

## FRAMING KELLY

Is this a house or a gallery? At the behest of an art-loving client, Melbourne firm Carabott Holt Architects has designed a beguiling hybrid ... a gallery for living in.

**IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR AN ARCHITECT** to be called upon to design a house with provision for the client's artworks. What is unusual about this inner-eastern Melbourne home, by Carabott Holt Architects, is that it was designed *specifically* to house the client's collection of tapestries, sculptures and paintings.

As the front door swings open, the visitor is greeted by Ned Kelly, keeping guard. He stands just inside the main living area, at the left-hand edge of an enormous tapestry rendition of Sidney Nolan's *Death of Constable Scanlon* from the Kelly Series. "This wall was designed expressly for this artwork," points out architect David Carabott. "It is framed by this plane (wall) evenly all the way around the work. The wall really is the frame. I must have measured the tapestry at least 20 times to make sure that it would fit perfectly on this wall. It made me very nervous."

And it's not just the wall that acts as a frame. On the other side of the living room, the large window that looks onto the street is also cut to the appropriate scale so that Ned Kelly can gaze out over a nearby park, turning the entire facade of the house into a giant frame. "At night this elevation becomes a frame for the centrepiece of the collection and provides a theatrical backdrop when viewed through the expansive glass window from the street outside," David says.

The architect's knowledge of the client's art collection is evident

throughout this project. At every turn there is a perfectly proportioned wall custom-made for the work that hangs from it. Around every corner is an ideal nook housing the sculptural work for which it was designed. Even the hydronic heating was designed and custom-built as a sculptural element – black, sleek slats symmetrically placed either side of the kitchen, perfectly in tune with the space surrounding it.

But it would be wrong to suggest that the house is merely a gallery space for the art. Rather, it has a warm and casual elegance that belies its purposeful planning. "The art really focused the planning of the house, but we still needed to make it a functioning home. It does not have the sterility that can sometimes be associated with this type of project," David explains. "It's a great thing to be surrounded by these beautiful tapestries and have Whiteleys and Arkleys and the like, but still had to be aware of the functionality and efficiency of the house."

The architect notes that the project was blessed with a great client. "The client has a great deal of design savvy and that was a distinct advantage. It is a far more fluid process when the client knows what she wants but also knows how to listen to our ideas."

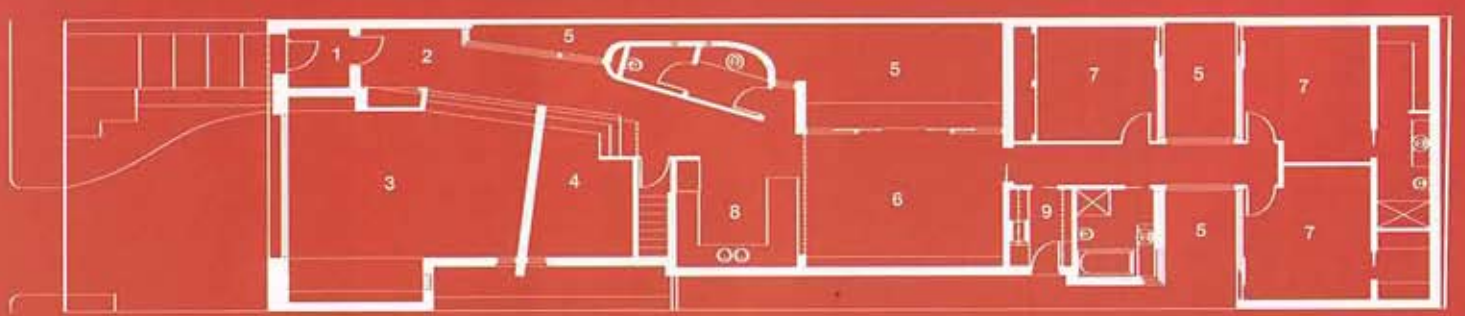
One feature of the house that the client insisted on was as few doors as possible. Where doors were unavoidable, simple floor-to-ceiling panels were introduced. "The client wanted to maintain this open flowing space, so we used other devices to demarcate the rooms where

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** In the evening, the front window serves as a frame for a tapestry rendition of Nolan's *Death of Constable Scanlon*. **THESE PAGES, BELOW:** Interior palette is neutral, except for the odd splash of colour such as the red splashback in the kitchen. **OPPOSITE:** The main entrance is guarded by Ned Kelly





- 1 Porch
- 2 Entry
- 3 Formal living
- 4 Study
- 5 Courtyard
- 6 Informal living
- 7 Bedroom
- 8 Kitchen
- 9 Laundry



ossible," says David. Changes in floor level and the use of neutral surface materials serve to define living spaces in this house that, in essence, takes a backseat to the artworks. "The art is such a focus that it made the house as neutral as possible. It is mostly black and white with the odd splash of colour here and there."

The exception to this neutrality is a space the client affectionately calls the "womb room". It is a powder room with a curved wall that sits along the north side of the project, just beyond the entrance. Painted a rich fuchsia colour, it announces the transition between the building's formal and informal zones. "Given the strained, neutral palette of colours and finishes, this red, curved element becomes an orientation and point of focus that reinforces that transition," notes the architect.

The site runs east-west, so enjoys morning and evening light. The architect opened up the northern perimeter with a series of courtyard spaces that usher in warming doses of sunshine throughout the day. Moving from the public to the private domain of the home, a glass-encased bridge running between two water-themed courtyards brings added visual interest, a sense of tranquility and acoustic separation between living and sleeping spaces. Housing the bedrooms, bathrooms and robes, there is a sense of retreat and respite here.

The brief also called for a two-vehicle garage, which the architect achieved by excavating the site at the front and building car spaces under the living room. "The basement solution was a result of the narrow site and the desire to avoid having the garage dominate the dwelling's address. By building it into the ground it achieves a reduced presence in the streetscape, and gives the impression that the upper level of the house gravitates above the ground."

The design makes full use of the property boundaries, with the building's footprint extending all the way to the rear fence. Council-imposed permeability issues were addressed via the side courtyards and some landscaping at the front of the property. Even though the house is somewhat set back from the street, a blade wall extending from the front door to the footpath draws the visitor's attention to the building, affording it an elegant yet assertive street presence.

In this project, David and his team have housed an imposing art collection in a building that also manages to work as a functioning residence. The architects have avoided the gallery-like sterility of vast white walls and instead – by controlling movement through the spaces – have revealed garden and street views while also devising a controlled sequence for the unveiling of artworks. The client's passion for the fine arts has been celebrated as a driving force. CHRISTOPHER MOORE

THESE PAGES, LEFT: Slender courtyard spaces on both sides of the site act as light walls. BELOW: The architect measured this tapestry version of Nolan's *Path of Constable Scanlon* many times over, then designed the wall to fit it perfectly. FOLLOWING PAGE: A glazed walkway leads into the sleeping wing.





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**PRACTICE PROFILE**  
 Practice specialises in residential projects, ranging from single dwellings to apartment complexes, aged care and aged accommodation, resort and tourism facilities, masterplanning and urban design, student accommodation, and retail and commercial projects.

**PROJECT TEAM**  
 David Carabott, Michael Holt,  
 Chivonna den Besten

**BUILDER**  
 Lelmac Constructions

**CONSULTANTS**  
**Engineer** O'Neill Group  
 Consulting Engineers  
**Landscaping** Black Bamboo  
 Landscape and Construction  
**Interiors** Carabott Holt Architects

**PRODUCTS**  
**Roofing** Lysaght Klip-Lok  
 Zincalume finish; Anticorn with  
 R2.5 thermo foil layer insulation  
 blanket; **External walls**  
 Rendered brick veneer, generally;  
 Unitek TWS System lightweight  
 cladding to facade; **Internal  
 walls** Plasterboard, painted;  
**Windows** Capral 400 Nylite  
 Series, powdercoated black;  
**Doors** Axion frames; flush  
 panel semi-solid core internal  
 doors; **Flooring** Concrete slab;  
 polished granite; wool carpet;  
**Kitchen** Bosch as appliances;  
 Quantum Quartz reconstituted  
 stone benchtop in 'Diamond  
 White'; **Bathroom** Quantum  
 Quartz reconstituted stone  
 benchtop; Caroma toilet suite;  
 Zucchetti tapware; **Climate  
 control** Parsons Hydraulic  
 Heating; John Waters Industries  
 retractable louvres; **Artworks**  
 Tapestries – *The River* by Brett  
 Whiteley, *White Cats Garden* by  
 Charles Blackman;  
*Nebuchadnezzar* by Arthur  
 Boyd, *Death of Constable  
 Scanlon* by Sidney Nolan;  
 Paintings – *Filipino Boys* by Ian  
 Fairweather, *Sleeping  
 Bridegroom* by Arthur Boyd

**TIME SCHEDULE**  
**Design, documentation**  
 9 months  
**Construction** 11 months

**SITE SIZE**  
 346 m<sup>2</sup>

**PROJECT COST**  
 \$680,000

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
 Rhiannon Slatyer



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