

{PROJECT}

BALGOWLAH RESIDENCE

{ARCHITECT}

B.E. ARCHITECTURE



BELLEVARDE

Welcome to Building with Bellevarde: Insights.

In this edition, we cover a wonderful house in Sydney's Northern Beaches.

Being set deep in the hillside, the excavation required some ingenious engineering solutions to shift material up the slope. The resulting multi-storey home features a superb and functional central staircase that offers views to different levels giving a sense of togetherness and privacy. Bellevarde's Site Manager, Mick Carroll, collaborated closely with the architects and owners to produce an exceptional result.

It was our first collaboration with B.E. Architecture and it was a deeply gratifying experience. We look forward to working with them again.

We hear from architects Jon Boucher and Tim Carrington as well as owners Kate and Dave about what it was like working with Mick and the Bellevarde team on this special house.

We hope you enjoy their stories.

As always, we welcome any questions, feedback, or opportunities to discuss your next project.

A handwritten signature in dark brown ink, appearing to read 'John Fielding', written in a cursive style.

JOHN FIELDING
AND THE BELLEVARDE TEAM







This was our first time working with the Belvedere team. B.E. Architecture's Tim Carrington and I came into it with our eyes wide open and, in the end, got a lot out of the collaboration with John Fielding and his experienced team at Belvedere.

Belvedere's Adam Buckley and B.E. Architecture had worked up the cost plan before starting work on site, so we had built up a good understanding. When we landed on site, we met the site manager, Belvedere's Mick Carroll, a straight-talker who says how it is which was great because we're a group of architects that love being hands-on on construction sites. With the two sides, building and architecture, working that way, we broadened the project's outcome.

One of the challenges we faced was doing the major part of the building during that chaotic time from 2021-2023. Coordinating people, materials, client needs and keeping it all at that highest level was no small feat. And yet somehow, with the help of some technology, and the good will of all involved, it all happened.

It's a layered building in a sense in that you go from a public area which is very fenced off and then you walk into an intermediate space between you and the building and in that space, you can see all the way down to the harbour. You can then turn left and walk back to the building and you're inside.

The front elevation might be my favourite part. It creates a sense of privacy. There's no hint at what lies behind. It portrays itself as a very simple, quiet, elegant single storey building—with fine detailing of timber and render. From the street, you have no sense that there are six storeys looking over the harbour.

Coming from Melbourne, we noticed it can be more humid in Sydney so we focused on different ways to incorporate ventilation and cross ventilation, especially important on such a rectilinear site. That's where the idea of cutting the building into two parts emerged. One part can look through a garden, through the second part and on to the foreshore, creating more facades that face the water. The more facades we have, the more ventilation.

The house is set deep into the hillside, but the site is so constrained that Belvedere had to dig that huge hillside twice—once to remove the material and then again to move it from the front of the site up to the street. You had this line of excavators each passing scoops up the hill to the trucks, it was like machines dancing. An amazing piece of engineering and construction.

We wanted to create something that had the air of the public spaces in Europe—those cobblestoned areas there's no clear delineation of where a car is supposed to be, where a person can be. We had a mature olive tree craned in. In that space, you could have a party, or park four big cars, or put a long table and eat lunch under the tree. We like that feeling of openness and utility.

Mick and Tim worked tirelessly to produce the stunning staircase. Being a multi-level building, you're on the stairs a lot so it's important to get it right. A stair of that height can become very dark, so we've got the skylights at the top and the open treads to let light in. We wanted the stair to have the same value as the premium joinery. So, from our point of view, it's a piece of joinery and not just a metal staircase. A combination of solid timber, timber joinery, and the same limestone as the external paving. It's a triumph.

The overall finish is excellent. There's nowhere to hide in this building and Belvedere were up to the fine tolerances required and finished the project in an exemplar way. The simple elements are often the hardest to get right. Getting things to line up and be completely flush where you've got different materiality can be very difficult. Especially when things are pared back as they are here. The painting is fantastic, the stone masonry, the rendering, the precision of the meeting of all the materials—timber, plaster, stone reveals, all seamless. The level of technical ability that Mick and the team were able to achieve is outstanding.

At the end of the day, probably my biggest read on Belvedere, is that their hearts, their heads and their hands were in it. Not only did they help us realise the vision, but they were also instrumental in making it happen in the way we thought was best for the project.

That great combination of idea and buildability and getting those two things to match so that the sum is greater than the parts. There's even been recognition from within our office of the work Belvedere have done. One of our other Founding Directors who is very focused on attention to detail was floored by the result. Upon entering the site, he walked up to Mick and said, 'This is one of the best builds I've seen in a very, very long time.'

All building projects are like a marathon. Working with Belvedere is like running with top level athletes. We would jump at the chance to deliver another project again with John Fielding and Belvedere.











The client brief was for a forever home. Given the steep block, it was always going to be complex. One of our directors, Jon Boucher, is very good at finding the right people for the work. We spoke to a couple of builders but none could compete with the experience Bellevarde have. We know them as being one of, if not, the very best residential builders in Australia. Being quite detail-focused, the client saw there was value in using them to get the quality they were after. They liked the idea of having the best finishing you could get.

About a year into the process, Bellevarde started doing all the dry work, the footing tests, and boundary condition tests. The nice thing for us about having Bellevarde on board early was that we were able to develop the project with the builder. We designed it, but it was certainly a team effort to translate it into reality.

They were heavily involved in developing a methodology for the excavation. The site called for a twelve and a half metre vertical cut into a hillside. The building is a giant buttress for the cut—it holds the whole thing up. There's a thousand ways to dig a hole but there's inevitably going to be one that's more stable, more efficient, and more cost-effective. Without that early work and without Bellevarde's assistance with the engineers, there was the potential for issues. Bellevarde's knowledge and experience proved invaluable in the process.

The render we used is a high end architectural product called Tanami. Bellevarde had a specialist Portuguese contractor, who was very skilled in traditional European trowelling techniques. He came and mocked up three different ways of trowelling with three different finishes. The client picked the one they liked and that's how we ended up with this wonderful texture that gives different lighting effects throughout the day.

Many of the material choices were driven by the client's preferences. They prefer a lighter aesthetic. Internally, the Arabescato marble was something that they really liked and it was an obvious choice to pair that with light oaks. The grey limestone complements that nicely. These materials manifest in areas associated with the harbour.

In response to the long, steep, and relatively narrow block we developed an idea for a dual-aspect building that could integrate the harbour and the views with the internal garden views and the central light court which allows light to penetrate deeper into the building. That led to all the extra programs, pushing deeper into the hillside, and the finding of innovative ways to draw in light and provide ventilation.

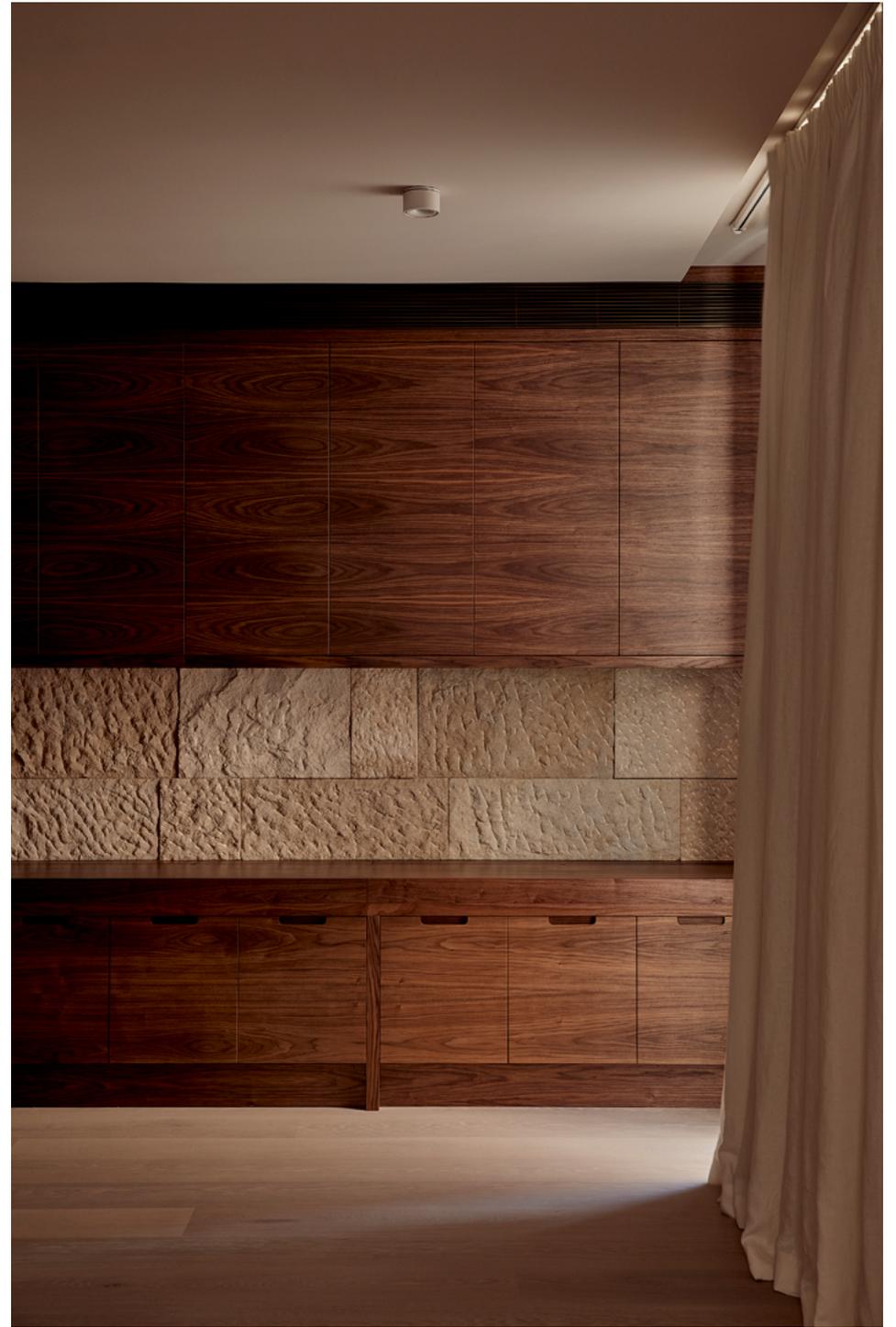
We developed a second palette and language internally, which included a darker aesthetic—the walnut veneer, the Verdi Alpi stone, and rough sandstone walls that feature in the courtyard. They are a reference to the excavation process and an acknowledgement of the subterranean.

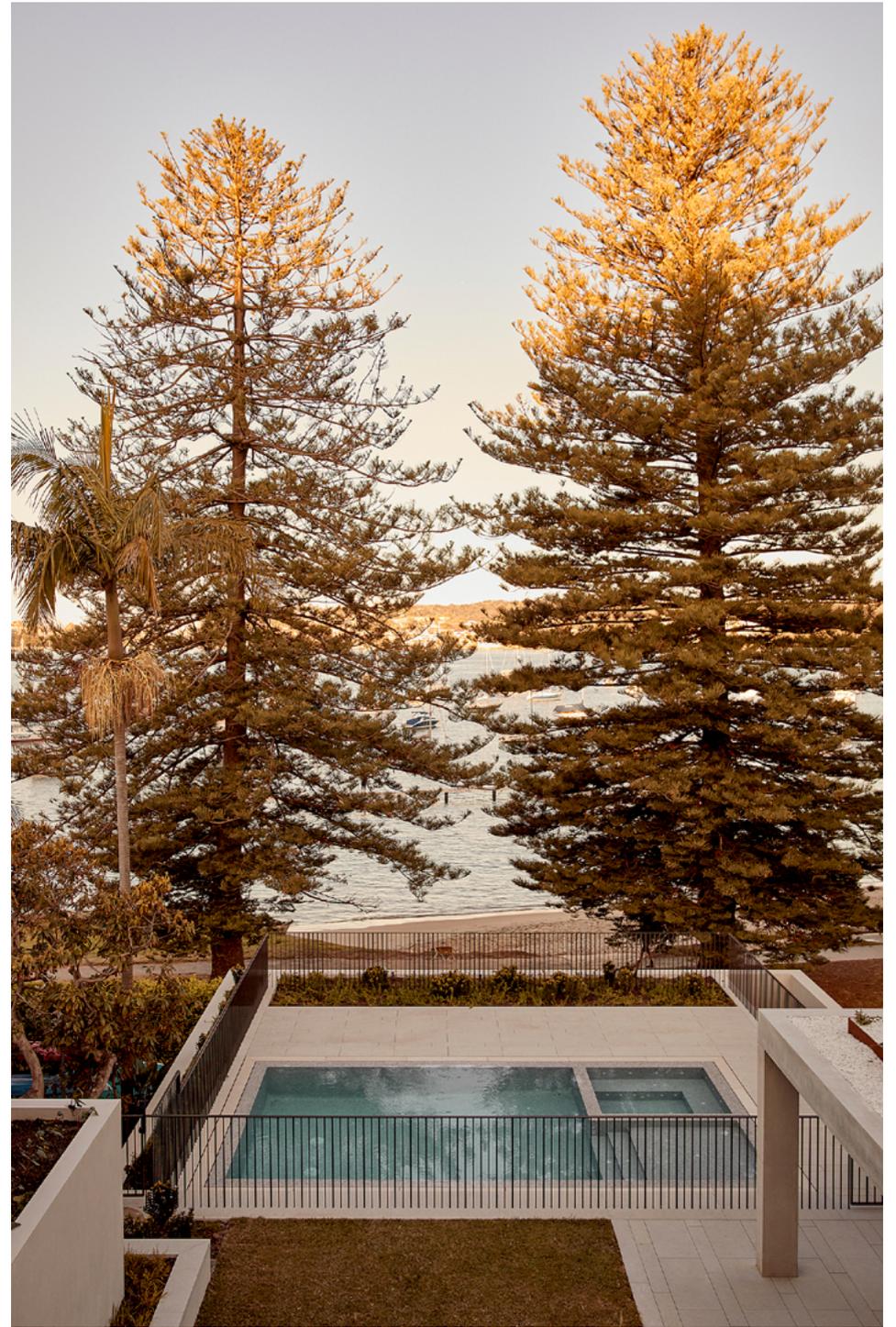
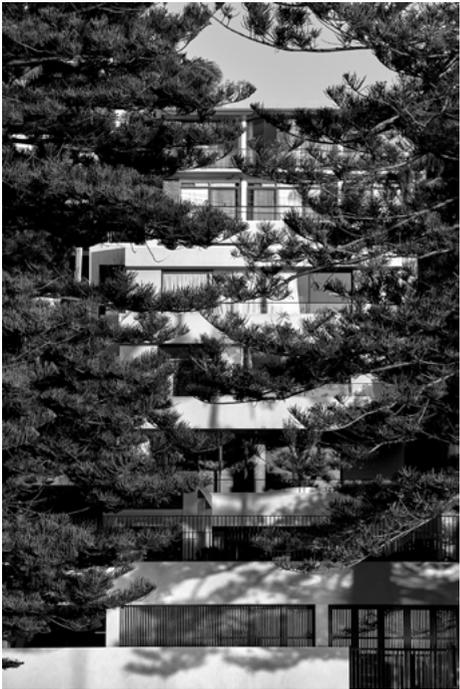
One of the nice things about working with Mick Carroll and the Bellevarde team was how enthusiastic they were to get the detail right. Refreshingly, the usual process was flipped. Because he was completely across all the detail, Mick was coming to us saying 'I'm thinking about this element, how do you want to do it?' or 'I'm thinking about making this in one of these four ways, what do you think?' In essence, he is very proactive when it comes to the building as well as the architectural process.

Overall, the job stood out for being a group of people who really cared. Everyone was willing to do a bit more to make sure it was right. When you've got a builder who is able to execute at this quality and to this detail, it enables you to have a different conversation on-site. You're not trying to make sure all the corners are neat and you're not going to miss a junction—you know you're going to get that. So you can talk about getting better detail resolutions and better outcomes—higher level conversations that add more to the building in the end. It certainly shows.

Thanks to Bellevarde's Mick Carroll, Adam Buckley, and Chris Hawke for steering the ship and bringing the project home in such fine style. The owners are delighted with the result and so are we.







We started with a vision for a contemporary, family-oriented home that could blend indoor and outdoor spaces while still keeping a sense of privacy. Ours is a steep block and a complex and challenging design so we needed a builder with exceptional attention to detail.

We discovered Bellevarde through B.E. Architecture, whose work we admired. Their high standards called for a builder capable of delivering on precision and quality. B.E. recommended Bellevarde as being able to execute intricate designs flawlessly.

Our site manager, Bellevarde's Mick Carroll, has been simply amazing. He has a great ability to anticipate potential issues and present solutions before they become problems. His honesty, openness, and meticulous approach instilled complete trust.

The house itself is very well crafted. The hand-trowelled render by artisan Nunu is a standout feature. It has the look of white concrete with a smooth, textured finish that adds sophistication and movement. Because Bellevarde has access to a large network of skilled tradespeople, we were shown sample spots by several renderers. We were struck by Nunu's artistry and the superior quality of his work and it's really elevated our home's style. The flush joinery, recessed handles, and seamless transitions—such as the garage door sliding into a cavity—make for a pleasing indoor-outdoor experience. The home's automation, including fingerprint entry, automated lighting, and climate control, was an important aspect of the build for us and it's been executed thoughtfully.

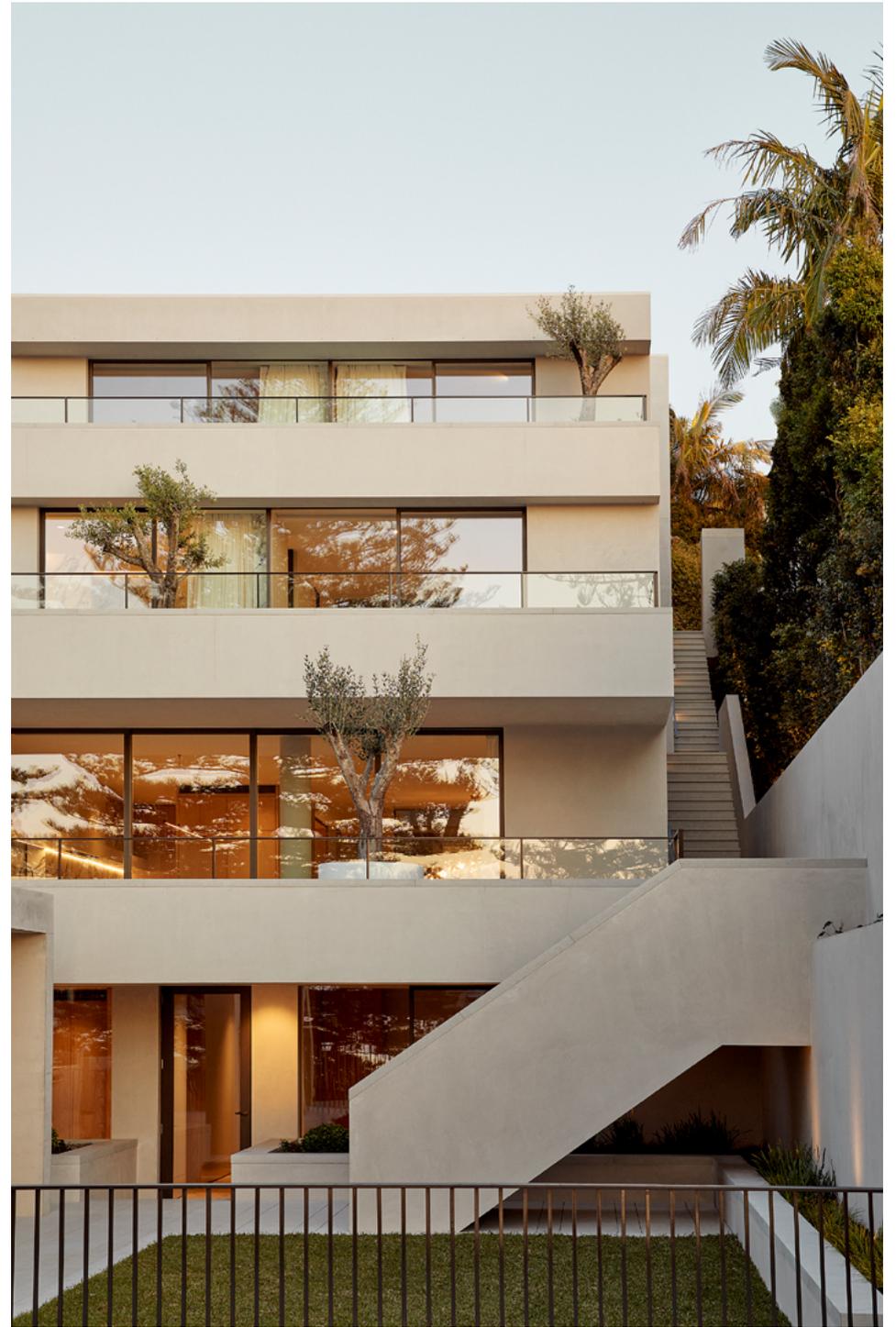
Apart from their technical expertise, Bellevarde's professionalism even extended beyond our project. During torrential rain, Mick and his team volunteered to assist a neighbour with flooding issues, turning a potentially contentious relationship into one of appreciation. Neighbours consistently noted that Bellevarde was the least disruptive of the builders working in the area. They quickly addressed any concerns and were always ready to move vehicles to facilitate access.

Bellevarde's resourcefulness was impressive. During the extensive excavation, they used offcuts to create a ramp for heavy machinery—it was innovative problem-solving. Their strong relationships with trades means they have access to top artisans and, when a joiner faced financial difficulties, Bellevarde stepped in to ensure the work was completed without any compromises.

The result is a home that feels interconnected—designed and built to bring our family together. From the kitchen, we can see across multiple levels, ensuring both togetherness and privacy. The entertainment area, equipped with speakers, lighting, and heaters, is a favourite. The 'Dave cave', with its opening glass and timber panels feels private but still gives a superb view of the beach. Every space is functional, with no wasted areas. The solid construction techniques, high level of finishing, and soundproofing make it feel tranquil, just as we'd hoped.

Bellevarde's dedication to excellence has delivered a home we absolutely love. Their proactive maintenance, with Mick quickly handling any minor issues, has further strengthened our trust.





At Belvedere, we have four principles that have served us well in ensuring we maintain standards across every job.

{First Principle}

FIND THE BEST PEOPLE

It is about searching until we find the people who share our love for building houses as well as they can be built.

That's what Belvedere is—a team of us who just want to build extraordinary houses. It is an attitude that can't be driven or constrained by external factors. It's innate.

We employ apprentices to artisans and experienced site managers—the rest are tried and trusted contractors. Many of our people have been with us for over 20 years and a few for more than 40.

{Second Principle}

KEEP ON LEARNING

Everything we have learned in building some of this country's most complex and challenging houses is formalised in our 200-page Belvedere Construction Manual.

It details step-by-step instructions on how best to perform every critical task.

It is on every site and is constantly reviewed and updated as our knowledge grows and as building techniques, materials, equipment, and technologies, evolve.

We visit completed builds and catalogue the best of each project to continually improve and refine our methods. We also keep a library of our favourite architecture and building publications to stay informed of the latest developments and learn from others.



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{Third Principle}

FORM A BUILDING TEAM

It takes three key players to create a great house: owner, architect and builder. That is why, on each site, we form the building team headed by our site manager who lives the project start to finish. The trio meets regularly to review, discuss, and guide every aspect of the project. This ensures everyone knows just where we are, where we are going next—and ensures that the team make the best decisions.

It is the best way to deliver an extraordinary house that only ever costs what it should cost, and brings great joy to all of us.

{Fourth Principle}

MAINTAIN THE HOUSE

This came from listening to owners. They asked us to take care of their houses as well as we built them. So we formed our own specialised Belvedere Maintenance division. It benefits from access to all information about the build. Plus we can often call on the very tradespeople who built it.

Each new home has its own maintenance manager, who thoroughly understands the house and cares deeply about maintaining it to the highest standards.

According to owners and architects, we deliver the most efficient and skilled post completion care they have ever worked with—indeed several have asked us to take care of other properties we didn't build.

We welcome any questions, feedback or opportunities to discuss your prospective projects.

<i>{Construction}</i>	2020—2023
<i>{Interviews}</i>	Hamish Spencer
<i>{Design}</i>	Pidgeon Ward
<i>{Photography}</i>	Martina Gemmola
<i>{Paper}</i>	Colorplan, Knight Smooth
<i>{Printing}</i>	Ellikon Fine Printers

