

CASA DI CAMPO NEIL ARCHITECTURE

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Landscape Construction by JCCM / Structural Engineering by Struppius / Furniture by Juma Interior Design Studio



Conceived by Neil Architecture as an inward-facing courtyard house, Casa di Campo is a place of sanctuary. Situated in Werribee South – a district known for its agricultural plains and ubiquitous market gardens – the rationale behind the design was to demarcate the residence from the pastoral landscape that serves as the homeowners' place of work.

Werribee South, 32 kilometres east of Melbourne, is a district steeped in a time-honoured tradition of agriculture. Here, the land is flat, the soil red and fertile, and the landscape unfolds onto the horizon with market gardens full of lettuce, avocado, cauliflower, bread and many more crops. As a district that produces a substantial portion of Victoria's vegetable produce, the area is far from residential, rather marked by the occasional farmhouse or manufacturing shed, appearing like islands atop the flat plains. Therefore, when David Dack, Founder and Principal Architect of Neil Architecture, was approached by a family of second-generation farmers to construct a home on the horizon, the true challenge lay in conceiving a residence that would afford the inhabitants adequate privacy and seclusion from the land.

In an effort to distinguish the family's residence from their pastoral workplace surroundings, Dack and his team developed the idea of an inward-looking courtyard house. The interior was kept simple, with a

rectangular layout pulsating into a large central courtyard garden that would serve as the primary outdoor living space. A series of smaller walls was also installed around the edges to create intimate periphery courtyard gardens. The perimeter wall, meanwhile, was built like a barrier to separate the interior from the encompassing plains.

For the central courtyard garden, the architects created a private oasis far removed from the local landscape. "Being so flat, the site is exposed to the elements. The courtyard, therefore, was important to create a sense of refuge," Dack says. The garden has something for everyone: a swimming pool on one side serves as a recreational space for the children, while a large outdoor lounge and dining area provides a welcome spot for entertaining. There are other smaller uses – a basketball hoop shield by scattered stone spheres, a fabricia herbager, a colonnade and covered walkway along the interior perimeter, an adjustable louvre roof and concealed sliding screens to keep horses at bay, and an assortment of transitional spaces that blur the boundaries between inside and out.





Adding warmth to the space, a double-sided fireplace divides the living area.
Photo: Kim Sisson/ASIS

When it came to calling the interior, functional determination served as the point of departure at Neil Architects. The exterior was carved from a wall of stone and finished by a dark-stained, American oak pine door. In a bid to introduce views on both sides of the driveway, the architect conceived a private walled garden neighboring the drive. A central living room was made to anchor the plan, while separate wings for adults and children were created to the west, the latter with four bedrooms, two bathrooms and a playroom. For David and his team, the living room was imagined as more than just a space for entertaining. "It is the first space leading off the entryway, sitting at the center of the home, with views to the central courtyard to the north and a secondary landscaped courtyard to the west. It is a junction of sorts, a gateway to the home's private realm, so it really is the heart of the house in some ways than one," he says.

A 6-ft-tall chimney wall with a double-sided fireplace divides the living area from the dining room. This space is further enveloped by the

kitchen and the outdoor living area, which it also merges to form an extended outdoor dining space by way of sliding doors. "The dining room is designed to host both intimate meals and larger, more formal events," says David. In the same vein, delicate, sculptural pendant lights set the setting, providing task lighting while serving equally as elegant objects of art.

The structural palette exhibits a consistent restraint, with restrained tones and textures. The walls, both interior and exterior, are characterized by a minimalist finish in dove grey, while the floor is clad in a complementary shade of micro terrazzo. For the wall panels and joinery, the team elected to use honey-comb oak, an atypical counterpart to the natural stone. Slatted screens define the wall openings, providing glimpses of the landscape beyond. The kitchen echoes the minimalist ethos, with such functional elements as a walkway for appliances and a well-appointed walk-in pantry. A quartzite island bench and a picture window give the room a postcard-like quality.



Seen in the hallway, today's kitchen provides an open counterpart to the next level of the home.





The window's double-paneled construction is crafted from sustainably sourced glass.

The primary bedroom is located on the eastern side of the house, oriented for the morning sun and opening into its own private, walled courtyard. The narrow-stair walk in the courtyard are contained inside, while a 1.6-meter-high primary module encompasses a large, double-height bedroom. The children's wing, on the other hand, mirrors the main finishes of the common areas. The walls, for example, wear a pale green-grey plaster, an homage of color reminiscent to the way of nature like above the fireplace. Blue ceramic geometric tilework and large porcelain tiles in the bathroom.

Four identical children's bedrooms extend along the western length of the house, with each angled towards the central courtyard. The placement sits at the end of the children's wing and offers direct access to the courtyard—a formal and figurative representation of its breath-taking role.

The house features a hierarchy of sustainable climate controls. The perimeter walls are 400 millimeters thick and composed of rammed earth. Consequently, it contains a central insulation layer that provides a high degree of thermal mass. In parallel, the rammed earth composition is made from a recycled 50 percent from Boral. In another similar example, the veranda protects the internal windows from the summer sun, while external blinds provide sun protection to the perimeter windows.

Responding to its context with an insulatively protective gesture, Casa di Campo is an ideal place of retreat for its inhabitants. With thoughtful interventions to keep the interior in tune with the environment, the home is indeed a sanctuary for all seasons.