

# Balancing the material palette

This challenging site provided the prime location for builder and architect to combine their skills and come up with a fluid design that embraces strong materiality.

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Architect Taras Wolf is proud of working with his client, who was also the builder, to create a contemporary look for this house, rather than acceding to an original preference for a more traditionally styled residence. This five bedroom luxury home in Melbourne's south east is composed of a series of interlocking rectilinear forms that are arranged so they cascade down the steeply sloping site, mirrored by the adjacent water features, opening the house up to views of a bushland reserve.

From the road, the steep downward slope of the driveway accesses a four car garage. This space is teamed with a home theatre and cellar on the lower ground floor of the house. Internally, a generous stair connects this level to the



main living area of the ground floor. Externally, the ground floor is reached by a raised timber walkway that connects the street, via an unfenced native garden, to the house's front door. The multi-level ground floor steps down from the entry level to a formal living and dining area, and then to the informal living, dining and kitchen space, with further stairs leading to the outdoor entertaining area at the rear of the house. The upper floor contains four bedrooms and three bathrooms, including the generous master suite, and another living area. Arranged around the house are a series of water features that echo the levels of the house, culminating in the swimming pool that sits between the living areas and outdoor deck and which can be accessed from the ground level living area through a massive folding door.

Wolf says that composing the constituent pieces of the house was a lengthy process, and required arranging and rearranging the elements to finally arrive at the resolution he felt suited the site. The flat roofs reinforce the

**Left:** A render highlights the different materials used in the project. **Above:** The entry view mirrors the house's original design rendering. **Below:** The master bedroom is suspended high above the ground.



## Make it work

*"The house was nearly finished when we found it and, apart from the bricks, we loved the contemporary look and the way the spaces work. The house opens out in tiers from the entry, and you can look back to the entry from the entertaining spaces at the rear and it's like looking up at a stage. There's also a wonderful amount of light throughout the house." ST*



### Architect Statement

"We originally intended to use stacked stone for the cladding of this house but, in the end, we felt brick was a better choice as it has a timelessness that won't date. The neutral tone of the bricks was also important for this reason, with the Daniel Robertson 50mm high Buff Blend Roman bricks providing the warm earthy finish, and the scale of these bricks creating the kind of reference point I needed for the volumes and spaces of the house. I think brick always gives a house substance and solidity, as well as inherent meaning and symbolism, and these values contribute to the timelessness of brick as a material." **Taras Wolf**



**?** *Why do the different materials work?*  
 "We've always loved the look of these bricks and had dreamed of living in a house that featured them. There's a number of materials used in this house that give it such a distinctive look, and the bricks are very low maintenance... they don't need painting!" **ST**



► rectangularity of the composition, and the palette of materials distinguishes the discrete elements. The original design intent to use stacked stone as an external wall finish was abandoned in favour of brick, and it is this material that ultimately ties the elements of the house together. Brick provides the exterior wall finish for the lower ground and ground floors as well as defining the driveway, retaining walls and external entertaining areas.

As a result, brick provides a literal base (and a metaphorical 'bass note') for the house, creating a background against which elements of aluminium, cement render, timber and steel are contrasted. This effect has been enhanced by the further decision to use one type of brick throughout. The neutral tone of the bricks harmonises with the timber window surrounds and adds a balance note to the greys and blacks of concrete and steel.

Both architect and builder were adamant about using neutral tones, particularly for the bricks, so that the materials would outlast trends in colour.

The builder had used the selected Daniel Robertson Buff Blend Roman bricks in other projects and he cites their earthy, neutral tones as part of these bricks' attraction. In addition, the 50mm height of the Roman bricks gives them an elegant horizontality that enlivens the exteriors. The narrow proportions of the bricks play with perceptions of the scale of the house and add a level of detail to the walls.

This classical reference of the Roman bricks is one that Wolf acknowledges, enjoying the sense of history and solidity embodied in the material. So this contemporary style house could ultimately be seen to spring from a very classic source.

**Top left:** The entry view.  
**Centre:** The building's strong brick base. **Left:** Steel stairs resembling a single folded sheet of metal.

### Builder Statement

"This project was an opportunity for both the architect and myself to experiment and be creative. I wanted it to be a house that was distinctly Australian and we worked together to make it contemporary. I have used Daniel Robertson bricks since 1999 and, in recent years, I've used the 50mm Roman bricks. They're very different to mainstream bricks because of their distinctive appearance and earthy, neutral tones; they've become part of my signature look. In this house I used double brick for the lower ground level and brick veneer for the ground floor, then lightweight cladding for the upper level so brick is both a structural element and a finish. I'll continue to use these bricks because of their strength and look. Most houses in this area are conventional and this one stands out, it has a 'wow factor' that engages the emotions." **Simon Theobald, En Vogue Developments**



*"Working with a steep slope, we created multiple split level living spaces, so while the house feels open planned, it's also well zoned into separate areas defined by volume and materials." **TW***



**THE FACTS**

**Who lives here:** Simon Theobald  
**Project name:** Hollywood House  
**Architect:** Taras Wolf,  
 Wolf Architects,  
 www.wolfdesigns.com.au  
**Builder:** En Vogue Developments  
**Brickwork:** Daniel Robertson  
 50mm Roman bricks  
**Design:** 6 months  
**Construction:** 12 months  
**Project's floor area:** 480sqm

**KEY MATERIAL INFORMATION**

**Balustrades:** Stainless steel  
**Ceilings:** Plasterboard  
**Cladding:** Compressed cement  
 sheet, timber boards,  
 rendered foam and bricks  
**Columns:** Surdex Steel  
**Facade:** Cement render and brick  
 by Trowel On P/L  
**Feature wall:** Lasercut metal  
 screen from Form A Sign  
**Kitchen bench:** Calacutta  
 Marble from Classique Stone  
**Stair:** Steel  
**Water tank:** 23,000 litre from  
 Bushranger  
**Windows:** Timber framed Nu  
 Lite Windows



**Top left:** A view from the kitchen back towards the entry. **Top right:** The bathroom's generous space. **Above:** A view into the kitchen from the pool. **Left:** This space was designed for entertaining with high ceilings, a pool and great views.

