions to make the result as banal as special.<sup>7</sup>



This interest in apparently anonymous architecture is also shared by Joshua Duncan's Vasse House. In Leo Showell's photographs, the house is almost identical to its neighbours: a typical house with two bedrooms and a studio in a suburban setting. Humbler than those surrounding it, it avoids completing the buildable area and exploits means, techniques and local materials, solving a sheet gable roof that flies over a wide gallery with the least number of

constructive decisions. The interior plywood panelling and the tiles in wet areas suffice as finishes. The succinct design space interior and large exterior remind us that to enjoy the good Australian life, especially in Western Australia's climate, hardly requires coverage.



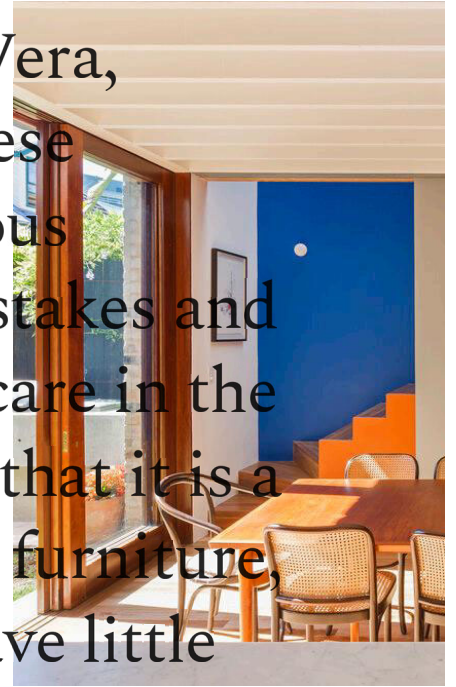
The family home that Andrew Power built with his father in Red Head, a coastal retreat in northern New South Wales, also differs from its adjacent constructions. In fact, it probably has no comparison with other houses recently built in Australia. Located on a much larger plot than its neighbours, the house seems to float over a leafy garden. It is a villa made up of three parallel pavilions, united by a gallery that negotiates its classic proportions with the climatic and material solutions of Australian bungalows. In the images, taken by

Power himself (although in PLOT 71 and on this list, for the first time, the images that Hamish McIntosh took during a surprise visit to the house also appear), we find fragments of Adolf Loos' interiors, remnants of his passage through OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen, and traces of the Japanese influences on 20th century Australian domestic architecture. Power's second house, under construction a few blocks away in the same street, uses a more relaxed scheme in which the ambiguity of the best Swiss plans unfolds inside a classic Australian bungalow. We look forward to seeing it completed to comment further, as its footings are quite promising.



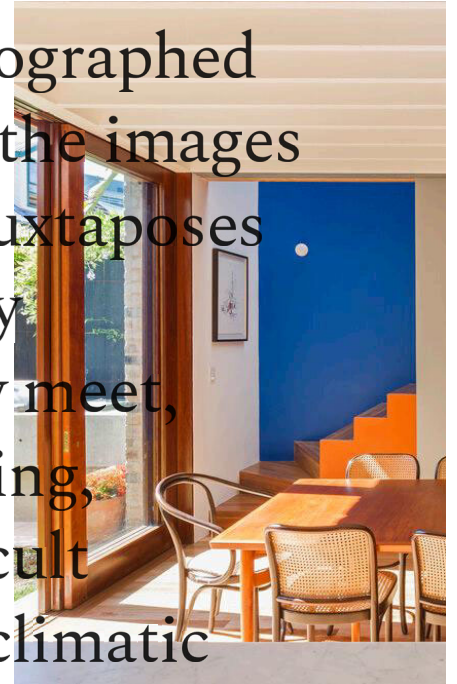
Power designed the floor plan of the second house —and only the floor plan— with Kate Finning, whose first work, a refurbishment of an apartment in South

Yarra, in Melbourne, is also included in this collection. The project constitutes a small manifesto of a bourgeois approach to domestic space. Captured by Power during its construction and later photographed by Matteo Dal Vera, focusing on the daily life of these timeless interiors, this ambitious renovation contains all the mistakes and successes of a first work. The care in the doors and the cork floor show that it is a house to live well in, while the furniture, perhaps too large, seems to leave little space, conceptually and physically, for daily life. The clutter of elements while intrinsically Art Deco, like the apartment itself, overtakes this pleasurable renovation. In any case, perhaps Finning's resistance to the open plan was not entirely necessary.

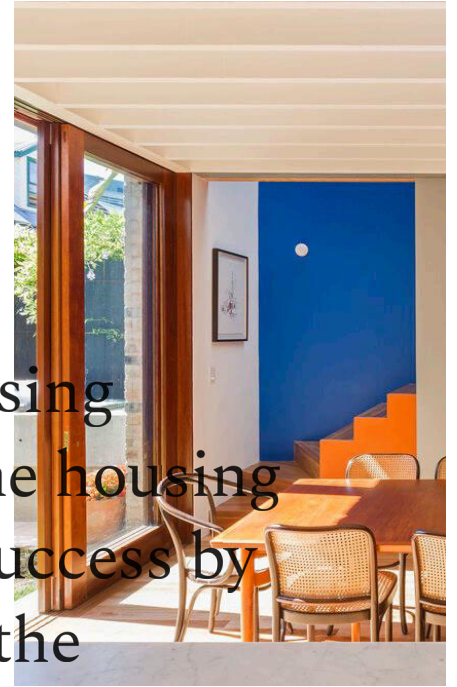


In Sydney, the production of bourgeois houses often includes Bill Clifton, a

builder recognised for working with architects such as Andrew Burges or Tribe Studio. For his own house in Berkeley he founded the office of Anthony Gill, who designed the brick and polycarbonate house photographed by Gardiner in bare bones. As the images show, the blunt construction juxtaposes found materials on a seemingly incompatible logic. When they meet, features are clear and resounding, assuming the Venturian "difficult whole", with brilliant spatial, climatic and constructive moments. The fragmentary tectonic logic is not circumstantial. In a country where construction costs are integral to the housing crisis, architects like Power decide to self-build their projects and builders specialising in high-end housing like Clifton invest in companies focusing on reusing construction materials like Second Edition who are proud to expose recycled fragments in new works. Other builders are betting on prefabrication



experiments, such as Fabprefab with the  
 Chief and Tri offices, or, in the case of  
 Blok Modular, partnering with architects  
 such as Woke. Peters to try to make  
 the Australian dream a little more  
 affordable.



SAHA's intergenerational housing  
 explores another solution to the housing  
 crisis promoted with uneven success by  
 public institutions: extending the  
 coexistence of members of the same  
 family beyond the time children  
 traditionally leave their parents' homes.  
 The work, photographed by Saskia  
 Wilson, also explains another structural  
 condition of young Australian practices.  
 After receiving countless awards, the  
 house might lead to an invitation by a  
 major practice to join the team of a  
 large-scale competition, one of the few  
 paths through which a small office can  
 scale up its commissions. Young offices



such as Retallack Thompson, Other Architects, Triunfo Billy Maynard, Sibling and Panov & Cott are trying to take that step in the meantime, they receive commissions for houses, renovations and public bathrooms, one of the few programs they can assume on their own given the excess of consultants, subsidiary responsibilities and economic requirements associated with public works. That is the context of the two perforated aluminium sheet pavilions surrounded by scrub designed by Aileen Sage Architects and photographed by McIntosh. A more disciplined and shiny version of the primitive cabin of modern Australian architecture to shelter the public bathrooms of the Bobbin Head National Park.



When successful, collaborations with larger studios lead to unexpected results and even independent commissions.

There are also alternative paths. For example, LIAN has developed housing complexes with Kerstin Thompson, after winning a competition on their own. The interest of the non-profit office, OFFICE (unrelated to Kersten Geers and David Van Severen) on neglected public housing blocks is starting to bear its fruits.<sup>9</sup> Offices like Supercontext and Archer are trying to establish their practices through small civic buildings in Sydney. In Melbourne, where European trends are absorbed faster, quality domestic projects are more common. Studio Bright stands out with its pleasantly nondescript extensions and renovations. Edition Office, less friendly in its designs but equally successful among the general public and the community of architects, follows, being perhaps the other great domestic exponent in Victoria. Both studios, already well-established, are accessing larger commissions, mostly linked to residential architecture. Among the not-

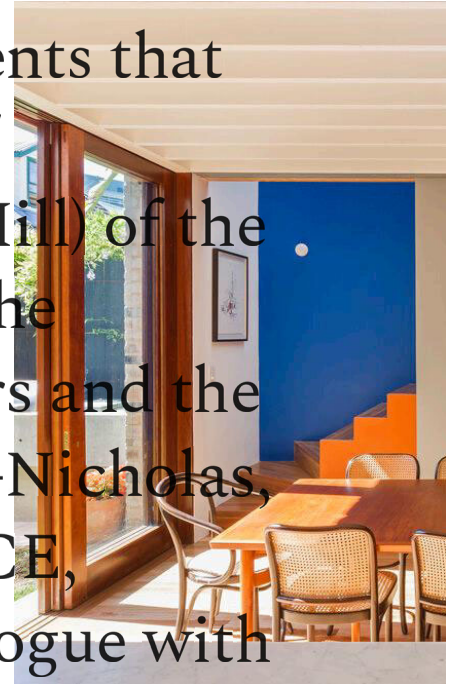


so-young, it is worth noting the homes of Archibur, Lovell, Burton, Eldridge Anderson and, if we look among the very young, the recent homes of SSdH have more than earned a place on the list. We would like to also add Colby Vexler, who for years has been teaching his students to make single-family homes at the architecture schools of the University of Melbourne and Monash University. Still, as he has yet to complete one, we cannot welcome him to the list.



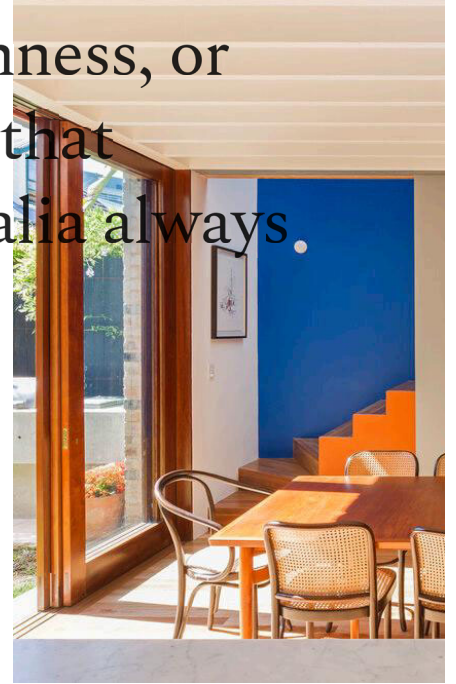
As it often happens, geographical inequality and distance from decision-making centres give rise to omissions. This list is no exception. We will try to acknowledge some. They are sited in places where the price of land, as opposed to Sydney and Melbourne, still allows middle-class families to access the services of an architect to design their

home: In Tasmania, we can find Taylor + Hill's homes and extensions, and in Newcastle, NSW, Curious Practice's work in the city, in Brisbane, Queensland, the good weather has allowed for domestic experiments that link with the radical houses of Donovan+Hill (now Partners Hill) of the 90s. They now continue with the mannerism of Vokes and Peters and the more recent works by Zuzana+Nicholas, Lineburg Wang or J.AR OFFICE, bringing Queensland into dialogue with some contemporary trends (Brisbane might deserve its own list to include also Besley Spresser, Yohei Omura and many others).



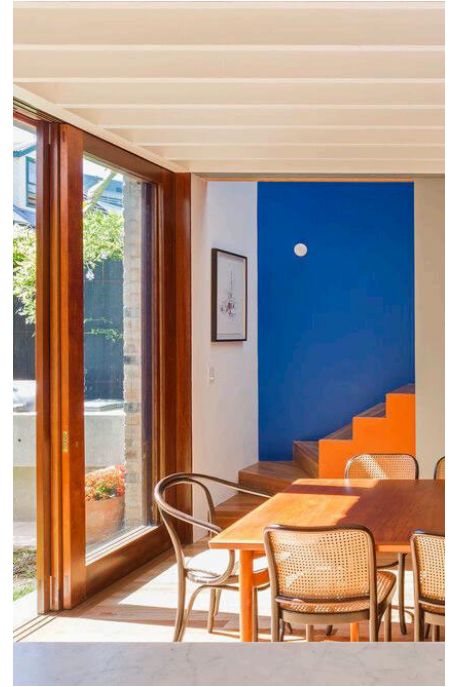
As a way of conclusion, and at the risk of irritating some of our beloved Australian colleagues, we are almost convinced that the best recent house on the continent is to be found on the banks of the

Hawkesbury River, a summer house by  
Leopoldo Banchini, which, looking out of  
the corner of his eye Richard Leplastrier  
manages this paradoxical condition  
common to much of the best local  
architecture: its radical foreignness, or  
what is the same, being aware that  
building architecture in Australia always  
means being from outside.—

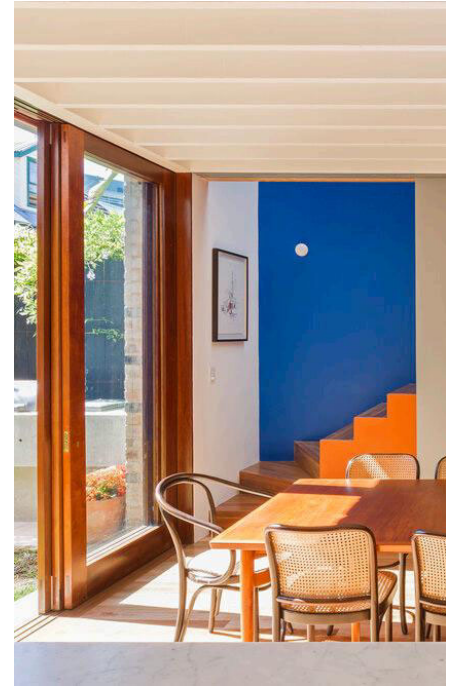




Twitter,  
Instagram



Guillermo Fernández-Abascal is a Spanish architect, a Practitioner Fellow at the University of Sydney, and a founder of the practice GFA2. Based in Sydney, Australia, and Santander, Spain, his recent work destabilises the dichotomy between research and buildings and includes diagrams, exhibitions, publications, housing, and public buildings across the globe. His recent projects include the book *Regional Bureaucracy* and the Enaire Foundation building in Santander.



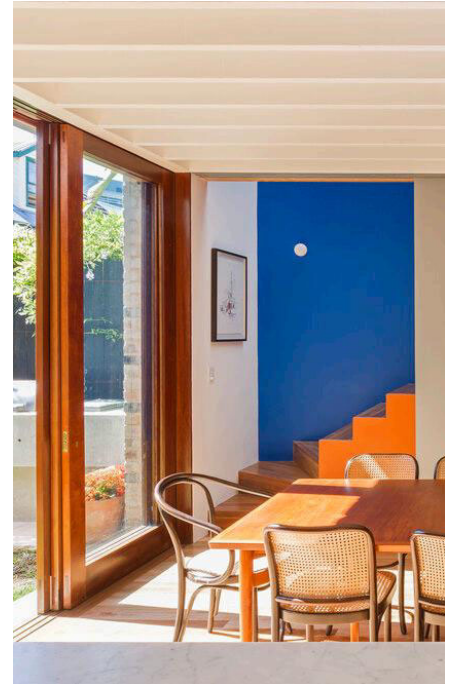
Urtzi Grau is an architect, an academic in the School of Architecture at the University of Technology Sydney and the founder of Fake Industries. He uses replicas —both as literal reproductions of pre-existing works and, in a sense denoted in Romance languages, as responses to previous statements— to produce architecture.

Acknowledgements  
 Thanks to Magdalena  
 T. Deluchi from URO for  
 commissioning this piece. And  
 special thanks to Christina  
 Deluchi, Louisa King, and Felix  
 McNamara, and for their  
 insightful edits.

### Notes:

1. Grau, Urtzi and Fernández-  
 Abascal, Guillermo, “A Long  
 List” in Better Together: 33  
 Documents of Contemporary  
 Australian Architecture and  
 their Associated Stories.  
 Melbourne: URO Publications  
 (2022).

2. As with most architecture,  
 the quality of domestic  
 architecture in Australia is  
 directly proportional to the  
 quality of its photographers.  
 Tom Ross, Clinton Weaver,  
 Hamish McIntosh, Pier  
 Carthew, Ben Hosking, Saskia  
 Wilson and, above all, Rory  
 Gardiner, are some of the  
 talented eyes that allow us to  
 see Australian architecture

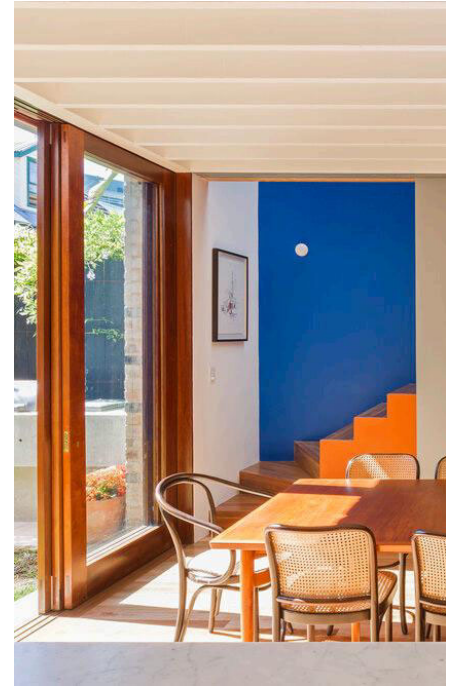




today. Without forgetting that Max Creasy, the other great Australian architectural photographer, rarely photographs his house in Australia.

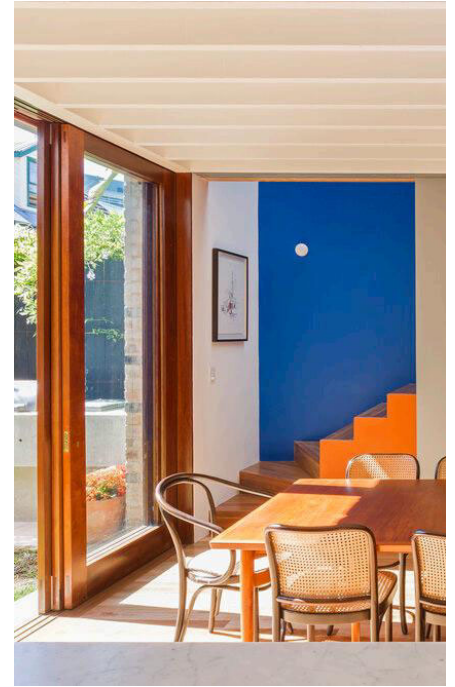
3. As we have written in the past, we are fervent admirers of some Australian houses from Richard Leplastrier, Glenn Murcutt or Sean Godsell but also of Gabriel Poole, Brit Anderson, Troppo; and especially Robin Boyd's wonderful very own house on Walsh Street and his Featherstone House. "Twin House in Boggabilla" in *Barbara Journal*<sup>1</sup>, Brisbane: Oppositions Editions (2022).

4. This fallacy is well argued in Bruce Pascoe's "Dark Emu" Broome, WA, Magabala Books (2014) among others. Paul Memmott and more recently Tim O'Rourke have also brought such discussion to the architectural community from Queensland. See: For example Memmott's "Gunyah Goondie + Wurley. The Aboriginal Architecture of Australia"



which extensively discusses pre-colonial architecture on this Land of Light, Queensland University of Queensland Press (2022). James Hudson (2022).

5. Jesús Vasallo has developed the political implications of the omnipresent beige tones in current architectural photography in an essay soon to be published. Vassallo, Jesús. "Golden Hour" in Analogue Images: Recent Work by Rory Gardiner and Maxime Delvaux. Melbourne: Perimeter Editions (in press).



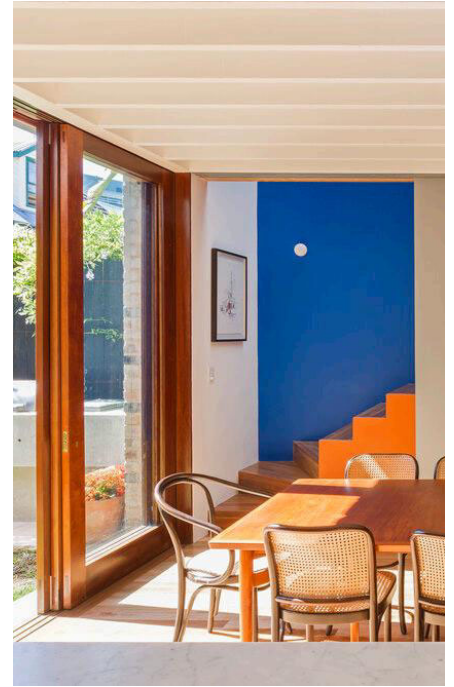
6. Baracco+Wright Architects has explored this hypothesis in works such as Garden House (2021) and especially in the Australian pavilion for the 2018 Venice Biennale. Mauro Baracco and Louise Wright. "REPAIR: The micro/macro continuum." Repair: the Australian Pavilion at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale (2018).

7. Richard Stampton Architects, Yanakie House, 2021.

## Photographs by Rory Gardiner.

8. While translating the article, the City of Parramatta released the shortlist for the Riverside Theatres Redevelopment Design Competition, which closely follows this model. The five finalists, ARM Architecture, COX Architecture, Durbach Block Jagers Architects, Wardle and Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects, were well-established firms leading big groups. The competition brief required a young office per team, which meant the inclusion as emerging architects of Retallack Thompson, Billy Maynard, Sibling, Aileen Sage and Second Edition in different teams.

9. Some of the partners of OFFICE and LIAN, worked once at NMBW, a rigorous, and perhaps the best office, not doing houses, from the previous generation. Also worth mentioning among the older colleagues are Phillip Arnold, an erudite architect and quasi-architectural



and quasi-architectural Instagram celebrity, who has recently completed several well-executed houses to be well in Sydney, and Simon Perkins has designed excellent homes in Perth. Both of them combined architectural references, the good life, straightforward schemes and a few nice details. Similarly Architect Brew Koch's latest house could have been in this list, it is a good Aussie shed.

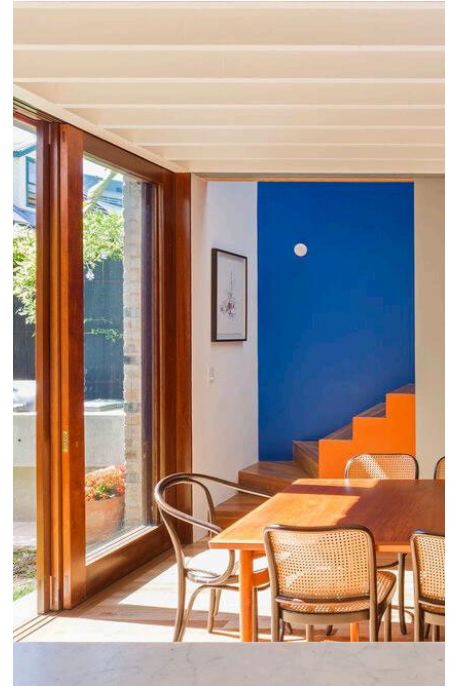


Image Credits:

Image 1: Glencairn, Trower Falvo Architects. Photograph: Ben Hosking. Image 2: Patio House in Paddington, Aileen Sage. Photograph: Tom Ferguson. Image 3-4: Outbuilding with Deep Garden, Baracco+Wright. Photographs: Rory Gardiner. Image 5-6: AB House, Office Mi-Ji. Photographs: Ben Hosking. Image 7-8: Vasse House, Joshua Duncan Architect. Photographs: Leo Showell. Image 9: House with a Guest Room, Andrew Power.

Photograph: Andrew Power.  
 Image 10: House with a Guest  
 Room, Andrew Power.  
 Photograph: Hamish  
 McIntosh. Image 11: House  
 around a Hearth, Andrew  
 Power. Photograph: Andrew  
 Power. Image 12-13. A  
 refurbishment of an apartment  
 in South Yarra, Kate Finning.  
 Photographs: Matteo Dal Vera.  
 Image 14-15: Clifton House,  
 Anthony Gill Architects.  
 Photographs: Rory Gardiner.  
 Image 16: University of  
 Queensland Maintenance  
 Shed, Lineburg Wang.  
 Photograph: David Chatfield.  
 Image 17: Stewart, SSdH. Photograph:  
 Piet Carthew, styled by Jess  
 Kneebone. Image 18: Bobbin  
 Head Amenities, Aileen Sage.  
 Photograph: Hamish McIntosh

