

HOUSES

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ENLIGHTENING PROSPECTS
HOMES GAZING OUT, OVER AND ABOVE

Q&A

THE DESIGNING MIND OF
ROBERTO PALOMBA

IN PROFILE

THE VIVID IMAGINATION
OF SCOTT WESTON
ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

flawless facilities

BATHROOM SCHEMES IN FOCUS

BOOKISH CONCERNS TERRIFIC TOMES, GREAT AND SMALL



SHELL GAME

Sculpted concrete forms by architect Vladimir Ivanov afford a Sydney family a taste of hard exteriors with soft centres.

Story by Peter Salhani Photography by Giles Westley



A CONCRETE HOUSE is not everyone's cup of tea. Though the high thermal mass of concrete allows it to heat and cool itself naturally, many still perceive the material as cold and clinical. Sydney-based architect Vladimir Ivanov is not one of these people, but he can see both sides. "You either love a house like this or you don't," he says of the Northwood house on Sydney's lower north shore. "It's not soft, organic, touchy-feely architecture." And it is just what the owners were looking for.

Before starting his own practice, Vladimir had worked in the office of renowned modernist architect Harry Seidler – a pioneer of the art of concrete houses in Australia. Vladimir had built the clients' previous home and found that they, too, shared his passion for concrete buildings, citing the monumental Australian National Gallery in Canberra and the intimately scaled concrete dwellings of Japan among their favourites. When their family grew, they approached Vladimir with an enticing commission for a new concrete home on a waterfront site. There were three stipulations: "privacy from the street, low and close to the water, and living areas and bedrooms on one level."

From the meandering course of Sydney's Lane Cove River, the building presents the strong horizontal planes of its east pavilion – the best angle from which to appreciate the huge cantilevered slabs and crisp edges of the concrete shell. The block is a steep waterfront of 702 square metres, originally parcelled with its neighbour to the north until subdivision in the 1950s. Today, a two-storey brick dwelling sits less than a metre from their shared boundary. To block the view of this structure, Vladimir opted for no windows on the northern face of the new house. He divided the home into two pavilions separated by a central open space that feeds light indirectly to both to compensate for lost light.

Inside the vestibule, a view of the bay is framed by a concrete portal set into a wall of glass, establishing the material language and conceptual logic of the house. Similarly framed views recur in varying scales throughout. The two pavilions branch from the landing of the central staircase. The smaller west wing is the children's zone, with bedrooms, bathrooms and a play area wrapped around an enclosed courtyard. The east pavilion encompasses the rest of the house on two levels. Open-plan dining, kitchen and living space all lead to a deck through a ten-metre span of sliding glass, while the private domain of the master suite is tucked into the south end, four steps down. On the lowest level are the rumpus room, granny flat and study, opening to the pool, garden and jetty.

Cool grey concrete dominates the interior. Ceilings, soffits, walls and balustrades are all exposed concrete with the form-work ties revealed. Vladimir uses the concrete to play with tectonic geometries, and in several places has left walls or balustrades hanging – in a state of suspended animation. Above the open living area, the concrete shell

wraps downward from the roof to the floor at the north end, enclosing the dining area. At its opposite end, the exterior wall is punctured with an L-shaped panel of glass for a downriver prospect from the living room sofa.

"Vlad has a design philosophy that calls for large open-plan spaces to allow an appreciation of both the structure and exposed concrete finishes," the structural engineer Nick Joannides recalls. "It's not easy to achieve. That east pavilion roof slab spans the entire twenty-five-metre width of the building and was designed with minimal supports, to keep the view unobstructed. For maximum strength, roof drainage and detailing of the waterproof shell, we decided to cast it in one continuous pour."

Apart from the structural advantage, a single pour gives colour consistency, which otherwise varies with concrete under different weather conditions or from batch to batch. The operation takes months of planning.

"Once the forms were ready, we still had to wait for just the right mild weather conditions for the pouring and curing to work," Vladimir explains. He stayed off site that day to avoid spooking the builders with his scrutinizing presence. "We booked the entire concrete plant for the day and started at four in the morning. It took seventeen trucks to fill the forms."

Vladimir lent visual warmth to the concrete shell, designing fixtures in natural materials and neutral tones, tailoring them to the space. His joinery palette is a blend of sycamore, American walnut and Corian, which he intermingled from room to room. In the bathrooms, where natural light enters indirectly through clerestory windows and skylights, he placed bold colour accents amid the cool, white Corian with gloss-lacquered panels of pink, orange and green, worked into the joinery and strategically illuminated. In the dining area, along the windowless north wall, crimson-lacquered cubes are suspended in a low, horizontal series as a nod to the artist Donald Judd, whose work one of the owners admires. Together, the cubes underscore the long dining table while offering concealed storage spaces and display surfaces.

The kitchen is mapped out by an island bench of more white Corian over the raised floor. "I think Vlad may have overrated my cooking skills by making the kitchen centre stage," the wife says. "Though I do seem to direct a lot of household activities from here, so maybe the platform is appropriate." Reflecting on how the family feels about the space, she continues, "The kids love this house. It's robust and large enough for them to ride their bikes around inside. They think it's really cool. We didn't want a fussy house, and a concrete interior simplifies things. It's beautifully serene as it is. You can set anything you want against concrete and it doesn't take anything away – it only adds. And it doesn't need a lot of dressing up – we don't even have curtains." H

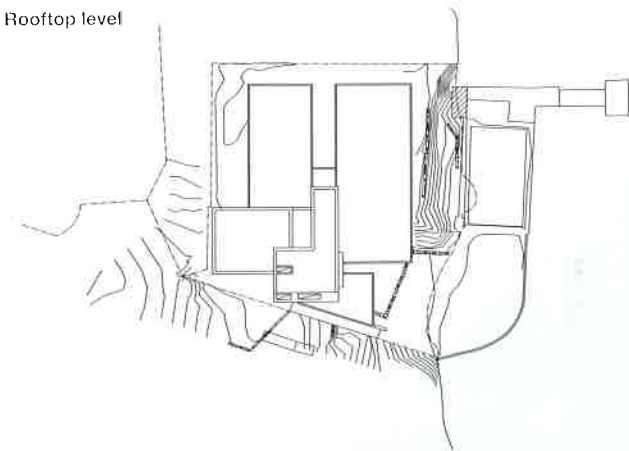
PREVIOUS PAGES: A ten-metre sliding glass door opens to a deck, which hovers over the river bank. **RIGHT:** Ceilings, walls and soffits are left buff, exposing form-work ties in the grey concrete.



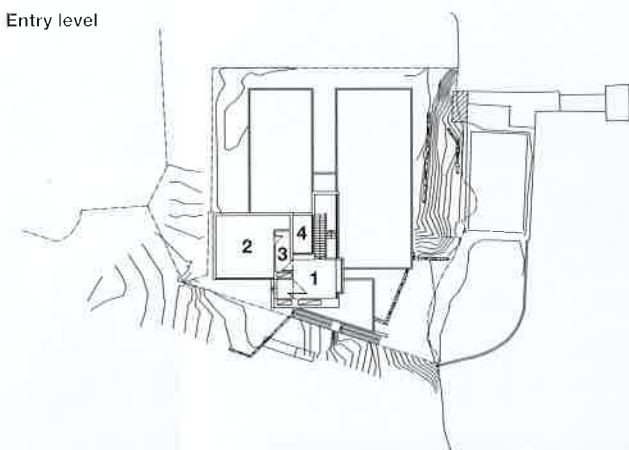


RIGHT: Floating glossy-red cubes in the dining area are an homage to artist Donald Judd. The palette of sycamore, American walnut and white Corian warms the grey concrete shell.

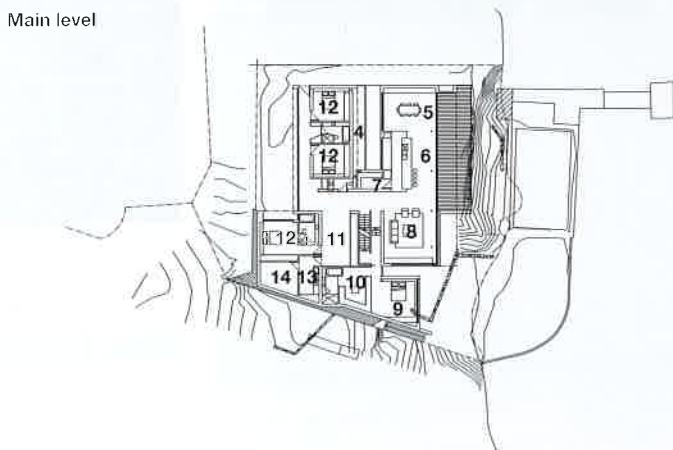
Rooftop level



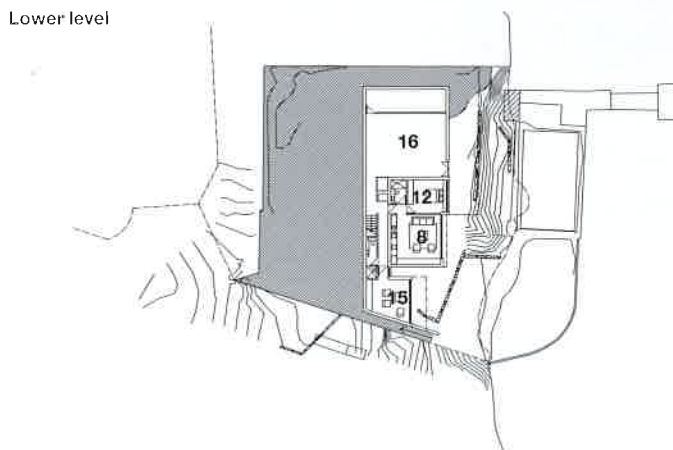
Entry level



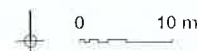
Main level



Lower level



- 1 Entry
- 2 Garage
- 3 Cloakroom
- 4 Reflection pond
- 5 Dining
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Pantry
- 8 Living
- 9 Main bedroom
- 10 Walk-in robe
- 11 Kids' room
- 12 Bedroom
- 13 Laundry
- 14 Cellar
- 15 Study
- 16 Store



ARCHITECT
Vladimir N. Ivanov Architects
123 Commonwealth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010
E: vlad@vniarchitects.com.au
W: www.vniarchitects.com.au

PRACTICE PROFILE
The practice has produced a series of residential projects and won several awards. The work is modern and highly detailed. Both architectural and interior design services are provided.

PROJECT TEAM
Vladimir Ivanov

BUILDER
Yuncken Construction Group

CONSULTANTS
Structural Engineer Partridge Partners
Landscaping Peter Fudge Garden Design
Interiors Vladimir N. Ivanov Architects

PRODUCTS
Roofing Concrete slab with torch-on membrane and white pebbles
External Walls Off-form concrete and cavity brickwork with render and paint finish
Internal Walls Off-form concrete and cavity brickwork with render and set and paint finish
Windows G. James natural satin anodized (NSA) aluminium framed windows
Doors G. James NSA aluminium framed doors and solid core doors
Flooring Pietra Chiara stone; Basaltina stone in wet areas
Lighting (Guzzini Lingoito flood lights; Modus downlights from JSB Lighting Kitchen Gaggenau cooktop, oven and steam oven; Miele coffee machine; Corian bench tops; Joinery lacquer paint finish; Liebherr fridge; Boffi tap Master Ensuite Boffi tapware, shower rose set and bath tap; Corian vanity; Basaltina stone floor; Walls Chestnut 2 glass mosaic tiles Bathrooms Rogerseller tapware, shower rose set and bath tap; Corian vanity; Basaltina stone floor; white ceramic tile walls Climate Control Daikin airconditioning External Elements Bluestone paving Other All credenza units, suspended bunk beds, day bed, and all joinery custom-made

FLOOR AREA
450 m²

TIME SCHEDULE
Design, documentation 18 months
Construction 18 months

LEFT: Illuminated, gloss-lacquered pink panels are inserted in white Corian joinery for a playful blush of colour. Daylight and fresh air drift into the room through clerestory windows.

HALL OF MIRRORS

With its own class of dignity and grace, the bathroom is a private refuge from the rigours of our lives – the backstage chamber for finishing today, reflecting on it and preparing for tomorrow. Sarah Warner peers across the shimmering surfaces of some exceptional bathroom designs.

NORTHWOOD HOUSE / Vladimir N. Ivanov Architects

Buried deep below ground level, this ensuite is a meditative, private retreat from the hubub of family life. Two light wells channel sunshine into the subterranean space. Beneath the light wells is a voluminous Japanese *ofuro* bath that captures the cascading light. Constructed from five solid slabs of Carrara marble, the bath is both decadent and Zen-like; the bather sits upright in deep water instead of reclining. Light reflects off the water's surface onto chestnut glass mosaic tiles casting a gold and grey-green shimmer onto the white Corian vanity and basins. The bathroom resembles a grotto dedicated to the ritual of bathing.