



New Wave

An honest approach to materials and form pays respect to the legacy of a celebrated local architect and the rugged splendour of New South Wales' Northern Rivers, in this secluded tropical haven by Harley Graham Architects.

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Lush rainforests, deeply fragrant with new growth; rolling hills and craggy mountain ridges give way to the Pacific Ocean below; a coastline romanticised by sun-seekers the world over.

Imagine waking up above it all, among the trees. Coopers Shoot, just south of Byron Bay, New South Wales, is a rural community comfortably detached from the tourist-heavy hoopla of the town centre.

While owners Stephen and Colleen have lived here on their sprawling 20-acre property for 22 years, successful careers in financial journalism have led to temporary homes abroad in Washington DC, Papua New Guinea, London and Shanghai. Upon retiring, they sought a way to bring their global lifestyle home, and a way to better accommodate visiting family, friends and other travellers. The pair approached local practice Harley Graham Architects to create Hidden Studio, a self-sufficient guest pavilion on site which, when needed, would afford privacy from their own residence.

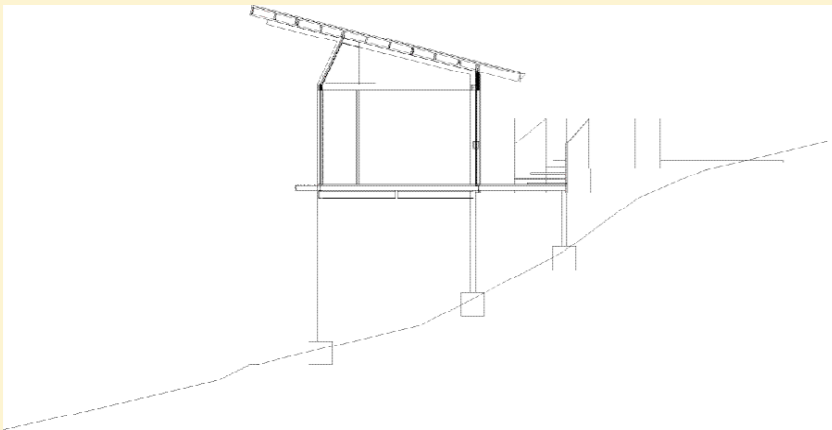
The two existing buildings on the property, the couple's home and writers' cabin, were originally designed by the late Ian McKay. Having had a personal association with the influential Sydney School architect before his passing in 2015, Harley Graham naturally looked to the built language of McKay's previous projects to inform the new design.

"We learnt from Ian's work, it gave us a clear starting point," says Harley.

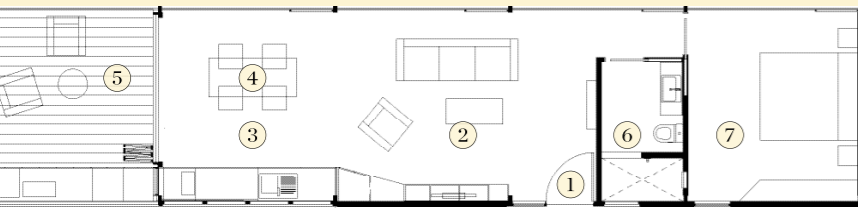
In homage to McKay's architectural approach – one which exposed and celebrated a building's structural components – the repetition of expressed portal frames at Hidden Studio visibly demonstrates how the design works. No obfuscating façade, or clever sleight of hand – the project is pared back to an honest depiction of form.







SECTION



PLAN

- ① ENTRY
- ② LIVING
- ③ KITCHEN
- ④ DINING
- ⑤ OUTDOORLIVING
- ⑥ BATHROOM
- ⑦ BEDROOM



“I think there’s an ongoing battle in architecture between the structure and skin of a building,” says Harley. “It’s a question of balancing what parts we should conceal, versus what we will see and experience.”

Working within such unique geography, Harley Graham Architects has developed a folio of homes which are both sensitive and robust, in tune with their setting.

“As beautiful as it is here, it can be quite a hostile environment,” says Harley. “We can get lots of sea salt-laden winds and tropical storms, so we’re very concerned about how our buildings weather. They need to become part of the landscape.”

Hidden Studio sits lightly on its site, softened by the surrounding foliage. Its material palette is restrained, in line with the concept’s intentional simplicity. Clad in rust-hued corten steel, there is a utilitarian strength to its exterior, heightened by the platform of stainless steel mesh that serves as the entryway approach. Beyond the front door, an exceptionally warm interior is wrapped in Blackbutt timber. The boards, running the length of the space, appear to exaggerate the linear quality of the design.

“The floor-to-wall timber gives it that sandstone, cave-like feel, almost like a rock shelf that’s been washed out by a wave,” says Harley.

Previous residences by Harley Graham Architects have a 360-degree quality, with views and access on all sides. By comparison, the Hidden Studio project is something of a departure – an experiment in linear planning, only fully open on one end.

Along its front north-eastern façade, large areas of plate glass frame the hills of Coopers Shoot and the ocean beyond, to dramatic effect. Or in Harley’s words: “The view really smacks you in the face!”

The building was positioned to effectively capture the north sun, while louvres allow cooling northerly winds to ventilate the space in summer. With its full solar access, the living area comes into its own during Byron’s brief winters.

“To be able to open up all the doors and windows in a little pavilion overlooking the ocean is an amazing feeling in the colder months,” says Harley. “Even on a chilly day, sunlight floods in and gives off great natural heat – it’s an absolutely dreamy space.”



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For a small project comprising just three rooms, a bathroom, bedroom and main living space, Hidden Studio has an impressively long list of green credentials. Given its careful orientation, which enables passive heating and cooling, it requires no air-conditioning. Constructed with low embodied energy materials, the dwelling is also completely off-grid, with a water tank set underneath as well as its own sewer system.

“We find we don’t have to battle with clients, or explain the value of building serious sustainability measures into our projects,” says Harley. “Up here people get it, and actually expect it.”

“Byron has always had such a sense of being a creative place, but it’s a lot more than mandalas and tie-dye. There’s a great group of architects here producing some really sophisticated work.”

A landscape populated by worldly design advocates, living between sun-drenched isles and verdant jungles – how idyllic.

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