

VISION

ISSUE 46

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BABY GRAND

The Incubator, Macquarie University, Macquarie Park, Sydney

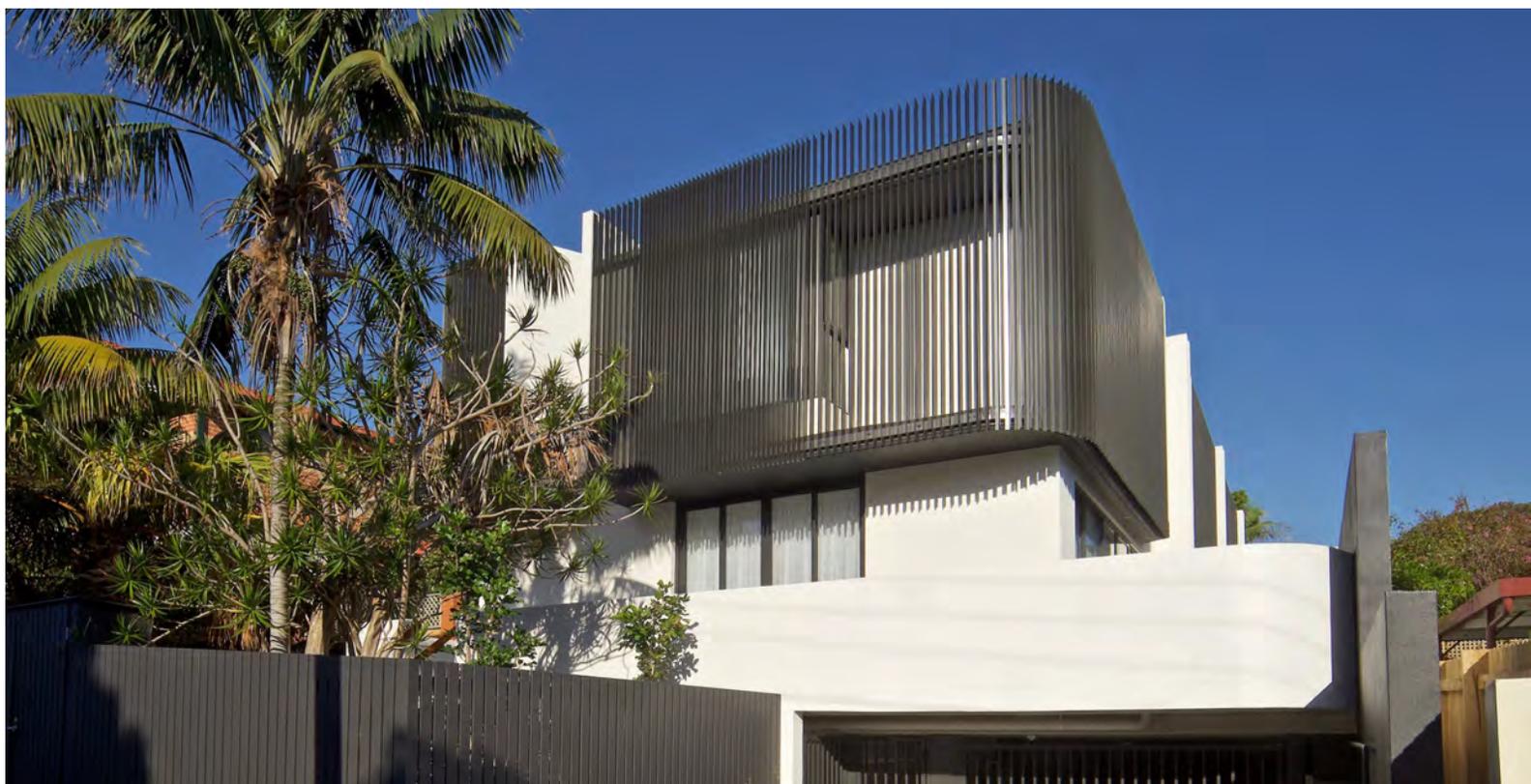
'The Incubator' could be just another Hollywood sci-fi, but this technology start-up hub at Sydney's Macquarie University is a mini-blockbuster all of its own.

Some architecture has an uncanny knack of appearing right at home – as though it always belonged. It's some feat to fit quite so effortlessly into a copse of trees on the university's grassy slopes without disturbing the natural order.

Typically it's bulldozers, diggers and concrete, but Architectus brings an atelier sensibility of crafted timber and Viridian performance glass for a quite exquisite assembly.



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THE INCUBATOR



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A CHIP OFF THE BLOCK

Clovelly Townhouses, Sydney

Townhouse, as a medium density development, bridge the extremes of the single dwelling and residential tower. Done well they offer the amenity of a house and economy of the tower.

At Clovelly, one of Sydney's lesser-known boutique, beachside suburbs, the demands for smaller rather than taller is resulting in neighbourhood-friendly developments.

One of the more recent – a set of five townhouses – designed by The Block architect Julian Brenchley, is neighbourly in more ways than most. While the project doesn't have the same profile or delivery pressures as the television series, with his name attached, it needed to be good.



CLICK TO VISIT THE
JULIAN BRENCHLEY
TOWNHOUSES

BABY GRAND





An Arcadian setting and flexible, collegiate workspaces, all within a pair of floating pavilions is some springboard for aspiring movers and shakers. Comparatively small but defiantly different in concept, this Incubator really is the Baby Grand.

Universities enjoy talking large. Growth signals confidence, importance and the kind of justifiable self-belief they might reasonably expect of their graduates. But big isn't always grand, and bold isn't necessarily better. And it's why The Incubator at Sydney's Macquarie University – so exquisitely woven into its landscape – is the rarest of workplaces to help occupants think way beyond the box.

Situated on 126 hectares of rolling bushland and lawns, the Macquarie campus at Macquarie Park 16 kms north west of the CBD, has a reputation as a research driven university in one of Sydney's high-tech corridors.

Given the groundhog buildings widely beloved by most tertiary institutions, the Incubator has gone from 'temporary' to 'permanent' in little more than the blink of an eye.

It's not difficult to see why, with high levels of occupant amenity whether roaming around glowing, light-filled interiors or finding repose on one of countless decks, fringed by the kind of landscaping all too rarely achieved.

To the designer's great credit the university has been so enamoured that it scrapped plans to recycle or relocate The Incubator, preferring to extend its life-span into the foreseeable future.

PROJECT

The Incubator, Macquarie University,
Macquarie Park, Sydney

ARCHITECTS

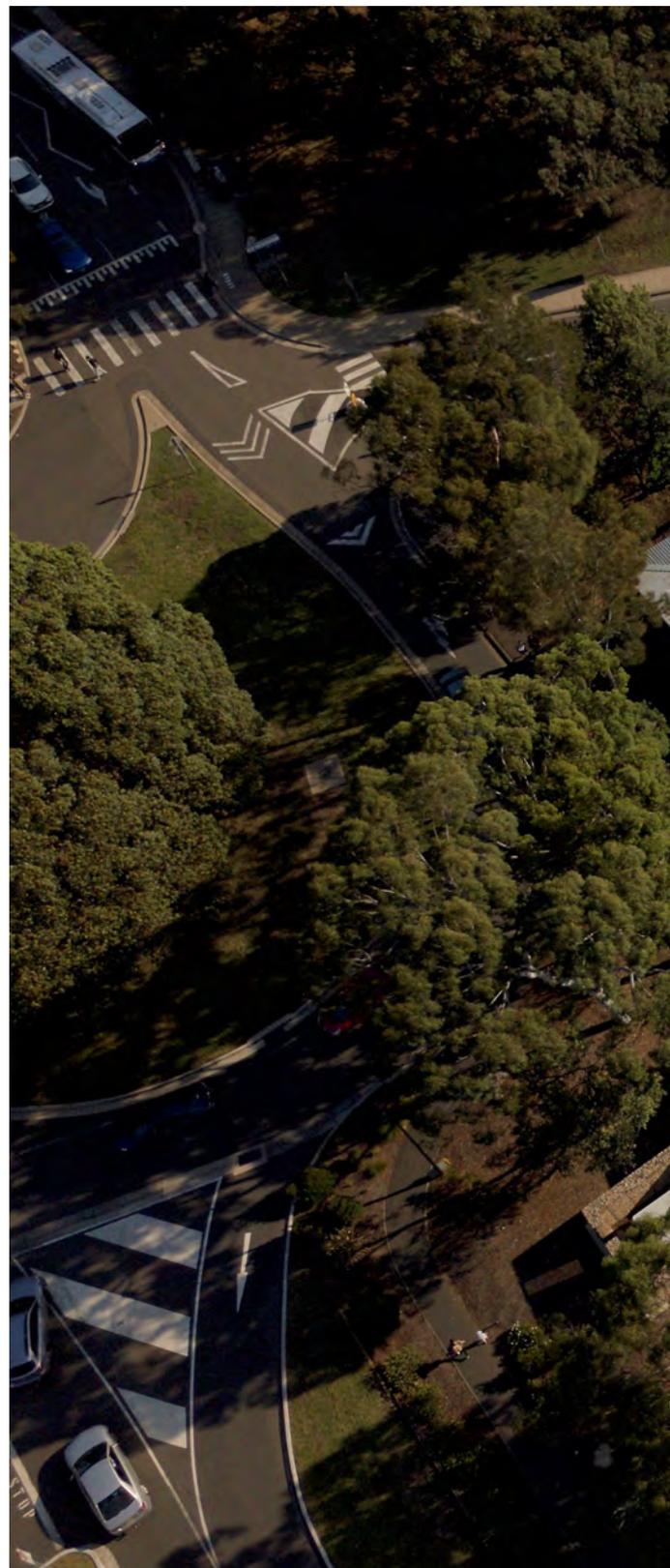
Architectus, Sydney

PRINCIPAL GLAZING

Viridian ComfortPlus™
and PerformaTech™

TEXT, IMAGES & FILM

Peter & Jenny Hyatt



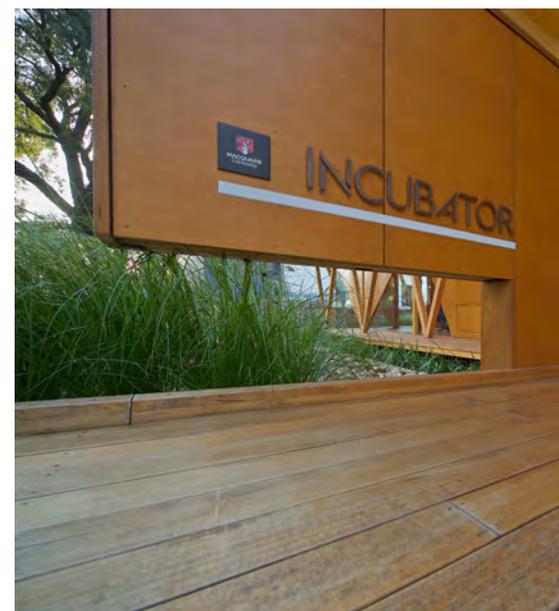


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“There’s a great internal view connecting the two pavilions, and it’s a very unusual proportion that expresses a sense of transition from one place to another.”

LUKE JOHNSON, ARCHITECT





Vision's Peter Hyatt spoke with design principal Luke Johnson of Architectus to discover the ideas behind a building of remarkable rhythms and finesse:

VISION This building is so completely different to its neighbours and indeed most universities. It's gentler, visually and physically accessible and treads lightly.

LUKE JOHNSON The Incubator is really a transformational piece of architecture on this campus. It's one characterised by a legacy of concrete buildings very beautiful in their own way, but anchored in a period of time. Part of our brief was to turn that all around and to really create a place and a space that would facilitate people coming together, working randomly, not really knowing who they were going to meet, but with the aim of accelerating their business ideas. With that we wanted to integrate university research, industry partners, and of course students, because students can have the best ideas, too.

How would you define The Incubator's role?

It was designed to foster and nurture young businesses and their great ideas. Its campus location is within the Macquarie Innovation Precinct where it can draw upon the skills and expertise of industries located around the university, as well as from the experts available within research departments. Let's not forget students on campus either to facilitate the acceleration of those start-ups out into the marketplace as successful businesses.

Do you have a highlight moment?

There's three really standout moments of experience in this building. The first one is at the entry with a pivoting large-scale door. That really draws people's breath away when it opens and offers a generous and engaging entry experience. They're suddenly aware of stepping across the threshold into a new space. Then there's a great internal view connecting the two pavilions, and it's a very unusual proportion that expresses a sense of transition from one place to another. And thirdly, I really love the corners of these buildings because they all open out to the landscape, and they all respond in a very sensitive way to the bringing together of materials, and in this case it's glass coming together.

How close is the completed building to your original presentation?

The concept design was received very favourably by the clients and thereafter the design team made many refinements but no significant changes to the architectural intent. The Incubator was conceived of as a pair of pavilions, each with flexible internal layouts that lend themselves to the future adaptations and functions of the start-ups inside. A strong driver was the need for collaboration and interaction between individual start-ups and with each other, in addition to privacy for each start-up to operate with confidentiality.

The timber frame really recalls a certain old-fashioned quality that celebrates assembly.

Timber was selected as the main construction material for its capacity to be beautifully engineered, swiftly fabricated and to capture a high quality finish. With the majority of components prefabricated offsite, rapid construction was achievable on site and with minimal disruption to the concurrent university semester. The resulting building was completed within five months of construction commencing. We designed the building to be assembled off the back of a very large truck. All of the panels were sized such that they could be moved as modular prefabricated components. That's the roof systems, the floor cassettes, wall panels, and glazing. That was designed for rapid on-site assembly and there's a very composed geometry to all of the set out. There was also the intended design purpose for future dis-assembly and relocation elsewhere on the campus and this remains an option for the University.



“I really love the corners of these buildings because they all open out to the landscape, and they all respond in a very sensitive way to the bringing together of materials, and in this case it’s glass coming together.”

LUKE JOHNSON, ARCHITECT





“It was really important for the design brief that the activities occurring within the building were also visible from the outside. Glass facilitates that...”

LUKE JOHNSON, ARCHITECT





Glass provides that lovely, complementary lift almost as the jewel in the diagram.

That's true and design patterns really contributes hugely, not merely to a way of looking out and through the building, but as a way of highlighting the building's whole assembly. It's way beyond just a decorative element. Of course we wanted environmental performance and Viridian gave us that performance we needed for fantastic transparency and energy control.

Glass really sings here. Its functional role appears a motif and crucial part of the building's identity.

It was really important for the design brief that the activities occurring within the building were also visible from the outside. Equally that people had the opportunity to focus on their work intensely, then look up and see this beautiful parkland setting of Macquarie University. Glass facilitates that, of course, and it's also the thermal skin being double-glazed and shaded with deep overhangs from the roof projections. That provides passive shading to the glass so that thermal transmittance is kept low, and consequently the glass could be designed as very transparent. That's facilitated this whole indoor/outdoor connection not unlike some Japanese pavilions for example. The connection from the outside to the inside, is really perceptible in this landscape.

The building's column-free qualities are pretty audacious and not normally associated with conventional tertiary design.

All of those exterior diagonal columns brace and support the building and free up the interior from a forest of columns. The ceiling diaphragm uses cross laminated timber, large span laminated veneer timber beams and glued laminated V columns, as well as spotted gum hardwood for decking, cork for the interior floor surfaces, and plywood for the external walls. Working with partners including Lipman and StrongBuild, these materials allowed us to take an innovative design approach. With this in mind, we created open spaces and breakout areas, and smaller, private meeting rooms.





“Typically it’s bulldozers, diggers and concrete, but Architectus brings an atelier sensibility of crafted timber and Viridian performance glass for a quite exquisite assembly.”

VISION

It's structural elegance and economy clearly contribute to its X-factor.

Architects bring together a range of experiences from the scientific right through to the very artistic. In our own project team, led by project Architect Nick Elias, we had talented people who really cared about all aspects right down to the fine detailing. Everything has been beautifully considered, not just with the materials, which are very harmonious throughout, but it's a sensitive approach which has an eye attuned to scale, and how all of the parts connect and are detailed.

Are the best buildings products of simplicity?

Sometimes you can draw a building in three strokes of the hand and it's really the essential idea that comes through. For this building it's about having a very clear ground plane. It's virtually a big platform where all of these innovative activities occur. Above it is another ground plane, if you like – the roof plane, and connecting those two is this very dynamic structure which represents the transfer of structural forces in a really elegant way into the ground, and that's really the essential diagram for the project.



“It’s virtually a big platform where all of these innovative activities occur. Above it is another ground plane, if you like – the roof plane, and connecting those two is this very dynamic structure.”

LUKE JOHNSON, ARCHITECT





Y3A

“Some architecture has an uncanny knack of appearing right at home – as though it always belonged. It’s some feat to fit quite so effortlessly into a copse of trees on the university’s grassy slopes without disturbing the natural order.”

VISION

Were you surprised to learn that your temporary building is now permanent?

Well, you can never account for the brief you’re going to end up with, and originally, as you say, this was to be a temporary structure, so it was designed to be assembled and then potentially disassembled at some future stage and reused in another location. However with the client so delighted by the completed building, they wish to keep it in its current location. So even if the current occupants move on to another facility, other university users will inhabit this building for a design life of 50 years and hopefully even beyond that.

Rather than the random holes left over by the builder, you show special regard for occupants with your treatment of glazing.

We revelled with some joy where we could bring glass together in a corner condition. It’s so unique to be able to do that, and it really opens a building out to its landscape where you can look in two directions, or more than one direction through the same corner. It’s a really lovely opportunity that glass gives you in this way.











PROJECT

The Incubator, Macquarie University,
Macquarie Park, Sydney

ARCHITECTS

Architectus, Sydney

PROJECT TEAM

Luke Johnson, Nick Elias, Angel Yi
Zhang, Hope Dryden, John Jeffrey

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

ASPECT Studios

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

ARUP + TTW

BUILDER

Lipman with Strongbuild

GLASS FACADE ENGINEER

ARUP

WINDOW FABRICATOR/INSTALLER

Against the Grain

GLASS SUPPLIER

Viridian

PRINCIPAL GLAZING

Facade – Double Glazed Units

10.38mm ComfortPlus™ Clear

12mm Argon

10.38mm VLam™ Clear

Awning – Double Glazed Units

6mm PerformaTech™ PH08(60)Clr

8mm Argon

6.38mm Clear Laminate

High-level Fixed Window –

Double Glazed Units

6mm PerformaTech™ Clear

16mm Argon

6.38mm Clear Laminate

SIZE

953 sqm (floor area)

BUDGET

\$7.6 million





A CHIP OFF
THE BLOCK



“Brenchley’s experience with the high-pressure and harrowing deadlines of commercial television proves the master of restrained control at Clovelly.”

VISION

Free of large personalities, on-air contestant spats and triumphs, The Block architect Julian Brenchley displays ideas rippling with light and shade. Embracing the elements might appear logical, but modern housing so often fails to connect. Brenchley's experience with the high-pressure and harrowing deadlines of commercial television proves the master of restrained control at Clovelly.

Starring quietly, Viridian EVantage™ glazing helps unlock the project's potential. Even without ocean views the result is compelling. "Being a good neighbour," enthuses Brenchley, "is all important."

Architects can become so identified with a project type that it defines and occasionally limits their working lives. The architect known for the art gallery or tower can just as easily be overlooked for other commissions because they have been pigeon-holed.

Julian Brenchley's connection with The Block is, by and large, a terrific gig for an architect. The roaming 'in-house' designer called upon way back in 2003 to help The Block producer Julian Cress select and develop the best possible properties is still on song in 2018.

In his other life, away from the world of television, Brenchley heads a small, pulsating practice applying many of the lessons learned across a variety of design fields. His work with Viridian Lightbridge™ during the past couple of seasons has helped to deliver some masterstrokes of sustainable design without any hint of anguish.

PROJECT

Clovelly Townhouses

ARCHITECT

Julian Brenchley

PRINCIPAL GLASS COMPONENTS

Viridian EVantage™ and VTough™

TEXT, IMAGES & FILM

Peter & Jenny Hyatt



CLICK TO VISIT
CLOVELLY
TOWNHOUSES



Julian Brenchley met with Vision's Peter Hyatt to discuss design opportunities and problem solving away from the spotlight:

VISION Here we are at Clovelly. It's a long way from the hustle and bustle of The Block. Did you miss the absence of adrenaline?

JULIAN BRENCHLEY Well, The Block's hard and fast. It's very concentric around the TV show, of course, that's the nature of the beast. Now how we approach other projects, it's a case by case basis. It's looking at context. It's looking at sense of place and the outcome. This is a townhouse development for a developer, so there's a certain outcome required.

This sort of project must feel like slow-motion.

Look, I suppose in essence, it's no different to The Block. This has a longer gestation period. As does the real world as opposed to the reality TV show, which is a condensed microcosm of the real world, if you like.

“Two components of this building are the northwest aspect and the terrace. It's working really well with the glass. The idea is it's an indoor/outdoor living environment. It's a quite strong response, and Viridian's product works fabulously for that particular area.”

“The complexities of the planes and how that works and the simple finishes of formed concrete with the glass, and chrome patch fittings all come together into something we’re quite proud of.”

JULIAN BRENCHLEY, ARCHITECT





There's a general philosophical approach and of course the commonly observed pragmatic approach to such projects.

There's a pragmatic approach to looking at developments such as this. I really come at it from the point of view that I'm designing for a house that I'd want to live in. That's the end of the story. I look for amenity. I look for sources of natural light. I look for cross ventilation. I look for features. I look for a sense of play, a sense of arrival.

And the representation of the design is surely important?

Yes, there's theatre of architecture. Obviously, within a budget, that's another consideration. Generally, it boils down to, at the end of the day, what would I be happy coming home to, and what would I be happy raising my children in.

For many architects site is one of the great drivers of their design. In a suburban setting, it becomes a little trickier. You've got to consider the interior amenity as much as the outward amenity and opportunity.

How do you balance all that on such a site?

Site and the site context are among the most fundamental things you have to deal with. Particularly in this sort of suburban setting and urban environment where everyone is virtually on top of each other.

I take the viewpoint that a building has to be a good neighbour. And you have to be a good neighbour.

Inward, outward amenity, all these considerations come into the play. Are you looking at someone's swimming pool? Do you want to be looking at someone's swimming pool? Do you want them looking at your swimming pool?

You have always championed the idea of neighbourly consideration when in close proximity to others.

Privacy and acoustic amenity, these things are real issues, especially in a built up area. Where can you push things? Where can you pull things? Where can you go crazy? Where shouldn't you be allowed to go crazy? But again, it's about a polite response to a built up environment. At the end of the day, you'll be putting your garbage out with the neighbours, so you've got to be able to nod and get on with them. I think that's a critical part of being a human in a human environment.

In essence what is the design approach here?

We've been able to achieve a lovely northwest facing row of terraces. Glass is a great tool there. The sliding doors are great. That affords acoustic and visual privacy. On the top level we've explored the idea of general privacy with this veil or this second skin. Two components of this building are the northwest aspect and the terrace. It's working really well with the glass. The idea is it's an indoor/outdoor living environment. It's a quite strong response, and Viridian's product works fabulously for that particular area.

And the interior?

The second component, of course, is the private zone veiled by the exterior screen of vertical blades. This acts in two ways. It gives partial visual privacy, but the real reason is environmental, to boost its sustainability. There's less sun-load and heat loss on the glass facade upstairs. In a nutshell it's a dual environmental response of screens and effectively cutting direct heat loads while retaining tremendous clarity. On the lower level glass accentuates the indoor outdoor feel.







“I look for amenity. I look for sources of natural light.
I look for cross ventilation. I look for features.
I look for a sense of play, a sense of arrival.”

JULIAN BRENCHLEY, ARCHITECT



**These aren't the old-fashioned enclosed townhouses.
Here doorways open up far and wide.**

What it comes down to, it's selling the concept to my client in the outset. It's a house I want to live in, and I'm happy to present it. I present a townhouse not so much as a series of five in a row. I present them as homes, individual homes, and each one has its attributes. The front one and the end one both have these magnificent gardens.

Feeling connected to your work, believing in it is clearly important.

That's absolutely true. The middle townhouses for example have their own character and their own courtyards. I'm happy to present it that way. Each one is a home. I looked at how to elaborate those in terms of their access to the amenity that I'm talking about. So that's sliding doors, and not just one or two, but the whole expanse of the terrace. It's about coming home to something you love, but then also having that wow moment. It's quite a special place for that reason. I feel confident when I'm presenting that to a client and quite happy about the outcome.

**Glass isn't always the obvious way to create a wall,
or complete a space.**

Glass is an amazing tool in a building project, but you have to know how and where to use it. The devil's in the detail here, they're not houses on top of each other, they're houses next to each other. Designing houses on top of each other means there are limitations on how you can use glass to deal with fire separation. These are technical issues.

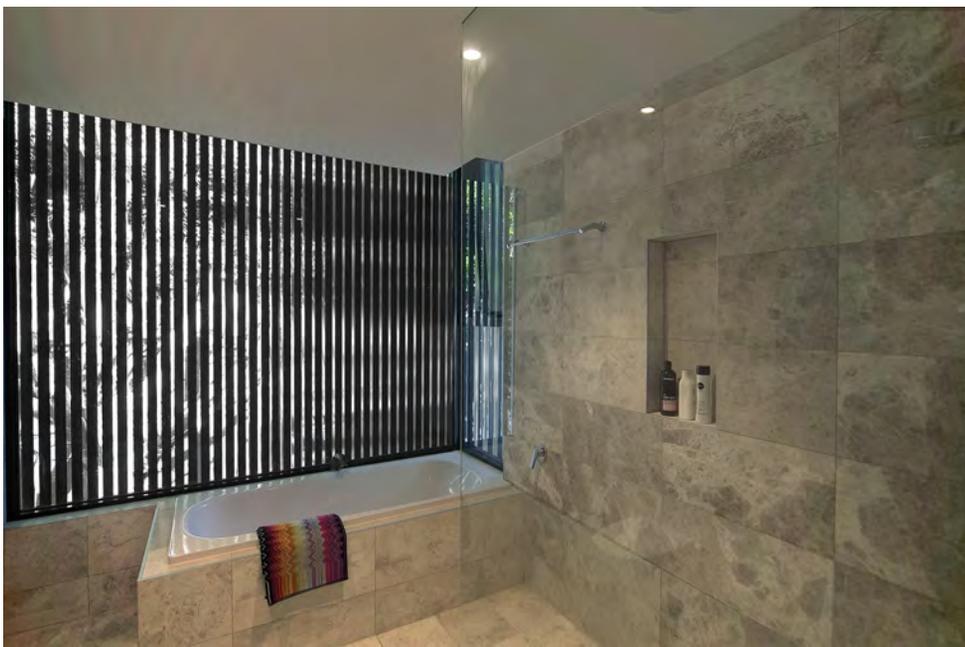
The result appears uncommonly lightweight.

When you are dealing with houses next to each other, you can more easily use floor to ceiling glass because you have no vertical separation issues from a building code point of view. It opens up plenty of design opportunities. It's part of the dualistic approach to this building. Glass below, a veiled glass event upstairs, and then upstairs again for attics.

Upstairs the bedrooms have floor to ceiling glass so you don't feel like you're sleeping in a state school classroom. As a designer you can often be playful and provide a bit more theatre and sense of humour in architecture – if there's such a thing. We use screens on the outside that fold back. This permits a really interesting control and playful use of light. Very rarely do you get to do that in stacked consideration or stacked typology of architecture. So that's been a lot of fun in this building.

Your glass balustrade staircase exemplifies material consistency and minimal material palette throughout.

We followed through with the interior so that the handrails for the staircase are a frameless glass event. It looks like a folded glass sculpture on the lower level. The complexities of the planes and how that works and the simple finishes of formed concrete with the glass, and chrome patch fittings all come together into something we're quite proud of.





“I take the viewpoint that a building has to be a good neighbour. And you have to be a good neighbour. Inward, outward amenity, all these considerations come into the play.”

JULIAN BRENCHLEY, ARCHITECT



PROJECT

Clovelly Townhouses

ARCHITECT

Julian Brenchley

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

ABC Consultants Pty Ltd

BUILDER

Solitarii

GLASS SUPPLIER

Viridian

PRINCIPAL GLASS COMPONENTS

Viridian EVantage™ and VTough™

BUDGET

\$2.5 million



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