

MACDONALD ROAD  
HOUSE  
BY PHILIP STEJSKAL  
ARCHITECTURE



# Contemplative and brave, this new house on a prominent corner site in Perth eschews the suburban status quo to connect its occupants with their community and climate.

Words by Stephanie McGann  
Photography by Bo Wong

There's something special about the sunlight in Perth. Shepherding the day, it reaches the west coast having crossed Australia's great land mass, ripening fruits in the wake of the Darling Scarp before puckering the bare shoulders of walkers, blinding evening beachgoers and, finally, resting beneath the Indian Ocean's horizon. It is fierce and unforgiving, and yet its richness and clarity make it a daily source of joy. Perth residents Adam and Kerry had long envisaged a home that would welcome those conditions, one that would work with rather than against the generous Western Australian sun.

Technically minded and well-researched in passive solar design, seasoned renovators Adam and Kerry engaged Phil and the team at Philip Stejskal Architecture to realize their dream of an energy-efficient home that would effectively be a downsizer for the couple and their 15-year-old whippets, Joey and Bandit. Located in the riverside suburb of Applecross, the new house replaced a triplex whose siblings remain, clinging together on a neighbouring block, their low-lying brick and tile forms typical of Perth's more established suburbs. Macdonald Road House occupies a corner site facing a roundabout that channels local traffic toward a quaint shopping village and, beyond, the river foreshore.

For the new house to capitalize on the all-important spoils of a northern face, it had to embrace its prominent location and open up to the site's public, rounded corner. This spawned an unusual parallelogram-shaped plan. "We were puzzling about how we were going to get the house to face north on this site," says Kerry, who had initially wondered whether she and Adam were brave enough for the unusual plan proposed by Phil. "We drew a line where we needed to be, parallel to north," Phil explains. "And it made sense to repeat or offset that line because that gave us a little courtyard at the back of the house."

Macdonald Road House is built on the land of the Whadjuk Noongar people.	Perth, WA	New house	Couple	3	+ 2 powder rooms	Site 350 m <sup>2</sup> Floor 173 m <sup>2</sup>	Design 1 y 6 m Build 1 y 6 m
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It might appear simple but this is a hard-working plan. The ground floor operates much like a one-bedroom apartment, while a smaller second storey for guest accommodation is tucked into the apex of the roofline. This arrangement, informed by the principles of universal access, serves Adam and Kerry's desire to age in place, to have all they need now and all they are likely to need in the future on one level. It also allows the home's roof to taper toward each single-storey neighbour, so as to avoid overpowering them in mass. The resulting geometry is at once modest and powerful, and it enhances the building's dialogue with its community. Viewed from across the roundabout, the home's tapering edges appear like arms opening to embrace the suburban village. A street-side vegetable garden and sections of chain mesh fence add to this friendly gesture.

The home's front garden doubles as its main outdoor living space, where publicness and privacy are brought into balance by a predominantly solid bagged brick wall, slivered here and there for subtle connection with the street. Phil and his team worked with long-time collaborator Anngi Tran Landscape Architecture Studio to create a garden of low-maintenance native plants set among limestone from Donnybrook in Western Australia's south-west. A spotted gum verandah wraps around the home's eastern and northern elevations and is poised to enjoy the garden as well as the cheerful chatter of passersby.

Yet another hard-working element of the design, this verandah also mediates sunlight and associated heat, with operable jarrah shutters above ground level that can be closed to the ferocious summer sun and opened to invite gentler winter light inside. "The shutters are particularly important to our reinterpretation of the traditional verandah, improving it," Phil says. "In a traditional farmhouse, the verandah works with the brickwork's thermal mass to keep the interior cool in summer, but it doesn't work particularly well in winter because of its low brim. At Macdonald Road House, the operable shutters of the double-height verandah are part of the house's clever passive solar design.

Inside, the materials are simple and organic and make vernacular sense in requirements of Adam and Kerry's brief. Crucial to the home's passive solar ambitions, bricks are used for the ground floor walls. Bagged and painted, they are judiciously set out in a hit-and-miss pattern ("a connection to the breezeblocks of the old sixties houses we love," says Adam) in places where cross-breezes and ventilation can be optimized. Birch plywood joinery reoccurs throughout every space with a consistency that imparts a relaxed yet ordered sense of calm, as do the many apertures to the surrounding gardens.

Macdonald Road House represents something that Perth's sprawling sunburnt suburbs need more of: homes that eschew the status quo with equal bouts of contemplation and bravery. Undoubtedly, part of this home's success lies in its passive solar credentials, underpinned by a careful responsiveness to climate and a philosophy shared by both architect and client. But it also lies in the bravery of the clients to diminish their house's footprint, to face the busy corner, to activate the front yard and to engage with the neighbours with wholeheartedness and humility. ☺

## Products

**Roofing:** Fielders Prominence in Zinalume  
**External walls:** Midland Brick Longreach bricks, bagged and painted; Fielders Prominence in Zinalume  
**Internal walls:** Birch plywood from Worldwide Timber Traders in Osmo oil; CSR plasterboard; Midland Brick Longreach bricks, bagged and painted  
**Windows:** Victorian ash from Worldwide Timber Traders in Cutek; Alspec aluminium frames, powdercoated; double-glazing  
**Doors:** Alspec aluminium, powdercoated  
**Flooring:** Burnished and sealed concrete; Signature Floors Victorian ash in Osmo oil  
**Lighting:** Unios lights  
**Kitchen:** Siemens Studio Line pyrolytic oven and induction cooktop; Schweigen rangehood; Miele dishwasher; Fisher and Paykel fridge  
**Bathroom:** Tapware and fittings from Reece  
**Heating and cooling:** Amuheat under floor hydronic heating; Daikin heat-recovery ventilation system and ducted reverse-cycle airconditioner  
**External elements:** Sandstone boulders and slabs; basalt gravel

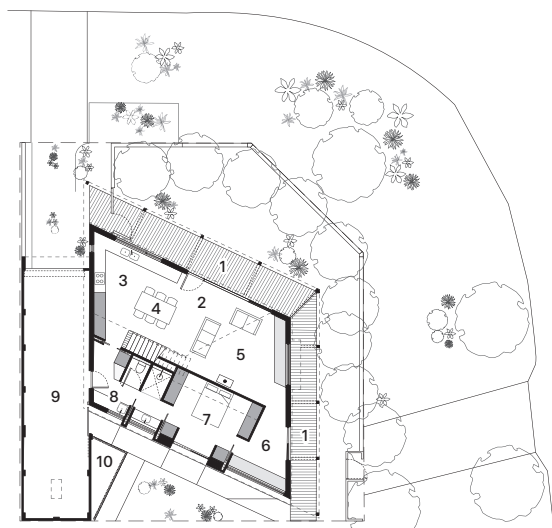
01 Macdonald Road House has a roof that tapers down to each side, so as not to overpower its single-storey neighbours.



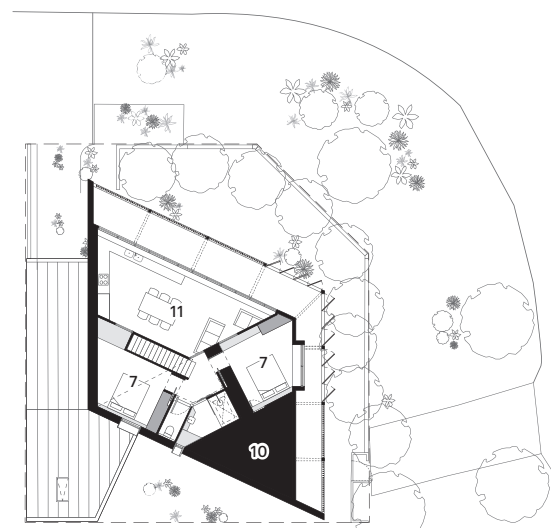
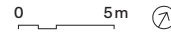
02



03



Ground floor 1:400



First floor 1:400

- 1 Verandah
- 2 Entry
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Dining
- 5 Living
- 6 Study
- 7 Bedroom
- 8 Laundry
- 9 Garage
- 10 Services
- 11 Void

02 The ground floor operates much like a one-bedroom apartment, serving the clients' desire to age in place.

03 A consistent palette of birch plywood, brick and polished concrete imparts a calming sense of cohesion throughout the home.



04



05



06

*The home's geometry is at once modest and powerful, and enhances its dialogue with the community. Its tapering edges appear like arms opening to embrace the suburban village.*

04 The main bedroom opens to a leafy rear courtyard, a happy by-product of the home's parallelogram-shaped plan.

05 All that the clients need now, and expect to need into the future, is located on the ground floor, while guest accommodation is located upstairs.

06 Operable jarrah shutters above the verandah can be closed to block the heat of summer and opened to admit gentler winter light.

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**Engineer** Andreotta Cardenosa Consulting Engineers  
**Landscaping** Anngi Tran Landscape Architecture Studio  
**Lighting** HS Recreations

# MACDONALD ROAD HOUSE

## MEET THE OWNERS

WORKING WITH AN ARCHITECT

Adam and Kerry Mason knew exactly what they wanted when downsizing: an energy-efficient home with passive solar design. To make their dream a reality, they joined forces with Philip Stejskal Architecture. Stephanie McGann catches up with the Masons about living in their new home and working with Phil.

Photography by Bo Wong



01 To build a timeless and unique home, Adam and Kerry Mason collaborated with Philip Stejskal Architecture.

02 The energy-efficient home's northern face forms an engaging silhouette.

03 Both Kerry and Adam enjoy their home's natural light.

**Stephanie McGann** Could you tell me a little about yourselves and what you wanted in your new home?

**Adam Mason** Kerry and I have been renovating houses together since the late 1980s and we've gained a great deal of experience in energy-efficient and passive solar design. I'm technically orientated and Kerry did studies in the 1990s, through which we came across the ideas behind passive solar design. It made a lot of sense to us. We're downsizing with this house and we wanted a very energy-efficient home that we can age in, which gives us all the spaces we need now and are likely to need in the future. We wanted a home that was built to engage and work with the sun, rather than oppose it. Where we're at now is the culmination of 30 years of hard work and we're ecstatic about it.

**Kerry Mason** I like to live simply. I don't need an enormous kitchen or a huge walk-in wardrobe. I wanted a minimal home that was beautiful and timeless and would remain attractive over a long period of time.

**SM** That sentiment certainly comes through in spades in this house.

**AM** We've watched the house grow and we're here every day. I would love to have experienced walking in here for the first time, having never seen it before.

**SM** Given your extensive renovation experience, what led you to engage an architect on this project and what attracted you to Philip Stejskal Architecture in particular?

**AM** It was the desire to build something different, something timeless.

**KM** We like things that are well designed. We found Philip online and his reviews said that he's a very good communicator, which is important to us. And it was so collaborative. Philip was open to our ideas and willing to listen to us.



02



03

**SM** What was it about your first meeting with Philip that reassured you that you would work well together?

**AM** Just a connection. You know when things are right, don't you? Intuition, I suppose. In my research, I'd come across people who were advertising the fact that they were specialists in passive solar design, but I looked at their designs and they didn't appeal to me. I thought, I need to find someone who can give me the design I want while embedding the foundations of passive solar design. I loved Phil's work and I felt that we connected early on.

**SM** What are you most proud of in this project?

**AM** I'm proud to live in an architect-designed home that everybody seems to love. It's an achievement for us both and a testament to our hard work. We've spent most of our weekends for the past 30 years working on our homes, researching, reading and learning.

**KM** It's just a beautiful house to come home to.

**AM** It really has surpassed our expectations.

**SM** As you go about living in this house, what elements bring you the most delight?

**KM** The light. It's a small home, yet it feels open and connected to the garden.

**AM** The light we get through the house in winter is extraordinary. I love the connection to Applecross Retirement Village over the road as well. You can hear people chattering and

laughing in the background. Everyone's always in a good mood over there.

**SM** Are there aspects of the design that you might not have imagined had you not worked with Phil and the team?

**KM** The shape of the house, definitely. We were puzzling for a long time about how we were going to get the house to face north on this site. Phil came up with the floor plan and when he presented it to us, I was thinking, "Are we brave enough?" because it was so different.

**SM** What advice would you give someone who is thinking about engaging an architect?

**AM** I think it's important to be well informed and to make it clear to the architect what you're trying to achieve. We had no idea what our house was going to look like but we had some solid ideas about things we wanted incorporated into the design and we were able to confidently leave the rest to Phil and his team. It was a collaborative project and if we didn't like something, we felt we could say so.

**SM** Would you use an architect again?

**KM** Definitely. An architect brings incredible value. You wouldn't achieve the same level of building and detail without one.

**AM** If you want something different, then very much so. ☺