



**FACT FILE**

**THE BRIEF**  
Build a four-bedroom modernist house that maximises its natural setting and doesn't dominate the landscape

**THE OWNERS**  
Tony MacKay

**THE ARCHITECT**  
Dugald Mackenzie,  
Mackenzie Architects

**THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER**  
Matthew Michel



# Lasting impression

Melting into the bush, this rock-solid dwelling has a modern mood with a philosophical bent

The key issue faced when designing this Castlecrag home was how to make the most of a dream location: north-facing, nestled in a valley with a creek running at the base of a rocky, fern-filled garden and, at the same time, to be able to meet council requirements.

As Castlecrag was designed by architect Walter Burley Griffin any new designs in the Griffin Conservation Area need to be sympathetic to Griffin's design philosophy.

Owner Tony MacKay lived in the original house, which he says was "a very old-fashioned 1940s house that straddled two titles" for several years until he decided to build two new houses, one to sell, which is featured here. The other is a more traditional Georgian-style house, which Tony will live in when it's completed.

This house retained a few walls of the original house but is predominantly new and is more in keeping with Griffin's style than the other residence.

"This house is preferential [with the council] because it is of the modern mood and perhaps has some elements of that Prairie School theme, with these banded windows and the roof-line," Tony says.

Frugal is not a word that could be used to describe Tony, who says he can't reveal the budget for the four-bedroom house because he hasn't actually added it up.

"I would be hopeless as a spec builder, as I always choose the expensive stuff and feel that in an area like this, it deserves it," he says.

"I feel that people are using this slightly hackneyed word sustainability these days.

And yet often what they're doing is not sustainable because they're using poor quality materials and it doesn't last.

"So my attitude is buy the best. You won't remember the price but the quality is remembered long after the cost is forgotten."

**Positive addition**

Growing up in the Castlecrag area was another factor that influenced Tony to build quality houses. Rather than save a few dollars, he wanted the properties to be a positive addition to the suburb.

"The building process has taken two years. We've had 62 concrete mixers in here and I think the last docket from Boral was 122,000 bricks for the two houses, so nothing is going anywhere," he says.



**A** Dugald Mackenzie and Matthew Michel **B** The house does not dominate its bush setting **C** Owner Tony MacKay **D** The main bedroom looks out to the bush **E** The downstairs living area

Photos: John Fotiadis



**F** Floor-to-ceiling bi-fold doors open up to the wraparound deck **G** Teak veneer and pietra grey marble are featured in the bathroom **H** The kitchen bench with breakfast bar



“These are houses that conceivably could be here in 150 to 200 years. Why not? They’re built that way. The reality of it is: How do you make the house last the longest and be the cheapest to run?”

**Wraparound deck**

One of the distinctive features of the house is its connection with the surrounding bush – you can open the bi-fold doors up and the living areas flow on to the ample deck that wraps around half the house.

“The connection with all this nature is what Mr Griffin wanted and I thought I might as well harness that,” Tony says.

Architect Dugald Mackenzie, from Mackenzie Architects, was surprised about how much light the house had access to.

“The house is in what Tony described as, ‘Frog Hollow’ and you think, when you’re on the road and look down, that this is going to be a really dark house,” Dugald says.

“But in actual fact, you look at the natural features and at the sun arc and everything like that and you think, ‘This

is going to be a really nice little house.’”

Creating a house that didn’t dominate its surroundings was a key part of the brief.

“The idea of the house was to try to maximise the light potential and give vistas through the natural landscape,” he says.

“The aim was to bring the outside in, so that’s why I used bi-fold doors and it’s covered over with eaves so you can open

**“The connection with all this nature is what Mr Griffin wanted and I thought I might as well harness that”**

the whole thing up and, literally, there’s no differentiation between inside and outside.”

Dugald went above and beyond Tony’s brief to build something that will last.

“The thing’s solid as a rock, it’s not going anywhere,” Dugald says.

“We’ve got concrete piers, concrete slabs and double brick. When we first looked at it, we were thinking of doing a really light

steel frame but then you’ve got problems with fire. We’re in a flame zone down here, so we went for a solid construction. And then, as a result of doing the piers and the concrete sub-structure, we were able to get that media room underneath.”

Industrial designer Matthew Michel was brought in to work on the kitchen and cabinetry throughout the house.

“The kitchen is in the middle of the downstairs living environment. We kept the main island bench low so it wouldn’t rise up and sub-divide the room,” Matthew says.

“We’ve created a bit of a breakfast bar there that goes around and that helps to introduce a bit of warmth into the space.”

A modernist design has to carefully tread the line between simple and dull, so Matthew was keen to bring some interesting material combinations into the kitchen to keep the palette rich and interesting.

Materials including teak, pietra grey marble and stainless steel were selected, with teak as the starting point, because one of Tony’s passions is restoring Halvorsen

## GET THE LOOK

**MIRROR MIRROR ...**  
A striking mirror is a great way to add interest to a room, create the illusion of more space, and help brighten things up by bouncing light around. A version of the mirror shown in this Castlecrag house is available from Hypnotic Mirrors, \$790 plus \$70 delivery.

● **MORE INFORMATION**  
**Hypnotic Mirrors** 03 9931 1979, [hypnoticmirrors.com.au](http://hypnoticmirrors.com.au)

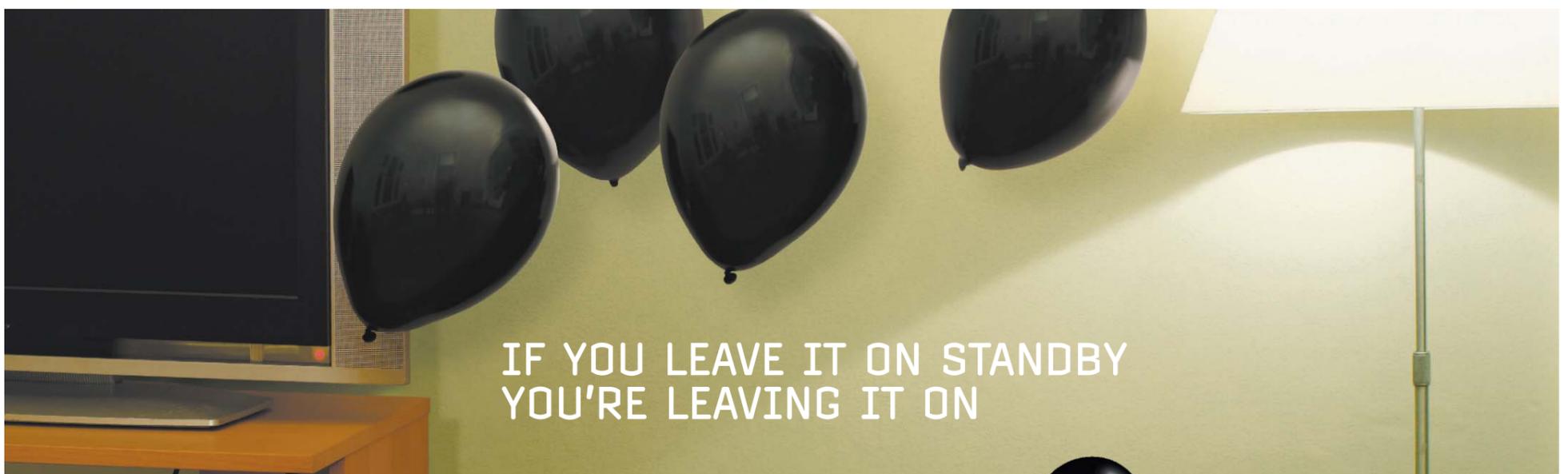
boats, which incorporate a lot of teak. The same teak veneer was also used to line the built-in cabinets in the bedrooms.

“It’s a combination of four colours that generally work together well,” Matthew says. “There is white, which is complementary to the wall colours as the base to all the doors and cupboards and drawer fronts. We also have teak veneer, which is the little accent colour, it’s that orangey red that is quite powerful. And we have stainless steel on the appliances and the bench-top with a waterfall edge on the end and the pietra grey marble.”

“We sort of went to town on the kitchen. We wanted something that would create real drama.” ■

**Alice Wasley**

● **MORE INFORMATION**  
**Mackenzie Architects** 9967 9966, [www.mackenziearchitects.com.au](http://www.mackenziearchitects.com.au)  
**Matt Michel Design** 0411 887 427, [mattmicheldesign.com.au](http://mattmicheldesign.com.au)



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