



Paul McGillick

**Alex Popov – Buildings and Projects**

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Australia may not, at first glance, seem a likely place for the principles and strategies of Scandinavian architecture to take root, but Alex Popov's cosmopolitan provenance typifies the cultural eclecticism of the country.

Born in Shanghai to Russian parents, Popov moved to Australia a decade later and eventually completed his first degree in Sydney. In 1968, however, he moved to Denmark where he completed a master's degree in architecture and worked for Henning Larsen and Jørn Utzon before returning to Australia in 1982. In Australia, where domestic architecture was for so long dominated by British models imported without adaptation, Popov is linked to a new wave of architects who have applied the principles of Scandinavian architecture to create an increasingly distinctive body of Australian domestic architecture.

Although the spirit of Scandinavian architecture is crucial, Popov's work also assimilates equally important influences from China and Japan and – most significantly – the light, topography and bushland flora of Australia's eastern seaboard.

Popov has discovered that the open forms and spirit of place which mark the Scandinavian tradition translate wonderfully to the very different landscape of Australia. Best known for his domestic architecture, Popov celebrates the house as a home, a refuge from the world – personalised, nurturing, reflective and soothing –, a place which interfaces with the public domain, but then turns inward and away from the drama of the outside world.

Inside, Popov creates other, more tranquil, dramas. His homes are typically a series of separate, but inter-connected spaces, each with its own character. Outside, the house is meticulously sited to generate a harmony between the building and its natural context. This emotional attachment to place, however, does not lead to vernacular sentimentalism. Popov is essentially a Modernist, his homes are invariably elegant and scrupulous in their detailing.

For many years Paul McGillick combined an academic career as a linguist with writing about the visual and performing arts. As series editor and producer with a national television weekly arts programme, he became increasingly involved with architecture and design, for example as editor of the leading Australian architecture and design journal, *Monument*.

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Alex Popov Buildings and Projects

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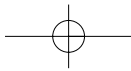
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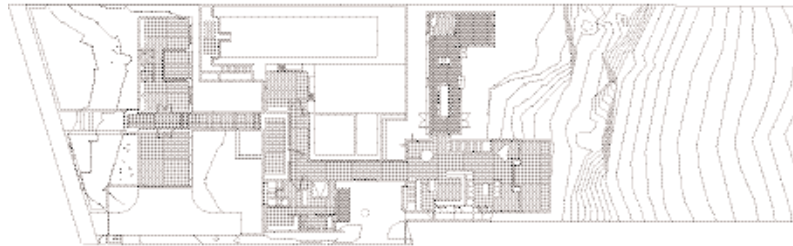
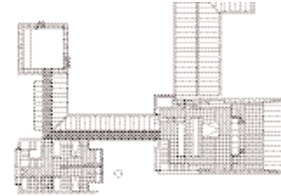
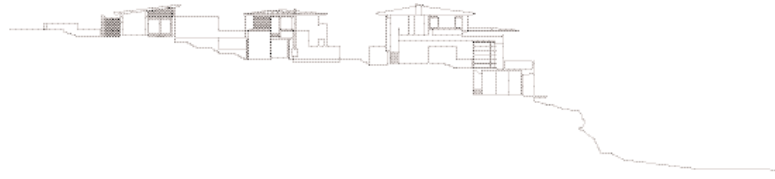




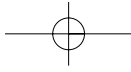
**Middle Cove House, Castlereag, NSW (1993-97)**

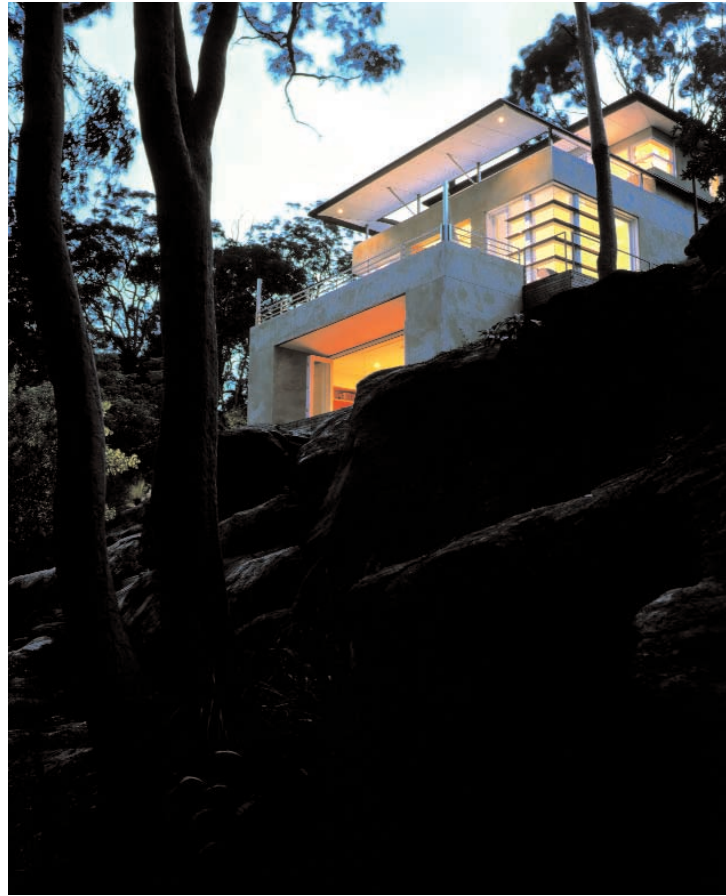
This is the most successful exercise so far in marrying the urban with the domestic. A series of pavilions is linked by an informal promenade – at both the ground floor level and above – creating the sense of a village composed of a number of intimate and almost autonomous spaces. Alternatively, the house reads like a Japanese or Chinese temple complex with the pavilions wrapping around three sides, the fourth side being a low wall abutting a nature reserve. Internally, the pavilion configuration wraps around a central grassed area and a 25 metre lap pool. Externally, the temple idea is reinforced from the street by the low, anonymous but some-

how discreetly ceremonial entry, which is indirect and through a massive pivoting door leading past a guest pavilion. On the valley side, the house soars up from a solid masonry base through two increasingly lightweight pavilions to a floating, cantilevered roof with its broad copper gutters. Set in the Burley Griffin suburb of Castlereag, the house occupies a double block with a marked gradient falling eventually to a rugged cliff face. The site included a heritage-listed cottage built by Burley Griffin's draftsman, Bim Hilder. This has been incorporated into the new house as a dining room with guest bedrooms at the western end. The fenestration, bay windows, and wall cupboards are subtle Art Déco references helping to connect the old with the new.

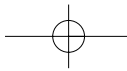


1. View of the house from the street.  
2. Section and floor plans.









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3. View of the pool from dining and guest wing.  
4. View of the roofscape from the master bedroom.  
5. The front side of the house.  
6. The entrance area.  
7. View from the living area towards the entrance.  
8. The kitchen with living room to the right.

