

These pages, from left Located in Floreat, dubbed Perth's garden suburb, the home has brutalist influences with its grey timber board-finished concrete exterior. The terrace looks over nearby nature reserve Bolt Park and is furnished with Kettal 'Mesh' coffee tables and 'Boma' three-seater sofa, all from Mobilia.

EMPIRE LINES

Poured into the landscape, this low-slung family home in grainy concrete shadows its location's mid-century origins.



Photographs JODY D'ARCY Words ELIZA O'HARE Styling LUCY McCABE



These pages In the reading room, a pair of BD Barcelona 'Showtime' loungers by Jaime Hayon, Moroso 'Gentry' sofa by Patricia Urquiola and Glas Italia coffee tables sit on a Hayon x Nanimarquina rug, all from Mobilia. Artwork by Yuri Krotov. Diesel with Foscarini 'Fork' floor lamp from Mobilia beside curtains in Pierre Frey linen. **Opposite page** The repetition of ribbed timberwork is seen throughout the house, including on the staircase.



When architect Neil Cownie prepared himself for the brief from new clients the request was short and sweet. “We want a grey concrete house,” they said. And that’s exactly what he delivered. The house champions beautiful modern concrete lines, but there’s so much more to this home. “I could have given them just that but they wouldn’t have been happy,” he says of the finished project, the award-winning Roscommon House.

The family had chosen a block in the beachside suburb of Floreat in Perth. “They happily informed me they had found a north-facing site to buy. But due north faces the street, so we had to work around that,” Neil explains. The suburb’s history became important to the design story. The 1962 Empire Games were held in Perth and 150 athletes’ houses were constructed in the suburb. That was the origin of modernism in Floreat. And while not every house here has modernist tendencies, it’s an element respected by the locals, evidenced with the uproar when the council approved the knockdown of the concrete brutalist structure known as The Kiosk.

When the family made the move to Floreat from the more urban suburb of North Perth, the house worked as a great entree into the local community. When their daughter started at the local school, curious, design-forward parents started turning up for afternoon tea at the house to take a look inside.

A key element of the house is its palpable texture and mood, with heavy linen curtains and walls that feature denim linen wallpapers, raw concrete or repeated timber ribbing. “We wanted a feeling of ‘wabi-sabi’ through the house using robust materials. It’s about being a little imperfect and ageing well,” says Neil.

For the owners, creating a connection to the outdoor spaces was essential. To maximise this, a roof terrace was created that sits off the master bedroom on the second floor. And in the downstairs



These pages Lapalma 'Miunn' bar stools in the kitchen, which is clad in Statuarietto marble and lit by a Rakumba 'Potter DS' pendant light by Anchor Ceramics. Opposite page, from top Textured materials such as matt cement and ribbed timbers set the mood as you walk through the house, while gardens and courtyards form part of every vantage point. Moroso 'Mathilda' dining chairs by Patricia Urquiola from Mobilia surround a custom table by architect Neil Cownie with Rakumba 'Stone Cow' pendant lights above. Artwork by Kate Elsey.



dining terrace, external underfloor heating was installed to allow the outdoor space to be enjoyed all year round.

Neil played architect, interior designer, furniture designer and stylist for this project, with the owners trusting him to create the total look and feel. “I’ve never been on site on a project as much as I was for this one. I didn’t leave the property for the last two weeks before we finished. We had custom furniture pieces arriving to be assembled on site until the day before handover. After that, I went to bed for three days.” The furniture was created in Perth by local craftspeople and artisans. “The bedside tables may not look tricky but they needed three trades: a metal worker, an upholsterer and a cabinetmaker. It was like constructing a little building in itself.”

Collaboration was key to Neil as well. “I’ve tried to be as inclusive of as many artists and other people as possible in this project. I introduced the clients to a couple of artists and they’ve ended up with two pieces in the house by Perth-born, Melbourne-based artist Kate Elsey and a sculpture by Peter Zappa.”

Sustainability was also imperative, but it was essential that it wouldn’t be showy. Courtyards capture winter sun and allow it to penetrate the length of the house on the north-to-south side, with cross-ventilation running through the interior via windows on both sides. The private courtyard spaces are also visible throughout, with every angle offering a fresh garden perspective. Solar roof panels sit on the north-facing roof but are hidden from view by the flat facade.

While there is no ocean view of the nearby beach, the outlook from the second-floor master bedroom and adjoining courtyard is 360 degrees of uninterrupted vegetation in the surrounding reserve.

The house was shortlisted for the Residential Interior category at the 2018 INSIDE World Festival of Interiors in Amsterdam. Neil is clear why it was a finalist. “This house has a story, a goal. The modernist history is reflected in its concrete lines, the palette and dusky pink curtains reflect local flora from this famous garden suburb, and the custom mid-century-style furnishings fit perfectly.”

A story with a happy ending, then. ■

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SPEED READ

» Briefed to design “a grey concrete house”, architect Neil Cownie delivered a home that champions modern lines. » Drawing on the location’s 60s origins, Neil imbued the structure with a modernist look. » Its poured concrete form stamps a mantle of texture on the exterior that is a theme for the interiors in raw concrete walls, timber ribbing and tactile fabrics. » Every room offers a snapshot of the leafy surrounds.

This page Diesel for Moroso ‘Gimme Shelter’ bed from Mobilia with custom bedside tables by Neil Cownie, which required three tradespeople to complete. Artwork by Stephanie Reisch. Opposite page, clockwise from top left Making the most of garden spaces was imperative to the clients and the extended rooftop garden on the second level brings the garden into the master bedroom. Vintage wire-framed outdoor table and chairs. In the master bedroom, Moroso ‘Redonda’ armchair by Patricia Urquiola from Mobilia with curtains in Pierre Frey linen. The ensuite echoes the home’s curvilinear form.