



# *Curvaceous*



# IN NATURE

*Looking out over one of the most sought after views in Sydney, this home had to overcome the challenge of residing on one of its steepest blocks*

WORDS / Tessa Hoult ■ PHOTOGRAPHY / Michael Simmonds





The perfect entertaining space overlooking the Pittwater

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— Peter Downes

**B**eing woken by the sounds of the native birds and the occasional putt-putt of a passing boat is common for folk living on the Pittwater in Sydney’s north. Located 30km north of the CBD, the Pittwater’s hidden coves, beaches and tranquil waters are a far cry from the fast-paced lifestyle of inner-city living.

Capturing the sunset every evening, this Church Point home was designed by award-winning designer and steep-site specialist, Peter Downes. “It was one of the steepest sites I’ve worked on,” explains Peter. “Access was difficult because the road was narrow and overhead power lines were blocking the site, which made it difficult for the builder.”

Notoriously steep, Sydney’s northern beaches can be a geographical nightmare for some architects and designers. Encompassed by the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Pittwater inlet on the other, the upper region of the beaches has some of the steepest land blocks in Sydney.

“They’re valuable sites because they have great ocean views,” relates Peter. “You can’t stick a project home in because they won’t fit, so you need to have a one-off architectural design that fits the block.”

With a brief to design a modern, upmarket waterfront home, Peter went about designing the floorplans, then tackled the sticky issue of heights. Adopting an ‘out, down, out, down’ design, Peter’s forward thinking has allowed the home to scrape in below the height limit.

“The slope was probably the biggest factor in the design,” explains Peter. “But it also has the advantage that because you are constantly stepping down, all the rooms face the view.”

Spread over five levels and including a double-decker car lift, this multi-tiered design has resulted in an interesting and thought-provoking home. With ample amounts of glass, light seems to penetrate into even the darkest recesses, allowing for an open and spacious feeling. Greeting you upon your arrival (and the client’s idea), the four-storey-high atrium acts as a dramatic architectural feature, as well as a source of light and warmth.





Creating a dramatic appearance when viewed from the top, the atrium overlooks the water feature below









The kitchen and lounge area are connected through an open-plan living design and free-flowing timber floors





The four-storey atrium was an idea from the client as a way to let more light into the home



The main feature of the kitchen, the fish tank splashback breaks up the neutral tones of its modern design



“The atrium serves a purpose of creating an entrance,” states Peter. “But it lets in the northern light to other parts of the building and it’s really good for cross-flow ventilation by letting hot air out.”

Descending down the zigzag staircase you pass various bedrooms that branch off to your left before gliding over an elongated water feature into the living areas. Stretching towards the water, the kitchen, living and outdoor area all overlap one another to create one large entertaining space. However, as the home faces west, something needed to be erected to ensure the area wasn’t going to be subjected to the harsh summer sun every year.

“We made sure the verandah down the bottom had a big roof overhang for overshadowing,” explains Peter. “We created a north-facing courtyard to bring north into the equation and minimise the effect of facing west.”

Taking an idea he saw while dining at a restaurant on Sydney Harbour, Peter installed frameless glass doors around the living space, enabling the outdoors to always connect to the interior.

“All the doors facing north and west fold and track back to the side so it’s a seamless blur from the inside out,” says Peter. “It also means when you are looking out at the view, because quite often with multi-fold doors you end up with lots of frames blocking the view, with the frameless glass you don’t.”

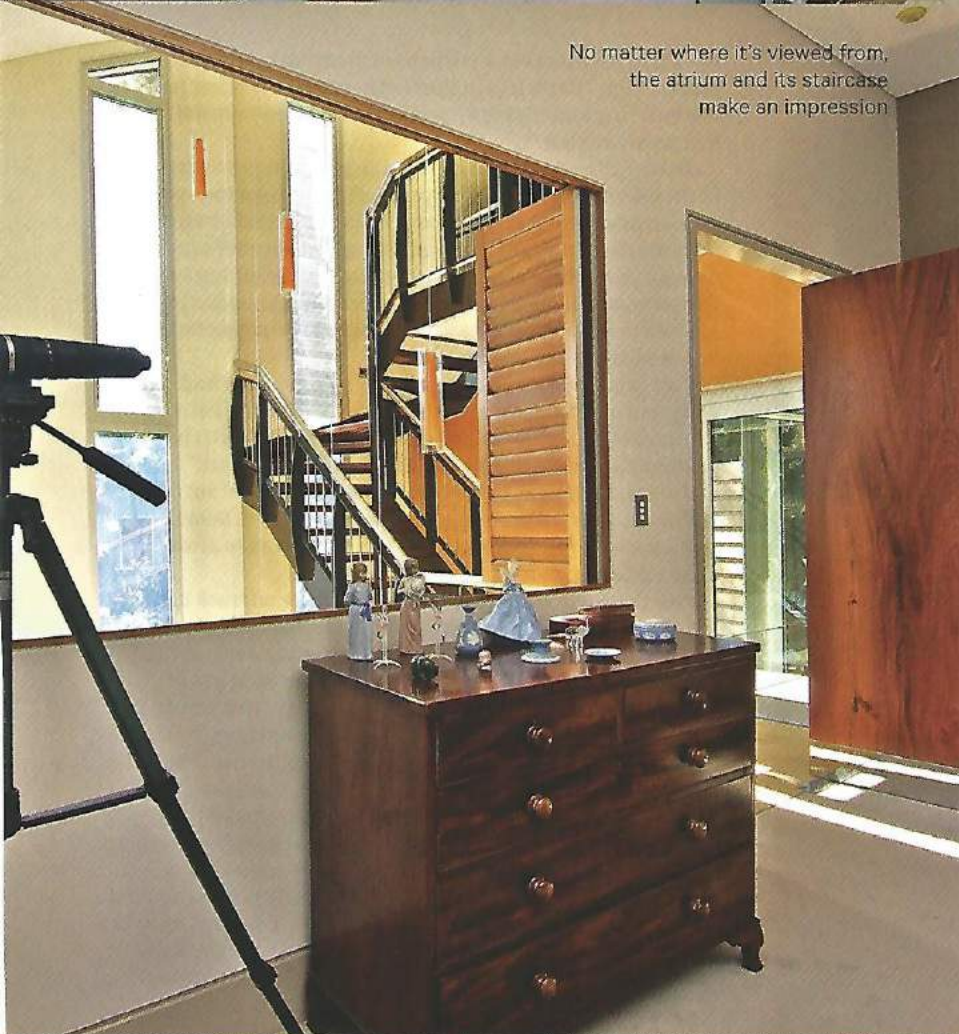
Looking behind the living area into the kitchen, your attention is automatically caught by the splashback, which is, on closer inspection, a fishtank, an idea from the mind of the builder, Greg Hunter. When viewed from the pantry behind, you can see through it to the kitchen. However, there is also a powder room here, which poses the question of privacy. “When you switch the light on in the powder room it activates air bubbles in the tank to give you privacy,” answers Peter when asked about the issue. “You still have the light filtering through the fish tank but you can’t see anything.”



Leading off from the staircase, each bedroom and bathroom has ample amounts of light through clever glass panelling



No matter where it's viewed from, the atrium and its staircase make an impression



*“Usually if a client has bad ideas you have to gently massage them away from it, but in this case, he had really good ideas”*  
 — Peter Downes

On many builds the clients can be a hindrance, trying to implement designs into the build that, more often than not, don't work or end up costing too much. However, in the case of this home, the clients ended up being an asset and turned out to be one of Peter's favourites.

“He was open to all adventurous suggestions and that made a really big difference,” says Peter. “Usually if a client has bad ideas you have to gently massage them away from it, but in this case, he had really good ideas.”

Having become somewhat of an expert in designing homes for difficult sites, Peter originally started out as an engineer and draftsman in the mining industry before dabbling in renovations and extensions in the late 1980s. Reigniting his boyhood passion for homes and the way they are designed, Peter has now built a business that includes numerous awards and more than 50 major projects around Australia. However, he likes to keep his commitments to a maximum of five a year, to ensure every home he designs is perfect to both his and the clients' standards.

“All my clients are doing their once-in-a-lifetime dream house and they spend a lot of money on it, so I'm always grateful and amazed that they trust all that with me,” says Peter. “So every house I do as if my life depended on it, which it does, because if I stop coming up with good houses then I stop making money and life wouldn't be so good.” ♡



Skylights allow an abundance of light into the bathroom area





Overlooking the water, the bathroom promotes an atmosphere of relaxation

