

PROJECT N°

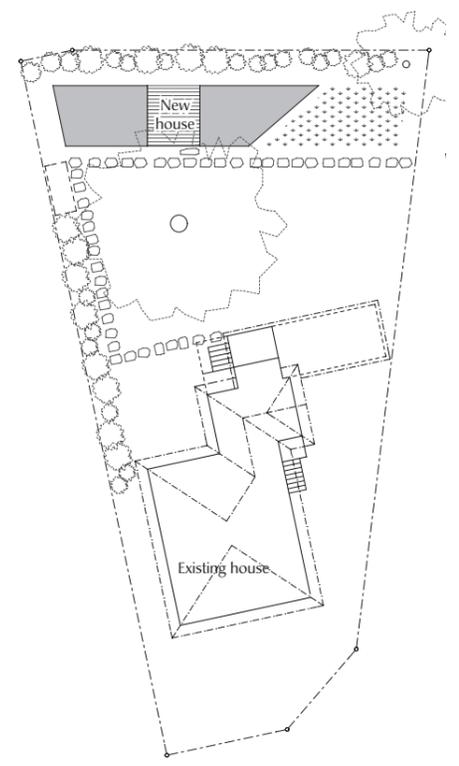
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Keperra HOUSE by A-CH

• BRISBANE, QLD •

This second dwelling, on the site of an original timber bungalow, gives functional amenity to the property and actively engages with the surrounding landscape.

Words by [Aaron Peters](#)
Photography by [Alicia Taylor](#)



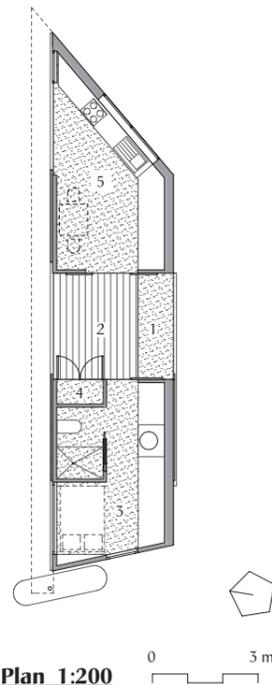
Site plan 1:400



01 Large sliding doors open to transform the secure bunker into a light-filled, permeable pavilion.



- 02 A bend in the kitchen wall directs the space towards the view.
- 03 Plywood linings create a warm interior, and provide a contrast to the cooler, robust steel exterior.
- 04 A string of rooms is punctuated with a roofed deck that creates a void through the solid mass of the building.



- 1 Entry
2 Deck
3 Bedroom
4 Store
5 Living/kitchen



They used to be called granny flats. Many architects prefer to inscrutably dub them “multi-generational accommodation.” James Hung, however, anticipates that Atelier Chen Hung’s (A-CH) detached addition to an existing timber cottage in Keperra, Brisbane, is likely to receive a number of curious monikers from onlookers. James and fellow director Melody Chen didn’t set out to shock, but their bold, experimental and provocatively conspicuous work isn’t likely to fly under the radar.

A-CH began life in a home studio in Sunnybank, a Brisbane suburb that lies beyond the traditional inner-city locations of most boutique design practices. Rather than romancing the timber Queensland of the inner fringe, A-CH was immersed in the brick-and-tile outer suburbs, drawing upon both local and international influences to help inform its growing body of built work. Now, firmly entrenched in a second-storey atelier in inner-city West End, A-CH pursues a variety of projects, from multiresidential to temporary installations. The practice even converted its street-level entry passageway into a compact gallery space that showcases a roster of aspiring local artists. However, like many young Brisbane practices, small-scale residential projects continue to

constitute much of A-CH’s output; unconventional responses to these residential commissions, like the Keperra House, are becoming its specialty.

The journey to Keperra from inner-city Brisbane encapsulates much of the quintessential postwar suburban landscape of the city. The surrounding streets are lined with single-storey timber bungalows interrupted by the occasional masonry cottage. Most lawns are still kept in common with low fences and austere landscaping. Tucked in behind one such unassuming timber house is A-CH’s backyard addition. Given that it is built on a shoestring budget in a workaday suburb, it might have been easy to be less ambitious about the potential for the project. Yet, with its deftly sculpted attitude, and perched atop a steep embankment and clad in board-marked concrete and galvanized steel, this building does not cut a retiring figure.

Much of the design and documentation of the project was complicated by the client’s travelling for work. Indeed, the low-maintenance skin suits the frequent absences of its occupant, who required a house that could be locked down. The building can also be unpacked like a suitcase: large sliding doors dramatically



transform a secure bunker into a light-filled, permeable pavilion.

In contrast to the robust exterior, the interior of the building is enveloped by the warmth of its plywood linings. Subtle design gestures lend the building an affable feeling that further belies the severity of the exterior. Doorsills along the rear elevation can be appropriated as improvised benches, where leg-dangling and coffee-drinking might unite with the voyeuristic indulgence of surveying the walking track of the creek reserve below.

Melody explains that their addition was conceived as an inhabited garden wall, a building that structures the landscape as well as exploiting nature as a backdrop. The building, by virtue of its careful placement on the site, creates two “new” landscapes where once the outdoor space was vague and indistinct. The first landscape is a private courtyard-like garden situated between the existing house and the new addition. This garden seems to reinforce a sense of autonomy for each dwelling; it is a kind of piazza or neutral public territory where the respective inhabitants can come together. The second landscape is the creek reserve, an unkempt and far larger wilderness beyond the back fence. The new addition actively engages and effectively appropriates this wilderness as its own private forest. Strangely, of all the houses that

back onto the creek reserve, A-CH's building is the only one that attempts to do this.

Although this is a relatively small and simple building, the plan has been resourcefully configured. A slender, wall-like string of interior rooms emphasizes the immediate proximity to surrounding foliage. A roofed deck creates a void through the solid mass of the building, framing the lush foliage of the creek reserve beyond like a giant window. An inflection in the wall of the kitchen “bends” the interior volume outward to meet the view. Equally as important as the large openings is the careful positioning of walls for privacy. The intimate dining nook is comfortably located between two solid wall sections. However, oblique views through the adjacent kitchen and roofed deck ensure that the dining space feels neither cramped nor remote from its setting.

To call A-CH's Keperra House a granny flat wouldn't be quite right. It adds functional amenity to the property, permitting more flexible social arrangements such as sub-rental to students, conversion to a home office or even multi-generational and non-nuclear family scenarios, but it ultimately achieves much more than this. The Keperra House is a beautiful, life-affirming slice of contemporary architecture. 



05 The house is clad in a low-maintenance skin of board-marked concrete and galvanized steel.

06 Doorsills along the rear elevation provide an ideal spot for taking in the view.

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Practice profile
A studio-based practice working on residential, commercial, exhibition and retail projects.

Project team
Melody Chen, James Hung, Renee Popovic

Consultants
Engineer: Northrop Engineers
Joiner: Jigsaw Joinery

Products
Roofing: Lysaght Custom Orb Zinalume; Ampelite Custom Orb fibreglass in ‘Opal White’

External walls: Galvanized steel sheeting; in situ concrete, board marked
Internal walls: Hoop pine plywood, limewashed; Formply; cypress pine with clear sealer
Windows: Southern Star Windows residential profiles in clear anodized aluminium
Doors: Southern Star Windows commercial profiles in clear anodized aluminium; Centor S1E retractable flyscreen; Locker Group expanded-metal screen; galvanized steel sheeting
Flooring: Polished concrete with clear penetrating sealer; cypress pine with clear sealer
Lighting: Fluorescent lamps
Kitchen: Formply benchtop, door panels and splashback; plywood cupboards, limewashed; Tradelink plumbing parts; Clark Monaco sink; Westinghouse rangehood and electric cooktop

Bathroom: Caroma Concorde Sovereign toilet suite; Tradelink plumbing parts; Eco Outdoor basalt stone floor tiles with clear sealer; Laminex Visage vertical surfaces
Other: Desk lamps, chairs and bedside table from Corporate Culture; Eco Outdoor seat cushions and seating pads

Project cost
\$200,000

Floor area
600 m² site
45 m² floor

Time schedule
Design, documentation: 4 months
Construction: 6 months