



VIBE

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MELBOURNE ARCHITECTURE FIRM VIBE DESIGN TAPS INTO THE MAGIC OF MODERNISM WITH KEW HOUSE 3.

FORM BLUEPRINT



Modernist architecture was the first design movement to completely disregard its own client's wellbeing and ability to withstand slow torture. Modernism was, after all, a set of design and philosophical principles that directly led to urban blights such as high-rise council flats, concrete prisons and public schools, and grey government offices with no windows, where people sat on spiky furniture in triangle-shaped rooms.

The 'Mods' created brutal public buildings. That was their duty. It was a war against the rococo excesses of classical architecture. Early modernist masters demanded that buildings be functional, inexpensive and unpretentious. They said this in a terribly pretentious sort of way. And they got away with it because the public took no personal insult in being treated like cattle, and because every now and then a modern architect or designer came up with an undeniable masterpiece that took your breath away. Great modern buildings were bold and self aware. When they worked, they were fantastic.

Architecture seems predictable today, particularly in the residential sector. Everything new looks much the same as everything else that's new. It's housing design by consensus. An architect is rarely granted complete control in designing a home. To do so takes guts. Anything could happen, and all you might be left with is spiky furniture in a triangle room. Then again, you might get an absolute classic.

A new home in Melbourne's leafy, heritage-heavy suburb of Kew has been recognised as something of an original by international critics. Photographs have been taken, words have been penned, and the house has featured in a string of publications, including *The New York Times*. Kew House 3 was designed by Melbourne-based Vibe Design Group, and is one of several recent modernist-inspired successes for the studio.

The façade of Kew House 3 is the first point to draw attention. Inspired by 1950s stereo cabinets, a recognisable reference realised with skill and humour, the façade is further enhanced by design features that make the whole structure appear to float above the ground. Vibe designer Michael O'Sullivan created this magic trick by utilising the slanted and rear-sloping geography of the block.

"The block slopes away sharply at the midpoint, which made it a difficult site," he says. "The ground floor walls were mostly hidden from view, and a



corner section at the front was cut out at ground level, leaving the upper levels floating in space." This overhang or cantilevering on the upper level is replicated at the rear of the home, where a cut out window line draws the eye along the structure to the pool area, and away from the essential grid of the ground floor level below. The effect also isolates the third-storey level. It is a tree house in the sky.

O'Sullivan also brought a few modernist touches to the interior of the home, mostly in the design's use of space. "We wanted to maximise every inch of space, which this style of architecture provides," he says. "We needed flow from room to room, and one way of achieving that was to disguise doors and doorways; an open door disappears behind panelling, enhancing spaces, and importantly, the feel of spaces, by removing the interruption of a door. It begins with a flat veneer panel wall that houses a cloak and powder room and entrance to the cellar and kitchen."

Interior spaces unfold by way of long corridors that lead the viewer back through the house, on both main levels. Pale ash timber is used throughout, which O'Sullivan says "softens the harsh modernist design elements". Same goes for the inclusion of Silvertop Ash for the exterior cladding, which will grey off with age and blend into the treed surrounds. "The interior colours needed to be soft to blend each space to the next," he adds.

The owners requested a light, spacious four-bedroom home decked out with quality materials, appliances and detail to finish. The interior lives up to the brief, combining the modern design and luxury fit-out you'd expect to find in a home of this calibre. The owners also requested a high concept design and unique visual aspects. It is here that they hit the jackpot.

Kew House 3 is proudly on display, with no front fence to spoil the view. O'Sullivan points out that the house sits on a street favoured by local walkers, joggers and other exercise enthusiasts. "Everyone stops to look at the house," he says with a grin. I can vouch for that. It is impossible not to be entranced by the big, floating stereo cabinet on top of the hill. For one thing, you've never seen anything quite like it. But more importantly, Kew House 3 makes you smile. It works, and in working, makes you happy. Just like magic.

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