

BALLARAT HOUSE KENNEDY NOLAN

Words by Rose Onans • Photography by Derek Swalwell • Architecture by Kennedy Nolan • Build by Spence Construction





From a design driven by the push and pull between the unique strengths and challenges of its lakeside site, Kennedy Nolan’s Ballarat House emerges as a home finely attuned to its context. While opening itself up to the ever-changing views of water and sky, the building draws the earth close like a protective blanket, nestled into a landscaped berm that shelters the spaces within from the street outside.

Lake Wendouree is the living, breathing heart of Ballarat, one of Victoria’s major regional cities. Set on the street that circumnavigates the lake, the site of Ballarat House offered constraints and opportunities in equal measure, and Patrick Kennedy, co-founder of Kennedy Nolan, explains that responding to these attributes formed the basis for the design. The views of the lake, so rare in a suburban condition, make Lake Wendouree one of the most coveted residential locations in Ballarat. However, “we identified the road between the house and the lake as a problem which needed to be solved,” he says, reflecting that it posed a number of questions: “How to maintain privacy to the interior from passing motorists and pedestrians? How to edit out the view of the road and cars from the interior? Also, the view faced south – how to ensure the house would also benefit from a northern aspect for light and warmth?”

Rather than designing a home and then looking to a supplementary screening solution, Kennedy Nolan instead created a building that engages deeply with its site, allowing these questions to inform the design at a fundamental level. “Our design response is in the section,” says Patrick. “The front of the house is elevated a half-level with the garden bermed up to a small terrace. The garden berm is densely planted with high decorative grasses which sway and quiver to reflect the outside movement of air.” This half-level elevation, coupled with the high grasses, ensures that the lake view is ever-present from the interior down the length of the house, yet “the passing cars and people are edited from sight – an arrangement which in reverse also provides privacy to the interior from the street.” Meanwhile, to the north, a series of clerestory windows admit winter sun deep into the home, with shading and a motorised opening system keeping the home cool and naturally ventilated in summer.



The full depth of the site is utilised to create a series of private yet connected indoor and outdoor spaces.

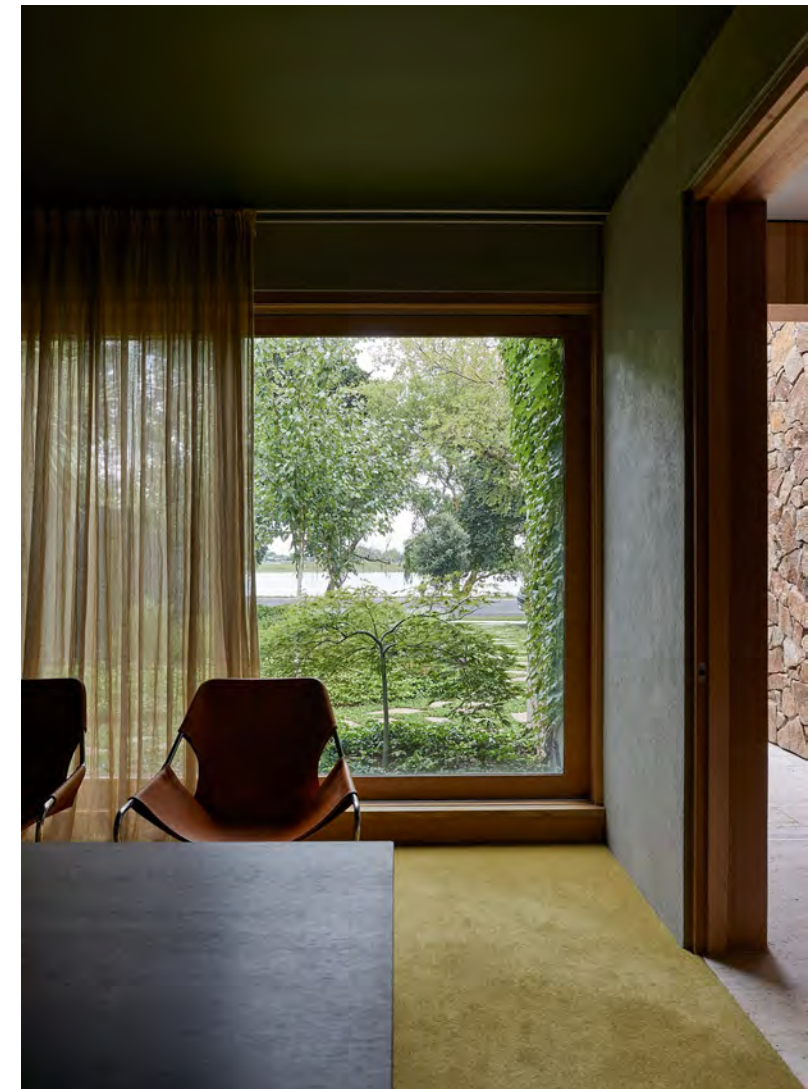
While physical site conditions provide a known quantity from the outset, the more subjective questions around the lives that will inevitably unfold within a home, of how the building will be used and respond to this use, require an even more sensitive and perceptive type of investigation. “Our best work comes out of great client relationships. We listened very carefully to what our clients wanted, and because they felt listened to they placed a huge amount of trust in us,” reflects Patrick. “Because of this trust, we were able to easily explain our concepts, some of which were unorthodox, and similarly we were respectful of our clients’ questions and instincts.”

From the fairly loose brief of a house for the family of four, with an ability to work from home, a place to entertain, and place that would be comfortable through the extremes of the Ballarat seasons that held some affinity to the clients’ most cherished environment in Noosa, Kennedy Nolan focused on the qualities of relaxation, light, calm-

ness and serenity – “in lieu of being able to provide the sun-soaked, temperate climate and white sandy beach [of Noosa].” And, most significantly, they came to grasp the clients’ desire to put down roots in a place that will gracefully reflect the passage of time as memories are made and the children grow. These understandings informed an approach whose effect is to situate the home within a natural environment despite its suburban setting. In doing so, the design avoids some of the grandiose tendencies that the prestigious lakeside locale has tended to attract and expresses the essence of the clients’ desire for a true family home that will come to reflect the narrative of their lives within. From the street, while the bermed earth and the vegetation protect much of the building from sight, the dominant architectural element is a stone fireplace “emphasising hearth and home,” says Patrick.



Substantial concrete walls are designed to patina with the years, expressing the passage of time.



Moving inside, while the view is to the front of the site, the house is spread across its depth, taking advantage of the area available to create a considered zoning of spaces around passive and active modes of occupation. “We wanted to pull the various parts of the house apart as a means of inhabiting the whole site but also to emphasise the gradations of privacy in a family home,” Patrick says. “The plan introduces you to the two home offices first, following that you are led into a friendly-family entertaining area, which then leads to a more intimate sitting room up a broad half flight of stairs and right into the lake view. Further into the house is the private family zone which is essentially sequestered from the main living areas.” The drama of long hallways is explored through the dynamic of an intimate courtyard in the front part of the house and a soft, private threshold to the bedrooms at the rear, further heightening the experience of the respective zones. And the changes in level, owing to the raised-up front section of the home, create a deeper sense of transition while also expressing the way the house responds to the proportion of the site and affects its topography.

With this careful attention to the rhythms of how the family inhabits the home supporting them in how they want to live and ensuring

the house remains dynamic and engaging for decades to come, the warm, tactile and robust material palette is designed to not only evoke a sense of permanence but to patina gracefully with time. It was conceived that “the passage of time will burnish the house as the natural materials age and patinate,” says Patrick, “and that signs of age would be welcome manifestations of time spent in a place.” Saw-cut travertine floors will develop a satin sheen through the polishing effects of use. Cement rendered walls will show their years, making them feel real and substantial, the chimney is natural stone, and the internal walls are extensively lined in solid Victorian ash, which darkens with age to a rich, warm hue. “Everything is for the long haul – marble benchtops, terrazzo bathrooms and hardwood doors and windows – all materials with natural, organic origins and which look better with a bit of use and time.”

Destined to improve with age, and all the while offering its inhabitants the shifting aspect of the lake, sky and softly waving grasses, Ballarat House exemplifies the rewards of an integrative approach that not only responds effectively to strengths and challenges alike but interprets both as design opportunities.



The home is considerably zoned based on active and passive modes of habitation.



An interior palette of travertine and Victorian ash imbues the spaces with warmth.





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