

LIGHT VAULT BY CHAMBERLAIN ARCHITECTS



Located on an exposed corner in Melbourne's Brighton, this uncompromising new house was conceived as a "concrete bunker," with luxurious, private space washed in light by multiple skylights.

Words by Marcus Baumgart
Photography by Derek Swalwell

The Light Vault residence by Chamberlain Architects in the Melbourne beachside suburb of Brighton is an example of what can happen when an architect and a client are completely aligned in their aesthetic choices. Unusually for Chamberlain, this house is the result of a new build on a cleared site – many of its previous projects are adaptations and extensions of existing residences – and the lack of this constraint or “anchor” on the finished product has combined with a client’s strong preferences to make something distinctive and uncompromising.

Declaring a love of concrete, the client said from the outset that they “wanted a bunker.” The house introduces a lofty physical volume onto a suburban street with little or no interaction between interior, facade and street. Privacy is baked in, with few windows or unscreened openings other than an imposing, apocalypse-ready armoured steel door in a long, high, partially louvred facade. This is an architecture of luxurious exclusivity and it seeks to carve out a commanding and handsomely appointed private domain within, one that the architect has softened and moderated with natural light and a tactile material palette.



The house looks resolutely inward. Light is introduced into its heart by skylights and a courtyard carved deep into the two-level volume, containing a maple tree and groundcover garden. This courtyard, which is on view as soon as you enter the house via the high off-form concrete-walled entry hall, is flanked by a study and guestroom to the south and a glazed formal dining chamber to the immediate north.

Spatially, the house is organized around a simple circulation spine running north–south on both levels, connected by a meticulously detailed black steel stair. The plan is quite simple, but effectively so. Turning north onto the central corridor, you move past the dining room and into the kitchen and family room flanking the spine on the west, with the living room to the east. The client has a background in cafes, restaurants and hospitality and asked for what is essentially a full commercial kitchen fitout, complete with a restaurant-grade, sixty-second below-bench dishwasher and a full-size espresso machine.

The family room table is a substantial and impressive piece. With its in situ cast concrete base, it isn’t going anywhere any time soon. The kitchen finishes rely heavily on a beautiful dark, veined marble, which continues into the fixed sideboard along the western wall. Marble is used effectively throughout the house, in wet areas but also in built-in joinery pieces.

The living room on the opposite side of the central spine is a vast space, with custom steel joinery containing a fireplace and storage. Both family room/kitchen and living space face due north, with a wall of glass opening into a front courtyard, which includes a swimming pool and outdoor dining space. The commercial nature of the cooking equipment within the kitchen is repeated outdoors, with a bank of stainless steel barbecue and food preparation facilities that would be quite at home in a bistro or restaurant. Taken together, the living and dining spaces of the house are abundant and comfortable, flooded with natural light and oriented for good passive solar gain.

The circulation spine of the ground floor is repeated on the floor above. From the top of the stair, you are immediately faced with a choice between turning right and heading toward the children’s bedrooms and study and turning left into the private domain of the main bedroom suite. The main suite repeats the material palette of much of the rest of the house, with variations in the choice of marble – in particular, the ensuite is a festival of lighter toned, butterfly-matched marble sheets, with a freestanding bath situated in the middle of a large open room. One of many skylights is called on to fill the room with natural light.

On axis with the circulation spine, a custom dressing table in marble and timber is fixed to the southern wall of the main bedroom, mirroring a smaller joinery unit at the far end of the corridor to the north. The children’s bedrooms and study are comfortable and finely finished, but otherwise unremarkable.

There is something contained and encapsulated about this house, something distinctive and particular in the approach taken to privacy. Materially rich, bathed in natural light and highly adept in its detailing, this is a quality product and it is also a shrine to the primacy and triumph of private space in the city. By screening the occupants’ lives within from the public sphere of the street, the house provides its clients with exactly what they asked for, and in this regard the architects can measure their success. @

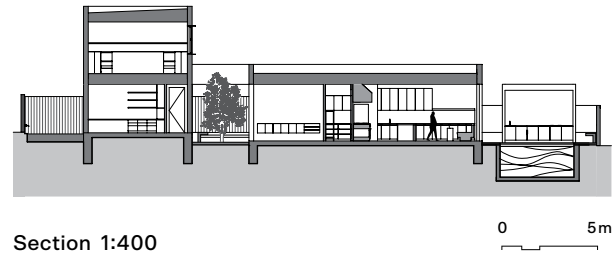
Products

Roofing: Lysaght Klip Lok in Colorbond ‘Shale Grey’
External walls: Rockcote Smooth Set render; Louvretec louvres in Dulux powdercoat ‘Black Ace’
Internal walls: Exposed concrete in situ; Epsilon profile in radiata pine by Wainwright
Facade Ceilings to ceiling
Windows: Skyrange steel-framed windows; Lovelight sheer curtains
Doors: Skyrange steel-framed doors
Flooring: Vic Mix Broadpeak Ash exposed aggregate concrete; Pavé Berberi carpet in ‘Cold Grey’ from Whitecliffe Imports
Lighting: Douglas and Bec Line wall light, Line pendant and Y chandelier; Christopher Boots BCAA pendant; Atelier de Troupe Torche sconce; Darkon Deep Down Square surface-mounted lights; Light Project XLUX track spots
Kitchen: Pietra Grigio stone from CDK Stone; custom oak veneer joinery with black stain; Winterhalter dishwasher; Mareno cooktop; Williams Refrigeration fridge; Brema ice maker
Bathroom: Arabescato marble from CDK Stone (main ensuite); Carrara marble from Jordain Stone (other bathrooms); Rogerseller Pinch tapware in ‘Graphite’; Apaiser Haven freestanding bath
Heating and cooling: Custom ducted system by McKinnon Heating and Cooling
External elements: Rhodes concrete pavers from Stone Outdoors
Other: Rimadesio Manta table from Pure Interiors

01 A bold, largely windowless facade caters to the clients’ love of concrete and desire for privacy.



02



Section 1:400

0 5m



03

02 Simple circulation spines running north-south on both levels are connected by a meticulously detailed black steel stair.

03 A planted courtyard draws light into the entry and formal dining spaces.

04 The timber battened ceiling offsets the cool tones of the concrete and softens the space.



04



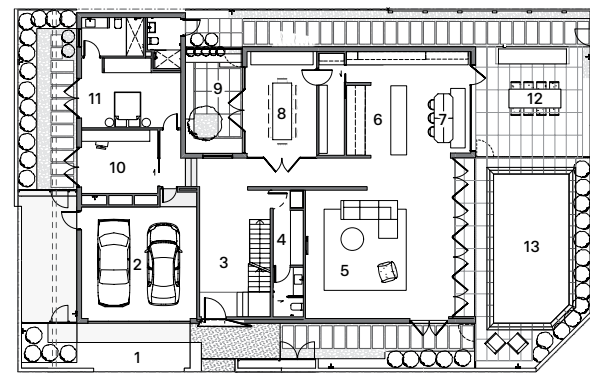
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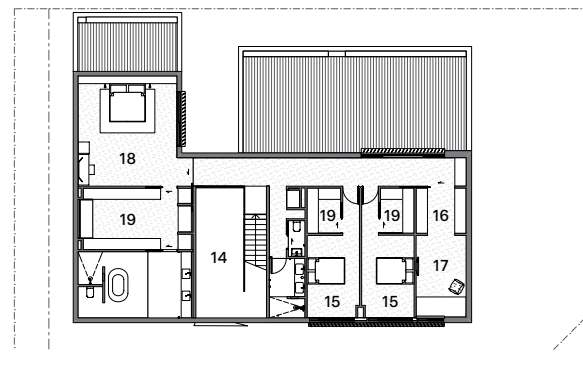
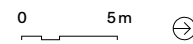
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07



Ground floor 1:400



First floor 1:400

- 1 Driveway
- 2 Garage
- 3 Entrance
- 4 Cloak
- 5 Living
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Dining
- 8 Formal dining
- 9 Courtyard
- 10 Formal study
- 11 Guest room
- 12 Terrace
- 13 Pool
- 14 Void
- 15 Bedroom
- 16 Study
- 17 Rumpus
- 18 Main bedroom
- 19 Walk-in robe

05 Dark, veined marble features heavily in the kitchen, and is carried through built-in joinery pieces. Artwork: Sean Meilak.

06 The external face is monochromatic and austere, while the interior is richly textured.

07 A skylight allows natural light to wash over the large, open ensuite.

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Project team: Glen Chamberlain, Ella Leoncio, Kathryn McCullough Builder: TDRM Constructions Engineer: Stantin Consulting Services Landscaping: Neil Jackson Pool: Out from the Blue Joinery: Flash Cabinets