



On the ground floor, the back wall is entirely windowed for views to the pool area. The first floor holds the living, dining, and kitchen areas; the second floor, tucked under the curved roof, is the “parents’ retreat.” **Opposite:** Street-side, the house is an intriguing mix of angles, curves, and slick surfaces. The shiny metal cladding is durable and easy to clean.



MAKING WAVES

IN A STRIKING MODERNIZATION OF SEASIDE STYLE, THIS CURVACEOUS AUSTRALIAN HOUSE WRAPS WINDOWED WALLS AND ROOFTOP DECKS AROUND A STEEL STRUCTURE TO FRAME VIEWS OF SYDNEY HARBOUR.

BY MARGARET GLASS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGUS McRITCHIE

If you live in Sydney, Australia, you want a view of Sydney Harbour from your house. There’s nothing surprising about this: Australian homes, unlike those in many, particularly northern, countries, are typically very open to the landscape—the better to appreciate the long sunny summers, and winter temperatures that seldom dip below 10 or 12 degrees Celsius. Taking utmost advantage of the views, then, becomes paramount on the wish list any client hands to the architect, in tandem with maximizing the efficiency of the home’s services—heating, cooling, water use—to conform to Sydney’s strict environmental controls.

When the clients came to architect Tony Owen, they already owned the site, in a very desirable neighbourhood set

halfway between the harbour and the ocean. The area is a mixed bag of modern and older houses, Owen says, so “fitting in to the neighbourhood to some degree” was a necessity, as was ensuring neighbourly harmony by being careful that the new residents’ soaring views weren’t achieved at the expense of those of the people next door. Aside from these concerns, the clients were looking for a unique approach to their home.

This is where Owen and his firm came in. “If they didn’t want something unusual, they probably could have gone somewhere else,” he points out reasonably. Owen’s lauded 2005 Wave house, built in Bondi Beach, one of Australia’s, if not the world’s, most well-known and sought-out beach towns, is a long, sleek box formed of concrete, glass, and water elements, softened with just enough curved lines inspired by its namesake to make it livable, even warm. And his award-winning plan for a public swimming pool and pool house at Sydney’s Royal Botanic Gardens shares his propensity for replacing 90-degree angles with rounded edges that pleasantly blur the line between walls, ceiling, and floor. In public, commercial, and private buildings alike, Owen demonstrates a taste for the imaginative and the unexpected, along with what one can only, wistfully, assume is inspiration derived from a lifetime of watching the crash of waves upon the nearby shore.

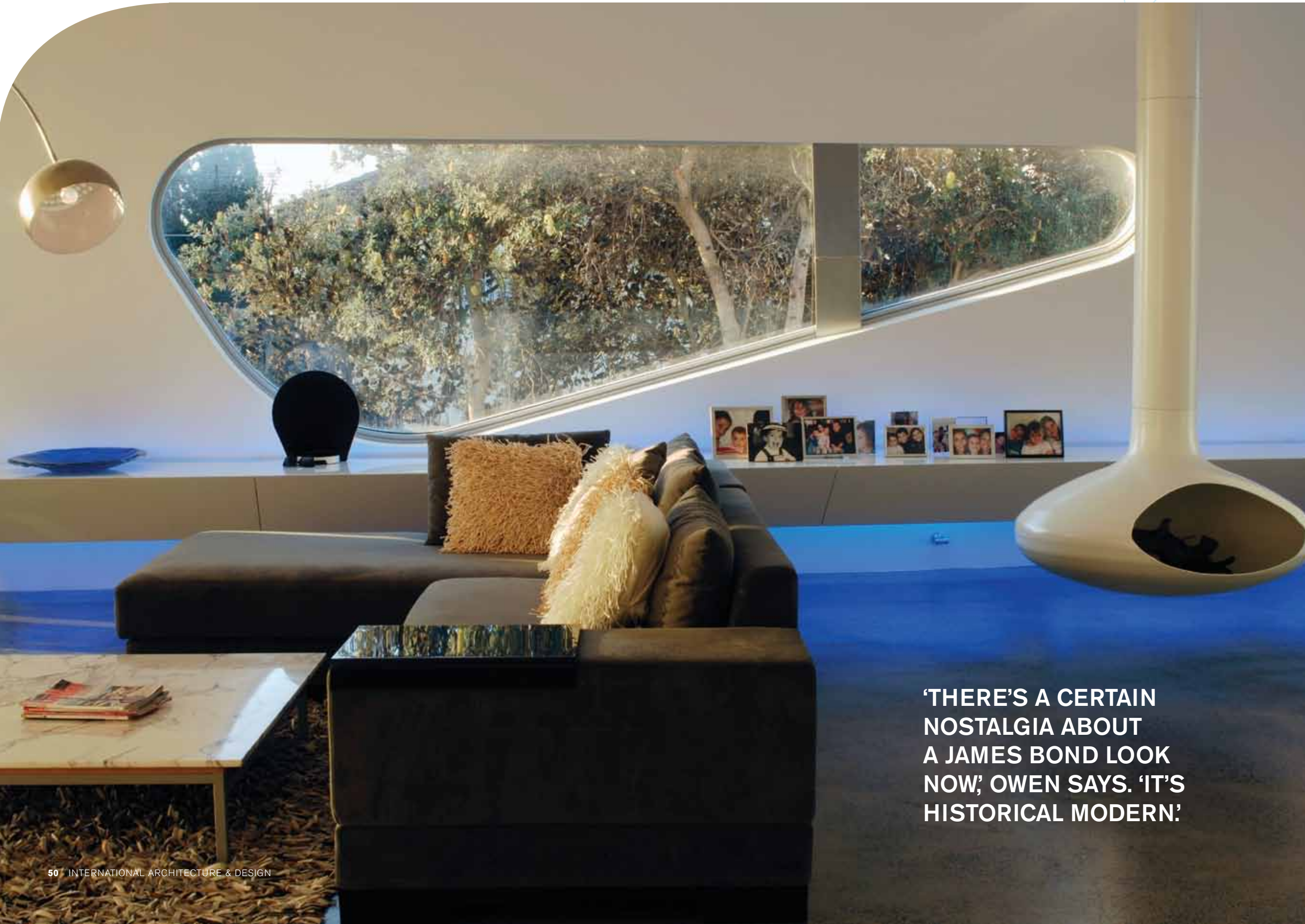
As rooted in the age-old pleasures of building for light and sea views as this house is, its genesis was absolutely 21st-century. The architects created its outlines using parametric modelling software, which can respond to very small changes to design-input criteria. The software allowed them to customize the house to the site with movements and alterations that manipulated the spaces in order to maximize



Concrete flooring curves a short distance up the wall, dispensing with baseboards and contributing to the home’s fluid character. “It’s a nice material,” Owen says, listing concrete’s attributes – low maintenance, attractive, affordable. For the unconvinced, there is also under-floor heating, often all that’s required in this climate of very mild winters. The low profile of modern furniture leaves views through the home’s spaces unobstructed.



THE FLUIDITY OF THE STAIRCASE ECHOES THE BUILDING’S SIGNATURE CURVES. ‘WE HAD A LOT OF FUN WITH IT,’ OWEN SAYS.



'THERE'S A CERTAIN NOSTALGIA ABOUT A JAMES BOND LOOK NOW,' OWEN SAYS. 'IT'S HISTORICAL MODERN.'



Left: A wedge-shaped window frames a slice of nature from the open-concept first floor, where most family life occurs. As night falls (**above**), soft lights reflecting off white surfaces—a leather sofa and chaise, a long deep shelf, and a floating fireplace—turn the family room, on the same level, into an inviting, ambient pod.

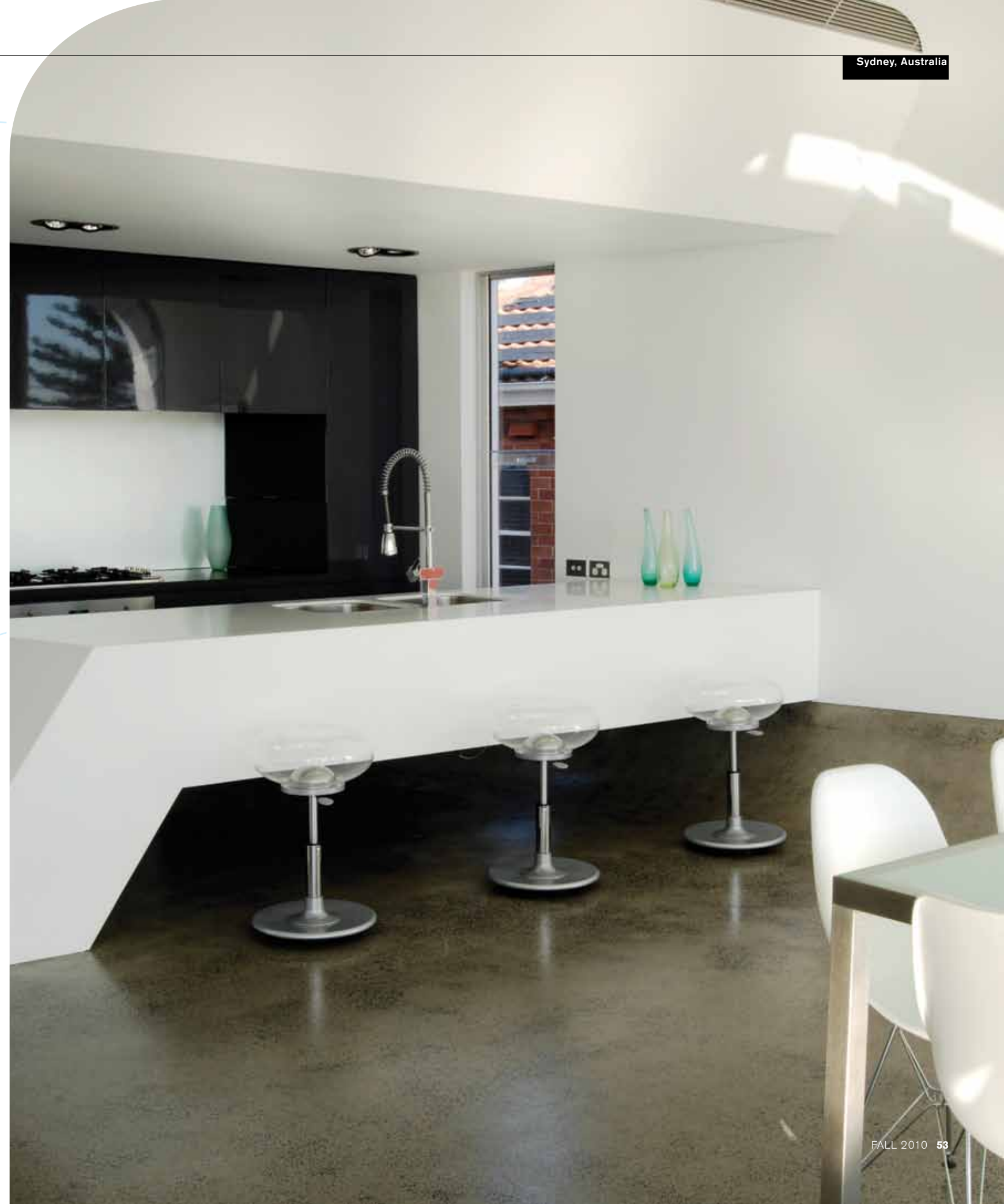
changes of level, views, and connection with the outside spaces, such as gardens and decks. They were able to create a model that responded in an intuitive way to all of the typical variables, the result being a pleasingly organic, yet sleek, almost James Bond-era shape. "There's a certain nostalgia about a James Bond look now," Owen notes. "It's historical modern."

What it yields for its owners is three storeys of living space—4,000 square feet in total—in an efficient, even compact composition that neatly ticks off all the "requirement" boxes on their list. Wasted space, of course, is not on the table, and this is one of the first areas where the results of parametric modeling are visible. "It's very large inside," the architect explains. "Usually, walls and roof take up a lot of space." Instead, here the "walls" are often windows, and the spacious top-floor "parents' retreat," with its high ceilings and walkout deck, is capped with a sleek, rounded, flat roof—not an intrusive peak or asphalt shingle in sight. Kitchen, living, dining, and family areas are on the open-concept first floor; the ground level holds the other bedrooms and a play space for the owners' young children, and offers access to the pool and the street.

Ultimately, of course, software modelling is just another architect's tool, a means to an end. The other challenge in building the house came in the construction process, which Owen compares to the fabrication and assembly of a car. The steel frame is clad in metal panels, which were precut in China. The cladding fits tightly over the steel-rib structure of the house; any deviance by even a few millimetres would have distorted the shape and ruined its clean lines. The steel structure, which Owen casually refers to as the chassis, took



The kitchen's pairing of seamless white and black surfaces might be the ultimate in functionality, yet the visual result is pure luxe. The island counter is a slab of Corian (the same as that used for the stair steps) that angles elegantly to the floor. "We like to do something sculptural in kitchens," Owen comments. The pillowy look of acrylic bubble stools complements the floating effect of the island.





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12 months to complete—from construction, adjustment, and comparison with its computer model, to its final, minute finesses. All in good service, though, as in the end there's not an obtrusive rib in sight. As Owen continues the automobile analogy, with the chassis formed and covered, the house was then wired, plumbed, and connected. The kitchen is control central and, he notes, it "even resembles a dashboard."

All the intrigue of design and construction aside, the architect offers the central staircase as his favourite part of the house. "We had a lot of fun with the staircase," he recalls, allowing also that it was another "complicated" program. Prefabricated, also in China, of steel with a plastic coating, the staircase's open treads and banister filter unobstructed light through the first floor. The white finish mutes the stair's impact and allows it to blend easily into the walls and ceiling. Its fluidity echoes the building's signature curves.

Although Owen enjoys detailing the technological and computer-aided innovation he explores in his work, he keeps firmly in mind the end goal: a comfortable family home that is highly efficient and environmentally responsible. Every home is a different response, he says, to its owners' requirements, and to the limitations and opportunities of its setting. So he was particularly pleased with how he was able to respond to this site and to its fabulous eastern view, which offers the panorama of Sydney Harbour, the famous bridge, and the city's storied opera house spread out before it. "It's what everybody wants," he says. ●



This page: A glass deck railing allows unimpeded views of the harbour. Low sinuous loungers suit the home's cutting-edge contemporary style.

Opposite: Owen suggests that "a house should be luxurious, like a hotel." Here the ensuite master bathroom is separated from the bedroom by only a partial wall of glass.