# THE LOCAL PROJECT

Nº10

Architecture and Design of Australia and New Zealand

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# CURL CURL

# TRIAS

Words by Sarah Sivaraman • Photography by Clinton Weaver • Architecture by TRIAS • Interior Design and Styling by Folk Studio

Build by Avalon Constructions • Landscape by Lindy Hulton-Larson Landscape Architect • Engineering by SDA Structures

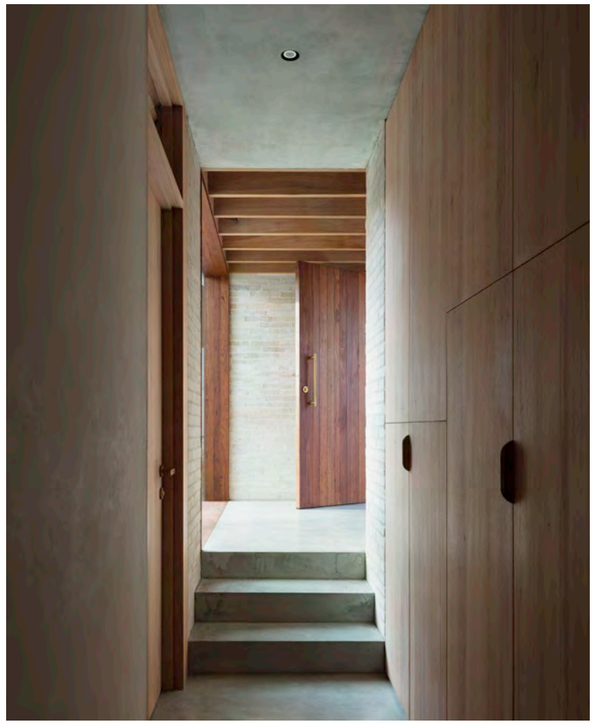
Joinery by Luke Geercke Cabinet Makers

Behind a decisive yet unimposing wall on a residential street in Curl Curl rests a family sanctuary. Designed by TRIAS with interiors by Folk Studio, the home is equipped for the fluid nature of family life over time, balancing functional and progressive technologies with timeless design.

Named after its home suburb on Garigal land, Curl Curl was commissioned by a quiet family who craved a forever home into which they could retreat and be together. TRIAS Director Jennifer McMaster recalls being briefed to create a house that feels "like a sanctuary, a bit of an oasis from the hustle and bustle of life." A balance between house and garden was also essential, with a level of integration between the two allowing the family "to live inside and out – to throw the doors open and go out to the garden, to have veggies and herbs and to enjoy Sydney's climate." Equally important was the home's capacity to age well, both structurally and materially, which was addressed by both TRIAS and Folk Studio. Beyond this, Director of Folk Studio Mariah Madder explains that they were given "creative license to explore and execute unique designs in so many aspects of this project." For Jonathon Donnelly, Director of TRIAS, this trust and freedom was inspiring. "It was a project that really captured our imagination, and we aspired to deliver the best possible idea and design for our clients," he says.

The house itself is an L-shaped building composed of two double-storey towers. "One of them is a tower for the kids and one is for the parents," Jennifer explains. Living spaces dominate the ground floor of both towers, complemented by the laundry in one and the bathroom and a guest room in the other. "[The clients'] kids are a little bit older; they're about to enter those teenage years," says Jennifer. "So, the separate living areas on the ground floor mean that the kids can go to one end of the house, and parents can go to the other." The perpendicular layout maintains some visibility across the floor plan, with both spaces looking out onto the garden. "The garden is the connecting outdoor room for the whole plan," Jennifer describes.

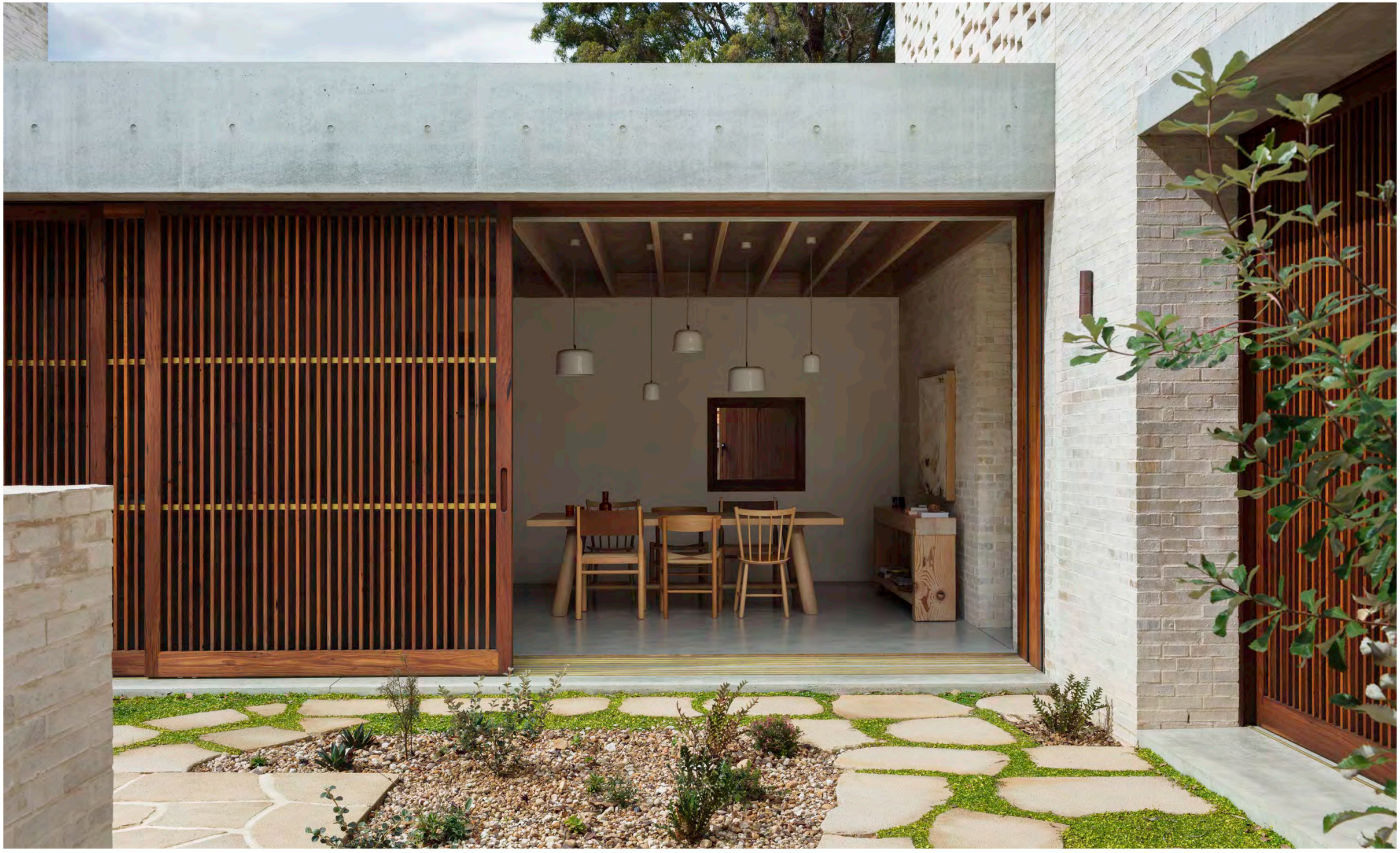
Upstairs in the parent's tower is a bedroom, robe, ensuite and study desk, whilst the kids' upper level consists of two bedrooms, a bathroom and a shared study. Linking these two structures is a low-slung pavilion that holds the kitchen and dining room, and features doors that retract into a wall cavity, extending the house out into the garden. The sunny, north-facing garden and pool is shielded from the street by a rendered perimeter wall. The house itself is built from handmade brick and then sponged in a warm white colour. The building also bears recycled iron bark cladding, recycled hardwood doors and windows, and a built-in, one-of-a-kind brick screen. "We wanted to push the envelope," Jonathon explains of the screen. "If you look at it closely, a lot of the bricks look to impossibly hang in space." Executing this feature required close collaboration with the bricklayer "who was a real craftsperson, and really understood what to do with the material because he works with it every day. We stood on site and hand laid out what those patterns would be."

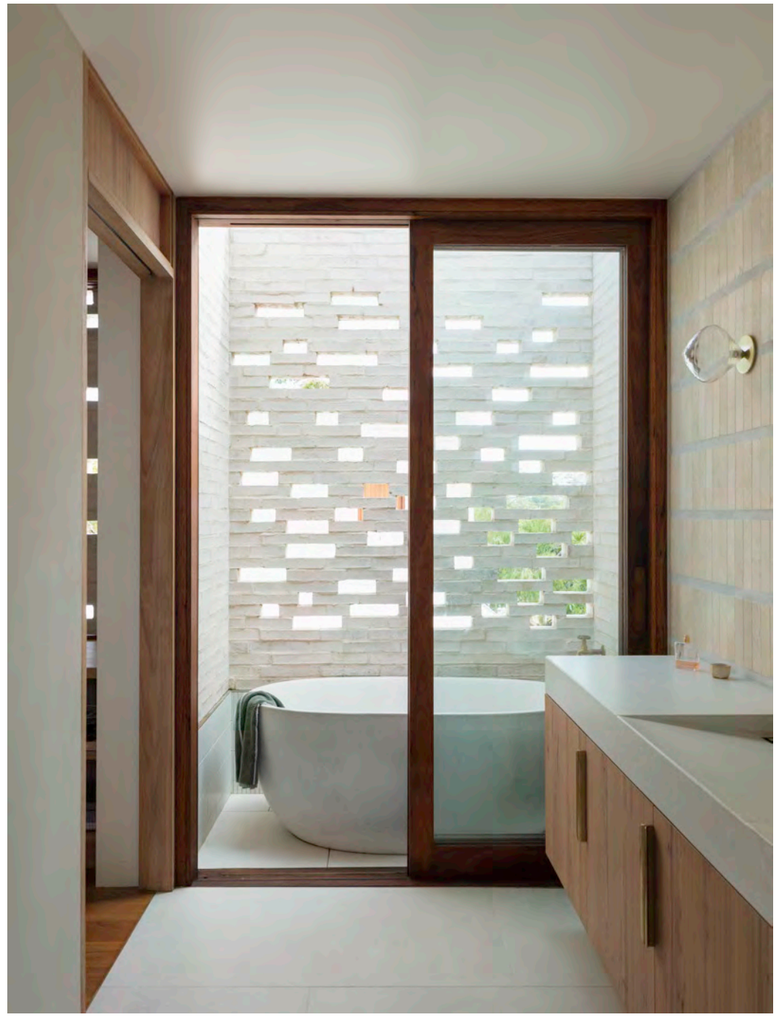


Inspired by Spanish architecture, the home features a raw, minimal materiality and a fluid transition between indoor and outdoor living.

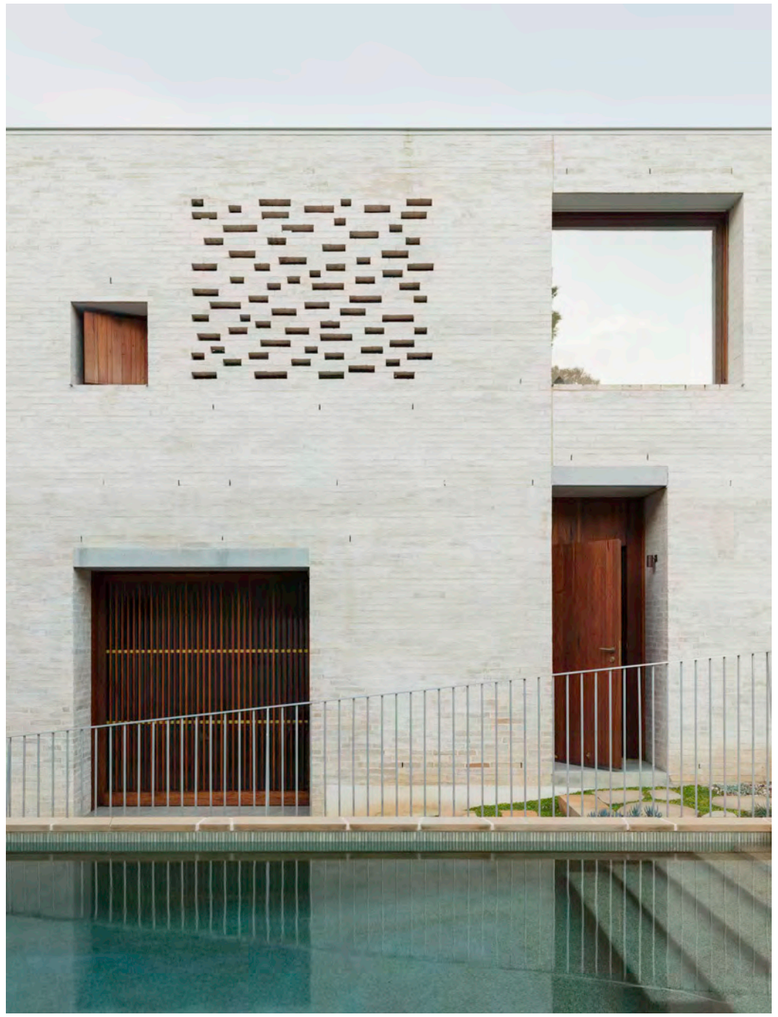
This level of attention to detail from both TRIAS and Folk Studio is evident throughout the house. It stems from a keen awareness that every small piece is contributing to an overall effect. For Jennifer and Jonathon, inspiration for Curl Curl came during a trip to Mexico City in 2019. "We were really inspired by the common condition we found [there] where a lot of the buildings are quite private and defensive," Jennifer explains. "You'll walk along the street and there'll be a gate or a wall that is giving protection to that house from passers-by." Though defensive, this arrangement is not without its charm or generosity. "There's also this incredible lushness; there are vines dripping everywhere and trees peeking their boughs above the walls. And all the openings – windows, doors – give you a glimpse of what's going on in these courtyard houses." Folk Studio, on the other hand, as Mariah explains, "drew inspiration from Spanish villas and farmhouses; the raw materiality, the minimalistic nature of them, saturation of texture and the fluidity of indoor-outdoor living."

Whilst both parties referenced far-off places, they also stayed grounded within the local environment. "We didn't want the house to feel cliché, but we did want to reference that coastal lifestyle that's such a big part of living in a place like Curl Curl," says Jennifer. This intention led to a layer of textures – sponged brick, sandstone, native plants, concrete – that convey a natural, sandy aesthetic without going overboard. In response to the client's brief to incorporate timeless materials and aesthetics, Jennifer opted for "materials that felt consistent, that felt harmonious with one another, and that had excellent tactility with a bit of life and variation to them, so that as the building ages, the character in those materials can be revealed." Inside, Mariah explains that the 'Hamptons' aesthetic popular in such coastal settings has been intentionally avoided in favour of "a home that could withstand the harsh Australian summers and be inviting and distinctive in its look." The textures of exposed brick, blackbutt timber joinery, rendered walls and an array of handmade tiles build a scene that is laidback and warm.

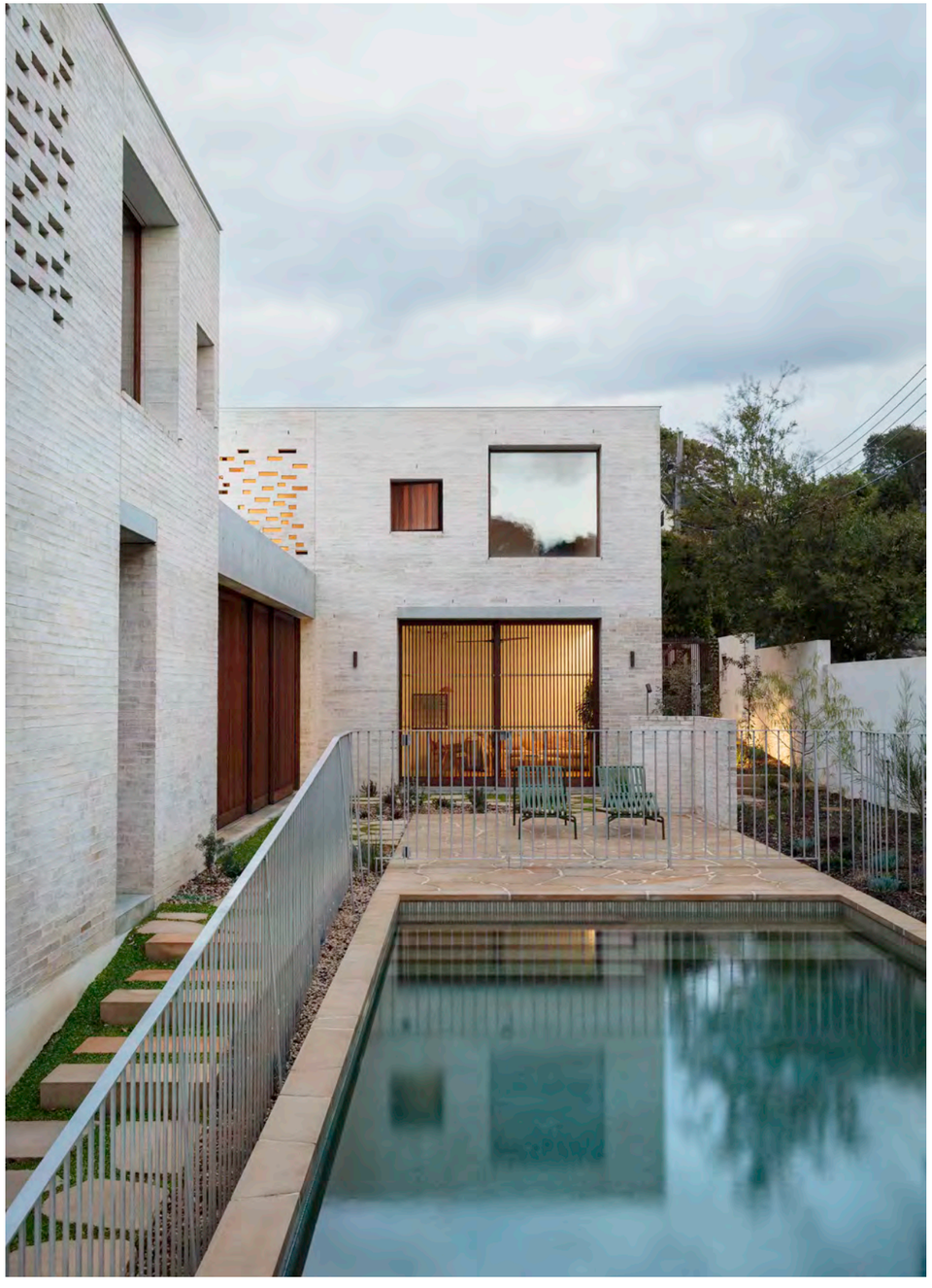




Exposed brick, blackbutt timber joinery, rendered walls and handmade tiles build a scene that is laidback and warm.



Wanting to create a home that could withstand harsh Australian summers, the house avoids the typical 'Hamptons' aesthetic in favour of a more robust materiality.



Timber screening offers increased ventilation and protection from seasonal heat and glare.

Collaborating across two studios to create such an easy going home, as TRIAS and Folk Studio have done, is no mean feat. In addition to this, Curl Curl is underpinned by an emphasis on sustainability. “The whole house runs off solar panels and a battery, so it’s designed to be operationally carbon neutral,” Jonathon says. Keenly aware that the embodied carbon within the house would be high, given the abundance of brick and concrete, Jennifer explains that “the conversation very quickly became about [the chosen] materials, [ensuring] that we treated them with a lot of care and dignity and also prioritised quality.” As well as full electrification, the house is designed with cross ventilation, optimal solar orientation, and a west-facing façade, with screens offering protection from seasonal heat and glare. TRIAS’s approach to sustainability is ambitious in the best sense and the proof of its viability lies within projects like Curl Curl. Jennifer is adamant that it is possible to achieve “a beautiful, publication-worthy home that is also good for the planet, geared towards the future, and is taking the responsibilities that we all have around making buildings both joyfully and seriously.”

Curl Curl is deceptively simple – this is a hard-working home. The house meets the needs of the client’s current lives and remains flexible to change as life goes on. Sophisticated electric systems operate to ensure carbon neutrality. Careful thought and planning have gone into ensuring that every detail ages gracefully. Yet, despite the inherent complexity of such a building, the home is a calm retreat. It stands solidly, gently implying that it could do so, unharried, until the end of time.