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JULY 23-29, 2014

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THE SPIRIT OF DESIGN

Michael Ong has kicked off his career with an award-winning house that melds outside and in, writes SARAH MARINOS

In his wonderfully mature Hans House, Michael has created a poetic series of forms, spaces, materials and details, with a fresh and inspiring use of colour. He narrates through his rich architectural vocabulary a story of his clients, their family and their site.
– Brian Zulaikha, architecture and interior design mentor for the Spirit of Youth Award judging panel

A home that engaged with the everyday rituals, demands and growth of a young family – that was part of the brief given to architect Michael Ong, of Michael Ong Design Office. The end result is Hans House, which has won the architecture and interior design category in the most recent Qantas Spirit of Youth Awards.

The awards recognise the work of a new generation of creative talent and provide young Australians with financial and professional support to foster their career.

The tri-level house is situated on a block in Aberfeldie

and takes its shape from the land's southern boundary to maximise the natural light that floods the house.

A large property to one side of Hans House threatened to overshadow the new building, but Ong's decision to focus on the southern position overcame this challenge, ensuring his building is bright and airy.

"The living/dining area is where that neighbour's garden is positioned instead, so we get a lot of light coming into that space and no overshadowing," says Ong. "There are lots of glazed areas and the living/dining area has glazed doors that slide back and connect seamlessly to the backyard. We also created steps and plinths along the edge – an active edge along that side of the home where you can sit and relax."

Ong's client had moved frequently but Hans House was designed as a place for the family to settle for the long term, so attention to detail was important.

"They love to be outside so we talked about how we can get the garden to be an active component of

the house," says Ong. As well as a garden, there is a courtyard that connects elements of the house with a series of garden and city views from within the home.

Hans House has a concrete base and ground level, while the upper two levels are contained in a timber-clad "pod" positioned above the base and angled to maximise natural light throughout the day.

"Within the house there are shared areas on the ground floor and the private zones – the bathrooms and bedrooms – are in the timber pod," says Ong. The ground floor has a living/dining area, kitchen, play area, lounge, guest bedroom and en suite and a powder room underneath the stairs.

"You go up into a sanctuary and the first floor is split into two sides. One side looks into the garden and a beautiful old peppercorn tree. The other side has city views. All the bathrooms and slow spaces face the tree and the windows are located in a position where they frame the views. So you can lie in the bath and the bathroom window frames the tree," he says.

The first level of the pod includes two bedrooms and a bathroom. The next level has a master bedroom with en suite and a study.

Integrating materials has been a clever aspect of Ong's design. The concrete used for the ground level of the



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Deceptive: Michael Ong says this Aberfeldie house feels big because it's long, and space "just spills over". (PETER BENNETTS \ SUPPLIED)

house is introduced in the interior of the home in the island bench in the kitchen, interior walls and flooring, and in a seating area at the entrance.

"There is a ritual about Hans House. You come in, sit down, take off your shoes and put your feet down on the concrete plinth at the entrance," explains Ong.

"When you step off that plinth onto the timber floor you know you've arrived home. Similarly, when you go upstairs to the pod, you step onto the concrete plinth and then onto the timber stairs, so you recognise that you are moving into another space in the home."

Thoughtful, subtle dashes of colour – a vibrant, fresh green – are scattered throughout the house. A reveal on the exterior is like a "wink" from the building, he says.

"It's a welcoming colour and is followed through on the timber baton screens in the bathroom and folds through to some of the lights."

The northern orientation of the main living areas means that for most of the year the spaces in the house

are bright and don't require much artificial light. Solar eaves in the glazed areas ensure that, in summer, the glass is protected from heat and the amount of energy needed to power the air-conditioning system is reduced. In winter, the sun helps heat the home's living areas.

"Underneath the home is a concrete slab that sucks energy in and releases it into the rooms at night," says Ong. "There is also a thick curtain that can be drawn across the living/dining area on a cold day, so you can easily close off that area so it heats up."

Ong, who studied architecture at the University of Melbourne, says his clients are thrilled with the feeling of spaciousness achieved on a relatively small block.

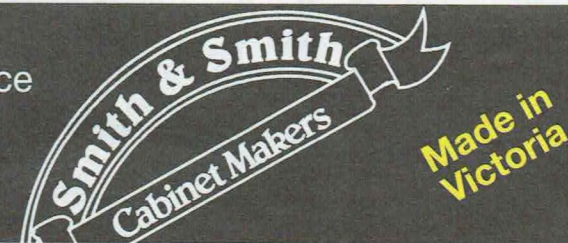
"The family wanted a space that they could grow old in," says Ong. "And the house feels big because it's long, there's lots of glass and space just spills over."

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