

# THE LOCAL PROJECT

N°17

Architecture and Design of Australia, New Zealand and North America

The House at Lizard Island JDA Co House of Horns WOJR Emerald Sound Luigi Rosselli Architects and Atelier Alwill  
Hilltop Flack Studio Ararat House SJB Mandeville Canyon Marmol Radziner Whale Beach Shaun Lockyer Architects  
Glass Ridge House OWIU Design Dune House Gezellig Interiors and Architecture Bureau Yarra Valley House JAM Architects

# Chaucer Residence Pohio Adams Architects

The Fisher & Paykel Series





Pohio Adams Architects has extended a Federation home in St Kilda to include a striking modern pavilion encased in glass blocks.

**Words**

Millie Thwaites

**Photography**

Timothy Kaye

**Styling**

Karin Bochnik

Christopher Adams and Bianca Pohio of Pohio Adams Architects were engaged by their client – a former architect who attended architecture school with Pohio in the 1990s – to oversee the renovation and extension of a Federation home in St Kilda, Melbourne. For the husband-and-wife team, working with an architect client was an unusual proposition, but it ultimately brought a rigour to the design process, the depth of which is evident in the dynamic result.

“It was very flattering to receive a commission like this, but it was also challenging because you have a very educated client,” says Adams. “The advantage is that they’re easily able to visualise and grab hold of ideas and references, but we were always trying to apply a discipline to rationalise and simplify the brief.”

The clients had a clear vision for a courtyard-style house that presented discreetly to the street and unfolded spectacularly at the rear. Counting Pierre Chareau’s Maison de Verre and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion as key references, the ambitious concept was further complicated by the site’s compact size, heritage-protected facade and narrow rear laneway. “The briefing process became quite detailed, and it wove together the functional requirements with a sophisticated overlay of what the clients wanted to achieve architecturally,” says Adams.

The resulting home, which places emphasis on contrast while celebrating old and new equally, belies these constraints. Fluctuations in light and volume help to generate a lively experience, particularly when traversing the home from front to back. “Light and space are always key considerations for us, and to make those qualities sing, you need to set up juxtapositions.”

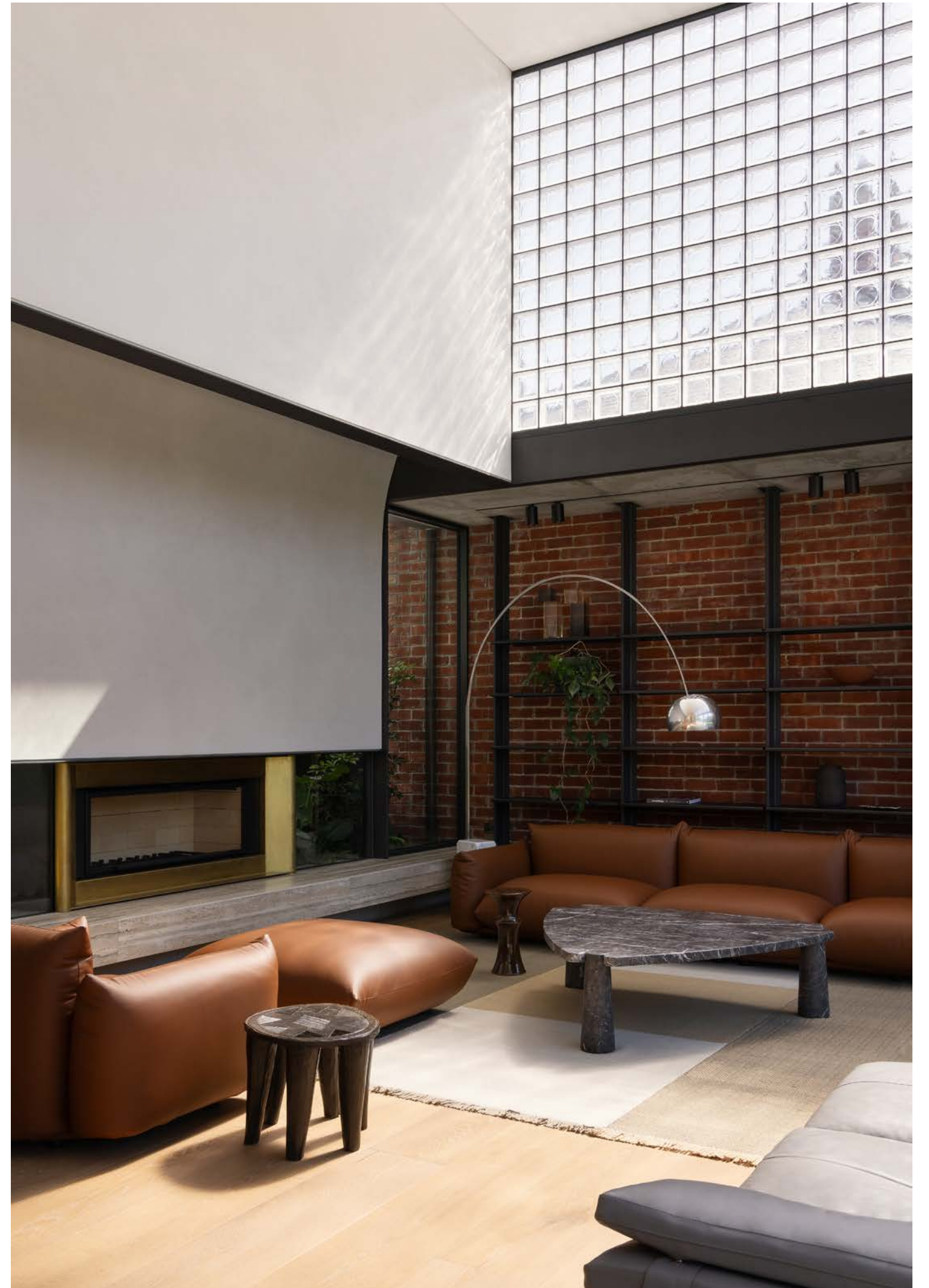


The living space is flooded with light, which streams in through large expanses of glass blocks on the northern and southern sides.

Restored to its former grandeur, the facade features fresh tuckpointing and newly laid tessellated tiles. The contemporary extension is intentionally hidden from view, allowing the handsome original structure to sit humbly yet proudly amid the streetscape. Inside, the front rooms retain their formal arrangement and detailing, with pressed-metal ceilings and restored cornices, architraves and skirting boards, while new pale oak floorboards and Venetian plaster offer a contemporary edge.

In a small but significant move, Pohio Adams raised the heights of the door frames, introducing increased fluidity without disrupting the original framework.

The threshold between old and new is an important juncture and it's accentuated by a shift in scale and hue. "You pop out into the living space, which is washed with light and has six-metre-high ceilings. It's a contrast from the cooler, dimmer rooms at the front." The entire north elevation is glazed; on the ground floor, Vitrocsa sliding panels open onto a courtyard and a travertine-lined pool, and glass blocks overhead wrap the northern and southern sides "providing a watery, dappled light". Reflected light from the pool also dances across the ceiling, animating this vast space and placing the landscape and its changing conditions at the centre of the internal experience.





A six-metre-long travertine island, statement lighting, large expanses of timber and sleek Fisher & Paykel appliances define the kitchen.

Deeper into the plan, the narrow galley kitchen sits below a mezzanine level. Sharing the footprint with a large scullery, it is condensed in height and width yet prominent in plan and experience. “It’s in a pivotal position as it’s part of a circulation space and it’s centrally located so you’ve got this direct visual and physical connection with the pool, living space and kids’ rumpus room at the end.”

Encased in timber, the kitchen seems to be carved from the forms that surround it. A six-metre-long travertine island bench and sleek Fisher & Paykel appliances denote its inherent function as a place of gathering, eating and cooking; however, it is decidedly sculptural and almost abstract in appearance. As a space to traverse and pause, it demanded a deeply nuanced response regarding aesthetics and utility, and unifying these qualities was Pohio Adams’ defining challenge.

“It’s a very functional kitchen but it has a calm and restrained approach to how that works and that’s because the induction cooktop is a simple black surface that sits perfectly flush

with the travertine. The ovens do the same on the back wall – they’re all black with a low-key display and the mirrored surface gives you a subtlety. Compositionally, it’s beautiful,” says the architect.

The layout revolves around the monolithic travertine island. Housing several appliances, it is both a workhorse and striking architectural element. “Long, linear pulls keep it very functional but aesthetically calm.” Stools at one end invite interaction and, in lieu of a back bench and overhead cupboards, an opening in the rear timber-clad wall leads to a generously sized scullery.

Though hidden from view, the scullery, replete with its own skylight, has been conceived by Pohio Adams with the same meticulous approach to detail and layout: “It’s no chore being in the scullery.” Housing a Column Refrigerator and Freezer, a second sink and plenty of bench space to accommodate smaller appliances, it’s “a pleasant and functional space” that mirrors the level of resolve and simplicity at the front of the house.



There is a staggering diversity of spaces at Chaucer Residence; a discovery made even more surprising considering that the modernist-inspired extension isn't seen from the street.



The subterranean living room is an ideal space for entertaining, complete with wet bar and wall-to-wall wine rack, and a porthole offering a peek into the pool.



Beyond the kitchen, Chaucer Residence continues to unfold with the same intent, and a significant portion of the program is contained at the rear. There's a study on the mezzanine, as well as a guest bedroom, bathroom and private roof terraces. The basement contains a powder room, laundry and a second living area. In the latter, a wet bar replete with a CoolDrawer, a wall-to-wall wine rack and a polished chrome and brass Gaggia coffee machine transform the underground room into a clandestine entertaining space. And it is anything but gloomy; natural light filters through circular glass blocks set flush in the kitchen floor above, and a playful porthole window provides views into the pool.

There is a staggering diversity of spaces at Chaucer Residence; a discovery made even more surprising considering the modernist-inspired extension isn't seen from the street. The takeaway, however, is not that of a superfluous piece of architecture but of an aspirational brief for a family home realised with conviction.

**Architecture and interior design** Pohio Adams Architects

**Build** Bacchus Constructions

**Landscape design** Grounded Gardens

**Engineering** Partridge

**Joinery** Fine Form Joinery