

When painter Stephen Bambury and architect Pip Cheshire go surfing, they discuss art and architecture. Inevitably, they have now collaborated on a house. DAVID MITCHELL admires its purity and flinty authenticity.

MICHAEL NG takes the photos.

Stephen's my best friend really," Pip Cheshire confides. "We go surfing nearly every weekend. We met at a dinner party about 15 years ago, and got into a very intense discussion about architecture. He knows more about architecture than most architects - he's very well-read and well-travelled. And tough. God, he's ruthless."

The house Cheshire designed for Stephen and Jan Bambury is tough too. You see a concrete wall on the street, and a skinny, slightly gawky galvanised box behind, with a couple of big oaks hanging over. Bambury says, "The site was a narrow gully covered in trees. I said to Jan, 'We're going to buy this.' She didn't even get out of the car. I was going off to Europe. So just in case we couldn't get a house on the section Pip and Jan had to work out the basics of it while I was away." Later, he and Cheshire chewed over every detail. (An hour with these guys reminds me that architecture is a very serious business.)

You approach the house down a long wall of tin and flat fibreglass on a raised path of grille flooring, and turn smartly right at the front door. No giveaways about the interior. Then you're in. Soft

Architects Pip Cheshire (right) and Kendon McGrail: pleasure in raw materials, and an aesthetic rooted in an ethic.

the certainty of
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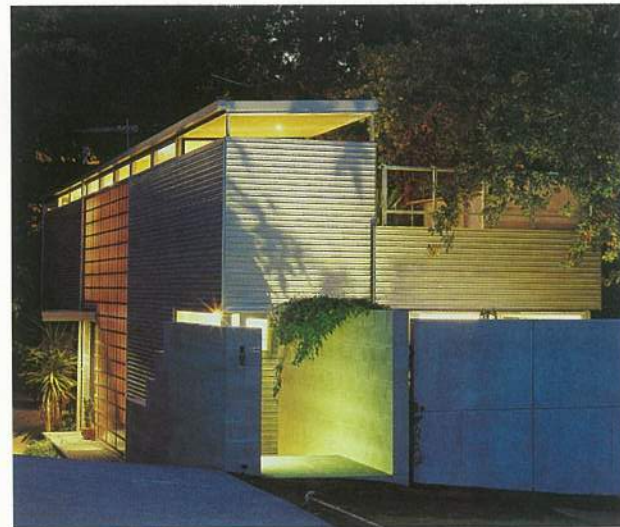


light through the fibreglass onto a ply stair, oak leaves on a deck that eats into the house, and to the right the living area. The plan is simple, but knowing - bedrooms at one end, living at the other, and a deck between them. It's functionally somewhat loose (you can eat here and there), but privacy and display are in careful balance. "Our bedroom is right down the back, digging into the deepest recesses of the cave," says Bambury. He's no simple rationalist.

I think of the Case Study houses that were made famous by Arts and Architecture magazine in the 1950s. Here is the same pleasure in raw materials. There is black vinyl flooring in the bedrooms, and industrial floor joists of wood and steel are exposed over the living room. But this is not just a piece of that modernist styling that seems to be everywhere these days. It's an aesthetic rooted in an ethic.



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Bambury spent years in the wilderness as a painter while post-modernists strutted the popular stage. Now he's recognised, and his paintings sell. "The avant-garde has always been populated by very few," he says wryly. "Great practitioners don't reinvent themselves every decade!" He talks with feeling of the pioneer modern artist Malevich - of his "profound belief in the certainty of abstraction and universality".

And that's what I can't help noticing about him and Cheshire. They believe in the "certainty of abstraction". It shows in every detail of this house. You see it in the play of volumes, and solids and voids, in the elemental ramp and stair and sliding door, in the set-out of screws on the walls, and even in the pattern of zinc on the galvanised steel and the random lay of strands in the wall of translucent fibreglass.

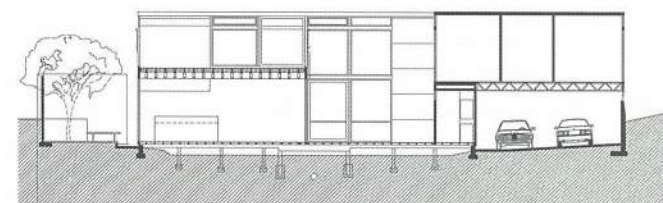
Cheshire's right-hand man Kendon McGrail can take the credit for a good deal of this. As Cheshire puts it, "He has a steadfast focus on uniting intention and detail that drives the whole project."

Both feel that the centre of gravity of world art and architecture has shifted west - from Europe and the eastern United States to California, and now to Japan, and Auckland too. "Art and architecture are moving closer together than they've been for centuries," says Bambury. "The problem is how to carry modernism on without the religion."

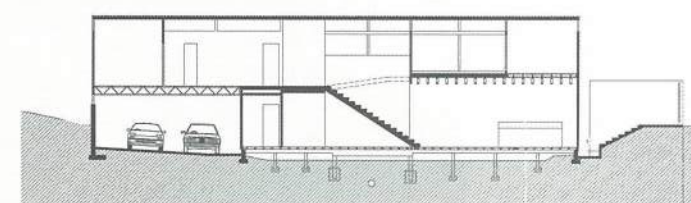
This artful piece of architecture shows us one way of doing it. It's stripped of local references in a way that most architect-designed houses are not. "Nationalism is the next movement we'll have to avoid," says Bambury, always on the lookout for the enemy.

The Bambury house is very direct, undecorated, sparsely furnished and

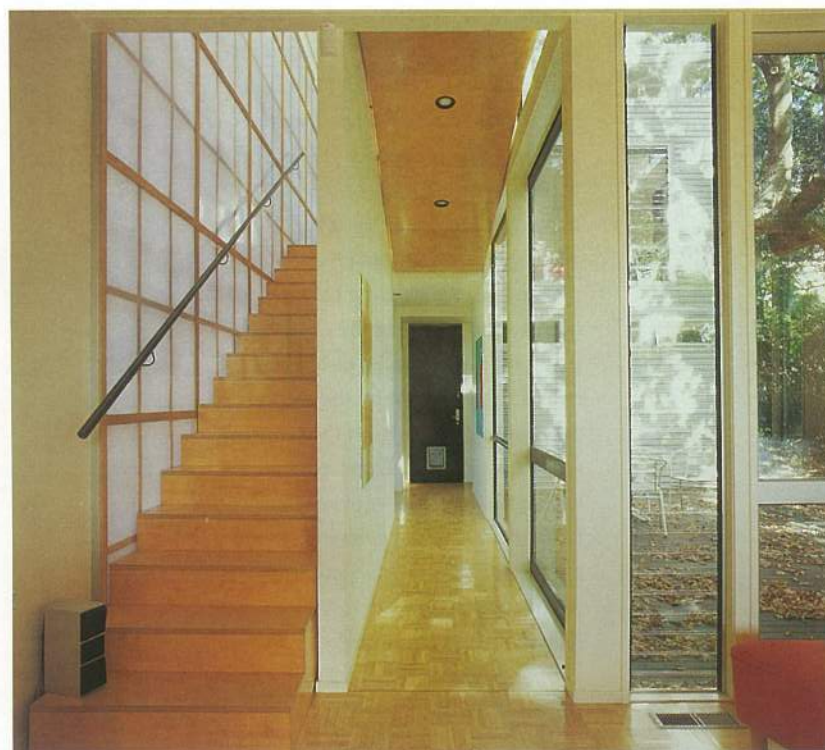
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paraphernalia and two polished saddles evoke an absent horse. It's the only true oddity in the house - a secret compartment revealing an unexpected life. But then it wasn't the practical brief that was particularly unusual or demanding of the architect for this house: it was the architectural theory that had to drive his every gesture. The architect and his clients are true believers, so their house has a flinty authenticity. It's what pleases me most about it.

"Stephen and I even talk about art and architecture while we're surfing - waiting for a wave," Cheshire tells me. It shows. ■

junk-free. Certain doors in the kitchen cupboards have been subtly coloured, but they are not decorated - they're simply part of a larger composition, that also includes a few art-works. Here is the design attitude of Rietveld and Eames and early Le Corbusier, easily rendered in the materials of our time. Not that comfort is entirely eschewed. In fact, the clients objected to an early plan which called for them to "streak naked across the lounge to the shower." Though acquainted with the kind of ambitions that require "shuffling" outside with a spade, Bambury found himself "raising my hand for that bourgeois conceit - the bathroom". He enjoys three lavatories in his new house.

Jan has a tack room not much bigger than a cupboard, where equestrian

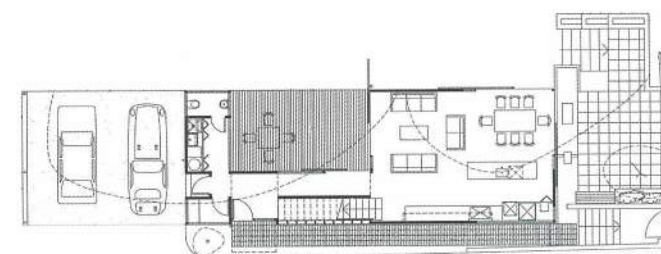
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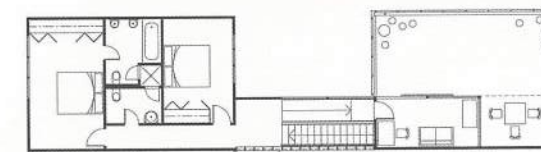
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THE CERTAINTY OF ABSTRACTION SELECTED CREDITS

Architects Jasmax **Design team** Pip Cheshire, Kendon McGrail **Contractors** Anne Taylor Builders, Bruce Tantrum **Courtyard contractor** Craig Morrison and Russell Hughes **Water feature consultant** Heritage Landscapes **Roofing** Nuralite **Exterior cladding** Dimonclad **Exterior joinery** Nulook (Henderson) **Interior joinery** de Bruin Judge **Flooring** Hills Flooring, Jacobsens **Tapware** italia **Design** **Kitchen appliances** P & M **Appliances** Tiles Brassell & Ojala **Lighting** Modus Architectural Lighting, Alpha Quality Lighting



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

