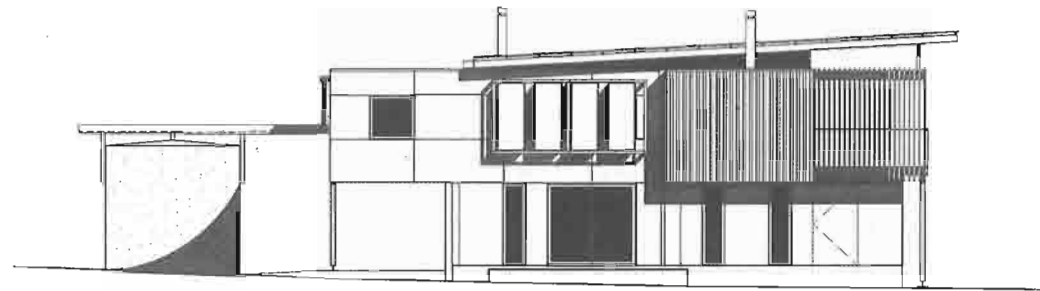


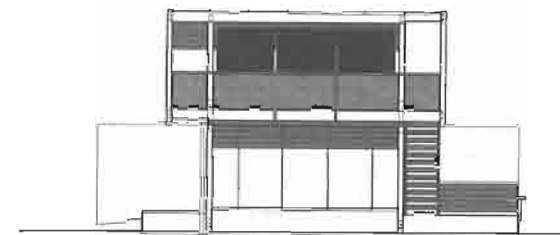
Shark attack at bach settlement

Herbst Architects' Hammerhead House is a single-minded intruder into a North Auckland beach town that is becoming suburbia-by-the-sea. Comment by John Walsh; photographs by Simon Devitt.

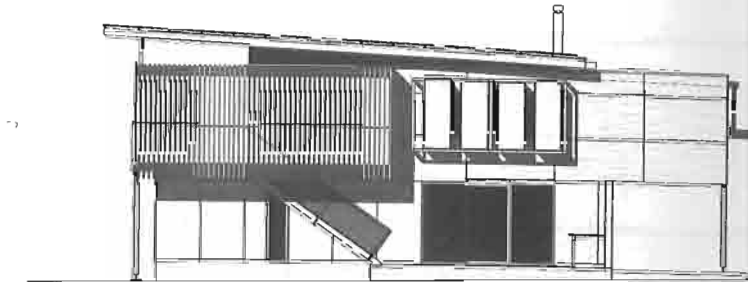




EAST ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION

The bach, about which much tosh has been and continues to be written, is such an equivocal structure. According to the orthodox version – to the cliché history, that is – it is both the expression of a reductive lifestyle, and a medium for its temporary achievement. Simplicity, modesty, pragmatism: they're the hallmarks of the bach, and of bach life.

But the bach also stands for a Kiwi kind of selfishness, one step removed from beachcomber self-indulgence. For all its legendary casualness, the bach is a private place. Views are welcome; the world is not. Baches cohabit with their neighbours; communality is accidental, and incidental. In the putative heyday of the bach – say the 40 years from the end of the Second World War – this self-absorption was relatively benign, but under the influence of affluence it has metastasised into an aggressively anti-social condition. Any number of coastal developments could serve to illustrate the phenomenon of a bach “community” eating itself. A particularly lurid display of such cannibalism may be witnessed on the hill at the south end of Lang’s Beach, near Waipu in Northland, where cheek-by-jowl Pakuranga-scale houses scrap for their piece of the prospect.

Designing modern “baches” for existing beach settlements – as opposed to vacant promontories or disestablished campgrounds – means confronting a legacy of egoism, albeit one moderated historically by a widespread antipathy towards “show offs” and an endemic parsimony. At these sites, a couple of generations might have done what they wanted, but today’s architect and client can’t. (This generalisation does not

apply to those larger developers who benefit from consent processes that are the planning equivalents of regressive taxation regimes – i.e., the smaller the client the more prohibitive the compliance costs).

On a small plot at the end of a cul-de-sac at Mangawhai, Lance Herbst and his clients had to deal with the cumulative contextual affect of a few decades of bach ad-hocery. Mangawhai, on the east coast half way between Auckland and Whangarei (not far from Lang’s Beach), is, like most of Rodney District, a fast-growing place. There is an ocean beach, a lagoon, and a rapidly developing hinterland. Mangawhai has never had the cachet of the Bay of Islands or parts of the Coromandel, but it is only 90 minutes from Queen Street and, as rising fuel prices shrink the holiday radius, it will seem more and more desirable.

What do you do on a coastal site when the surrounding built environment is poor? What you’d do anywhere, but more so: Try to ignore it, and focus instead on the good stuff which, in this case, is the attractive view to the north-east, over the lagoon and out to sea and Taranga Island and the Hen and Chickens. Herbst has, accordingly, sited the house to face this direction, and given it a second storey so that its inhabitants can

surmount their mundane surroundings. In fact, so determined is the house’s orientation that it may as well declare that looking in any other direction is simply not an option. To reinforce the message, the house comes with its own blinkers: wooden shutters in front of the sliding windows on the north and south elevations of the upper floor. The architect is not a complete determinist: the shutters can be opened, though the manual adjustments take sufficient effort to discourage whimsical use. (That’s not to say the articulated mechanism is not well-designed – it is.)

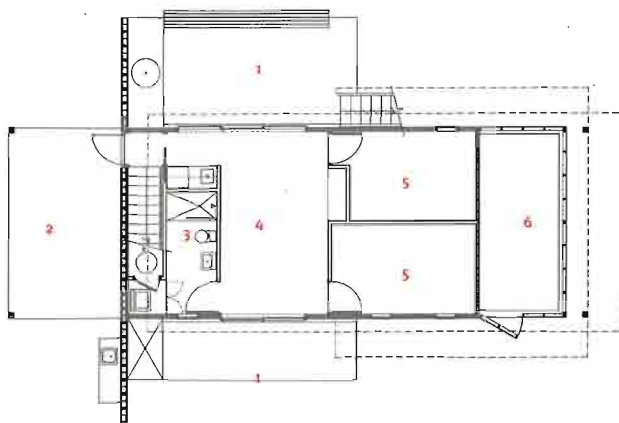
The plan of the house propels its inhabitants to the large deck – canopy-roofed, and screened to the sides – which stretches across the front of the upper floor. This protuberance, which inspired the Hammerhead epithet, is in effect an outdoor room. But it doesn’t just offer privacy and protection; it gives the whole house a presence without which it could have seemed too introverted, too much like a fortress. The deck, with its slatted timber flanks and its own entrance stairway running between house and screen, is an assertive element. On its stark, enclosed site, the house might seem rather besieged, but its hammerhead front suggests a posture of aggressive defence. The tacit message is “I’m going to get mine”. And why not? That was evidently the intention of many of the neighbours, realised with little consideration for each other and even less concern for natural or man-

made context.

The basic form of the Hammerhead House is one rectangular box slid over another, under a gently inclined roof. Behind the upper-level deck is a kitchen/dining area giving into a lounge, and behind that the master bedroom and en suite bathroom. An internal stairway descends between lounge and main bedroom to the ground floor, which has two guest or children’s bedrooms, another lounge or rumpus room, the second bathroom and a large storage room. A small terrace on the west side has room for a table; on the east side there is an outside shower for the post-beach clean-up.

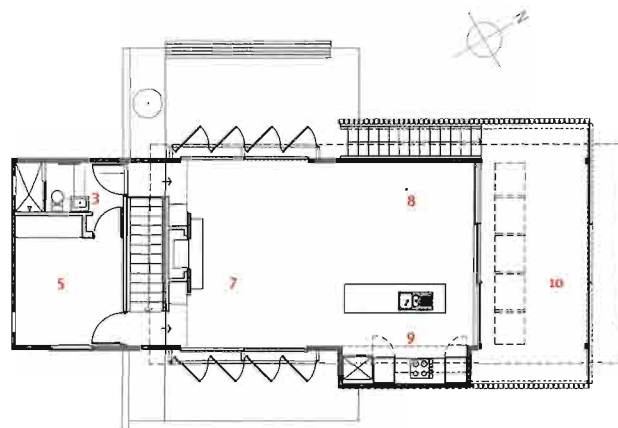
Trad bach materials have been used throughout: block walls and concrete floor downstairs, ply walls and wooden floor on the upper floor. In its material components and its unfussy nature the house accords to the bach archetype, but departs from it in its coherent programme. Herbst Architects is establishing a reputation for elegant and clever design (see for example, Marshall Cook’s enthusiastic comment on Herbst’s Parnell School Library, *Architecture NZ*, March / April 2003) and even on a comparatively modest project such as the Hammerhead House the practice aims to reach its high standards. This commitment is revealed in various grace notes in the Hammerhead House: the clerestory above the upper floor shutters, for example, the skylight in the roof above the deck, the grill behind a





GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- 1 TERRACE
- 2 CARPORT
- 3 BATHROOM
- 4 RUMPUS
- 5 BEDROOM
- 6 STORAGE
- 7 LIVING
- 8 DINING
- 9 KITCHEN
- 10 DECK



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

bookcase on the upper floor which brings natural light into the stairwell. These clients evidently got a lot of attention from their architect.

With some aging and fading of materials, and a bit of landscaping, the Hammerhead House will be less obviously the new kid on its block. But it will always stand out from its desultory neighbours. (Why do New Zealanders want to replicate suburbia at the beach?) What is interesting about the house is that despite its resolute repudiation of those neighbours in favour of a single-minded engagement with 90 degrees of ocean view, its presence has benefited its neighbourhood. Like all New Zealand “baches”, the Hammerhead House is self-involved; unlike most New Zealand “baches”, the self-interest it pursues is enlightened.

HAMMERHEAD HOUSE, MANGAWHAI

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PROJECT TEAM

LANCE HERBST; NICOLA HERBST; BODIE MAXCEY
(PROJECT ARCHITECT)

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

THORNE DWYER

WINDOW SHUTTER MECHANISMS

ECOTEC INDUSTRIES

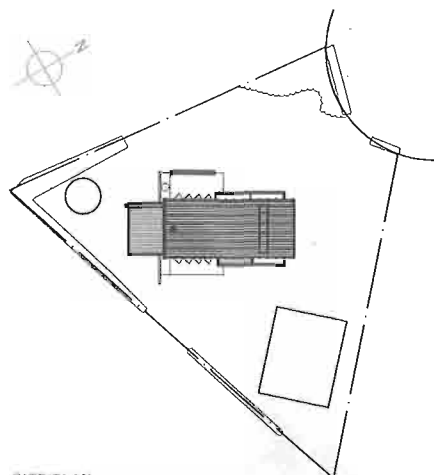
KITCHEN & CABINETS

J&T CONCEPTS

PROJECT COST

CONFIDENTIAL

Opening page: The Hammerhead House, from the NW. Page 55: Dining, kitchen and deck. Right: Stairway to deck.



SITE PLAN

