

## **The Story**

The sawmill house was a collaboration between two brothers.

- Yackandandah is a small regional town in northeast Victoria, Australia.
- The building sits on the site of the old saw-mill which the client has converted into a sculpture studio.
- The Sawmill had been a feature of our childhoods and by some chance my brother (the client) acquired the block in 2005.
- Over the following 7 years while the client established his arts practice, we often spoke about potential upgrades to the tool sharpening shed the he had cleared out to make a bed room,
- After multiple proposals crunch time came when the government announced it would be rolling back the first home owners grant, the proceeds from which was a sizeable percentage of the budget.
- We struggled to find an appropriate design to fit his ever shifting brief but eventually we came to agree that - Simplicity was the answer,
- The Client although flippant and beautifully erratic, his routine was to a large degree predictable:
- He rose at first light so therefore the bedroom was to face the east,
- He entertained only while cooking or eating food, therefore the kitchen was to be a central element,
- He wished to live outside as much as possible, therefore the building envelope needed to be adaptive
- The geography of the site, which had been shaped by it's previous functions as sawmill and gold mine informed the eventual location of the building,
  - One edge of the gold mines quarry had been levelled off for wood chip storage. This provided a great northern aspect with a strong edge condition and views down the valley.
- The slab was laid early 2013 but due to work commitments, the site lay dormant for a full year.
  - As the month's passed, the occasional weekend working bee, quickly erected the boundary walls from reclaimed 1 tonne concrete blocks that I had noticed farmers using as dam walls years before.
- A nice by-product of this is that the house is now a patchwork of all the other projects in the region: the local foot paths, peoples houses or a farmers shed.
- This materiality also began to formed a bridge between our modernist ideals and Ben's poetic eye.

- We decided to work with minimal documentation and let the design evolve as a conversation, we used the house as a tool, One to teach and learn from one another
- The clients skill set allowed us fabricated all of the steel work on site, and having a close relationship to the engineer we had the flexibility to develop the design and make changes on the fly.
- One afternoon, standing in the kitchen I mentioned that the view would be much better if the column was removed.
- Before I knew it the client had sent an email from his phone and the next morning we had a sketch from the engineer showing how it could be achieved,
- The following morning the column was removed and we had an uninterrupted view over the old quarry.
- This approach was used again when debating how best to make a louvered veranda, when we decided the entire veranda should slide away into the courtyard.
- Again when discussing which section of the northern facade should be operable we settled on moving the whole element as one 9 meter piece.
- This approach was also applied to the bedroom with the used of a 1 tonne gate hinge a 3 x 4 meter glazed pivot door was designed and built on the slab in a day.
- The client often sleeps with this door open as the courtyard is just stunning in the mornings.
- Timber for the project was sourced locally, we spent a few days sorting through packs of rough sawn red stringy that would eventually become the ceiling, floor and walls of the house.
- The timber is just beautiful to work with and we had great support from the local supplier who fell and milled the timber just up the road from the site.
- When it came to lining of the joinery wall that runs the length of the dwelling, We all felt it required something a special.
- After some experimentation we all agreed that a thin patinaed brass sheet would provide a beautiful glow and add texture to the space while referencing the precious metals that were extracted from the site when it was a gold mine.
- Originally conceived as a home for a bachelor the design of the dwelling had to adapt as the circumstances of the clients life dramatically changed during the course of construction. The birth of a baby not only hurried progress, but also pushed child friendly design changes to be made.
- The 9 metre long sliding door completely opens the main living space to the deck and view beyond. This door was made from an old Red wood tree that once stood in the play-ground of the local boy's school, and the brass rolling hardware was hand turned by an old family friend.

- When the door is open the space is transformed into a giant deck. This flexible planning is continued through the use of large pivot doors to the bedroom, that allow the whole space to be opened up into a continuous volume.
- We custom built all of the furniture for the project, from the couches, the lighting components, all the way through to the joinery. Each element was designed on the fly and when possible used materials Ben had available in his workshop.
- The bathroom sink is a great example. The client had a sheet of copper left over from one of his art projects and set about teaching himself to braze, after which, he spent an afternoon and fabricated himself a sink.
- Unexpectedly, the concrete blocks inspired much local discussion about design and alternative building materials. This interest led to the local concrete yard manufacturing them for commercial sale and up-cycling this carbon intensive material.
- On site, the texture of the blocks ground the building to the quarry, as the different layers of colour within them, mimic the sedimentary layers of the exposed earth.
- The untreated rough sawn macrocarpa timber screens reference the Sawmill and over time, will pale to grey, and settle the building into its perch.
- The Sawmill House is a dwelling that merges mid century modernist architecture with a industrial rural vernacular that focuses on site.
- Local materials are utilised but refined through an architectural lens that creates a proud and individual building that sits comfortably within its physical and social context.
- The project reached resolution through Archier's architectural intent, the clients artistic knowhow, and the use of local materials and suppliers.
- The Sawmill House has provided us the opportunity to investigate the positive reuse of waste materials.
- It has provided a chance for us to learn through making and established common ground, that served as a platform to exchange ideas, test materials and investigate an alternative vernacular. While challenging the regional 'standard' locals are both comfortable and excited in the presence of the building, a rough, unpolished finish, makes the experience understandable while the use of local materials enhances the connection to the town.
- Through this process, a result was achieved that was superior to what each of us could have created individually. It has changed the way we interact with our clients and how we run our practice.