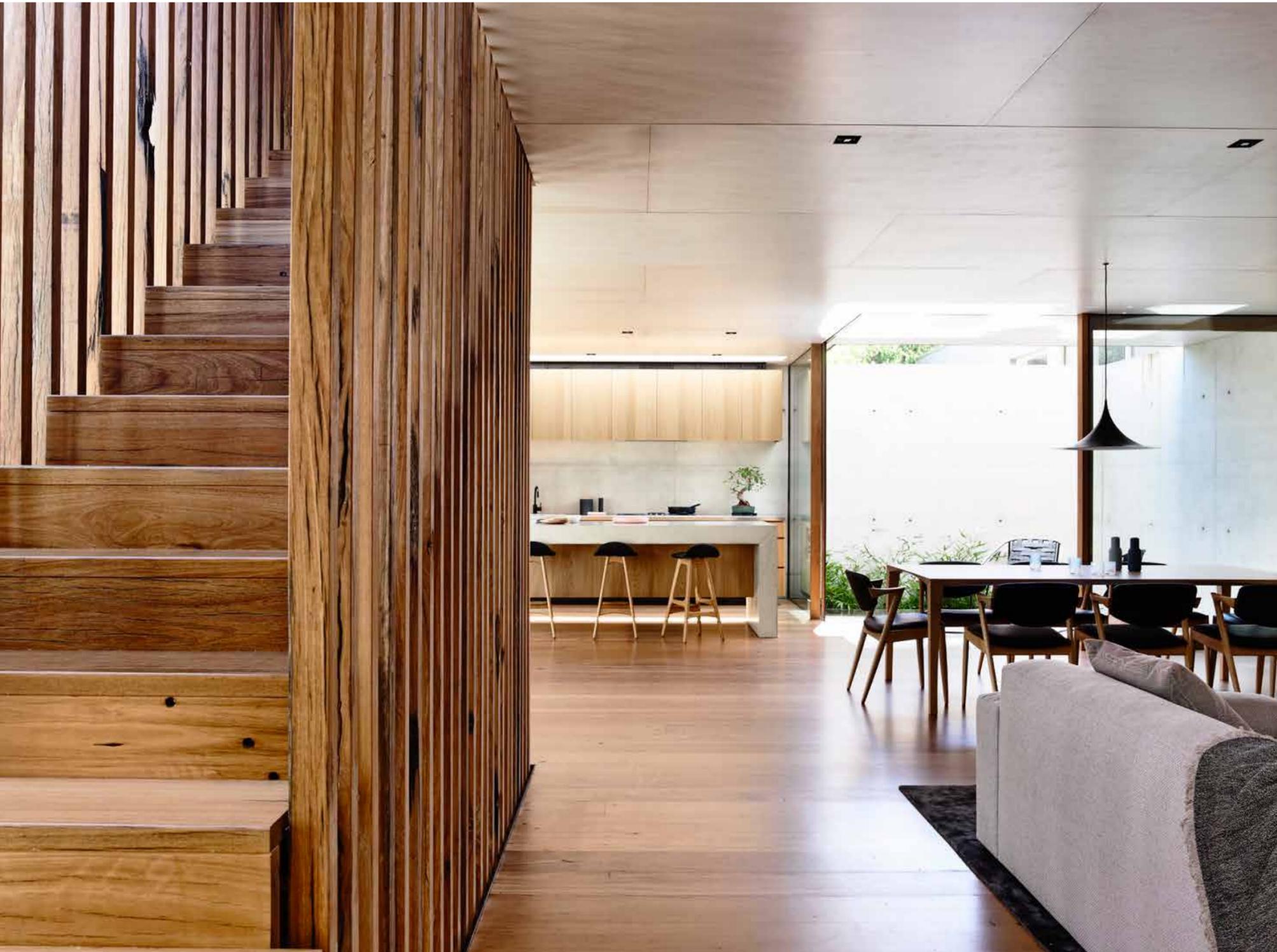


# *very* A SMALL SITE

Achieving the seemingly impossible, Schulberg Demkiw Architects have designed a generous family home on a mere 108 square metre buildable area. Ray Demkiw takes us through this ingenious design, explaining how they have created three very liveable floors through the careful manipulation of light and space.

Architect Schulberg Demkiw Architects  
Photographer Derek Swalwell  
Stylist Rachel Vigor  
Location Melbourne





Opening: The three-storey house is built virtually to the boundaries on three sides, with a breezeway setback along the southern boundary. The lower two levels are off-form concrete, while bedrooms on level three are built inside a timber box. Screens, skylights and high-level windows maintain privacy and control outlook over neighbouring sites.

A warm palette of materials is used here including recycled tallowood eucalyptus floors, window frames and balusters, and hoop-pine panelled ceilings. They all contrast against the off-form concrete walls and kitchen bench. Dining chairs and table: #42 dining chair by Kai Kristiansen in Oak and black leather, Johansen table in oak by Mads Johansen.



Above: Cars are parked on the private laneway, and the house entrance is down a 16 metre long, landscaped pedestrian pathway to the front door. The brick wall of the neighbour's house is softened with planting, as is the new concrete garden wall opposite. A concrete and timber porch greets the visitor, introducing the materials used in the house interior.

**O**n a small suburban lane in bayside Melbourne, we designed this off-form concrete home, surmounted by a timber-clad 'box'. We gave particular emphasis to materials, volume, space, and natural light to create beauty and functionality. These, and the tiny lot, acted as both constraint and generator for the design.

Our clients wanted a warm environment that could accommodate family living, two bedrooms, a study, and flexible space for living or future accommodation. So we needed to maximise the usability of the site by building almost to its boundaries, and by building a full basement. With little outlook from the site, interior vertical and horizontal spatial connections became key, as did a palette of interior materials to create interest, contrast and natural warmth. Dexterous use of light would enliven the whole spatial experience, and so we developed a scheme of courtyards, breezeways, skylights, floor lights, high windows and screened openings.

**For the basement level to succeed as a habitable space, we created a northern light-well courtyard for natural light, ventilation, and connection with the outdoors.**

Below: The basement floor is floodlit with a light well/courtyard in the northern corner. The timber joists above support the Perspex floor of the mid-level courtyard. Recycled timber floors give a warm contrast to the concrete walls and ceiling, while the large glass sliding door closes off the study from the downstairs living room.



A view of the basement powder room with the laundry beyond. The floor is tallowwood eucalyptus, including the shower duckboards. Its walls are rendered and sealed. Light streams down from the floor skylight above, day or night. In terms of flexibility, this area can become an ensuite if the basement is adapted into a master bedroom.

The basement level contains a living room, study, storage room, power room and laundry. For this to succeed as a habitable space, we created a northern light-well courtyard for natural light, ventilation, and connection with the outdoors. The glazed stairwell and skylights on the opposite side of the space ensure an even light distribution throughout the floor.

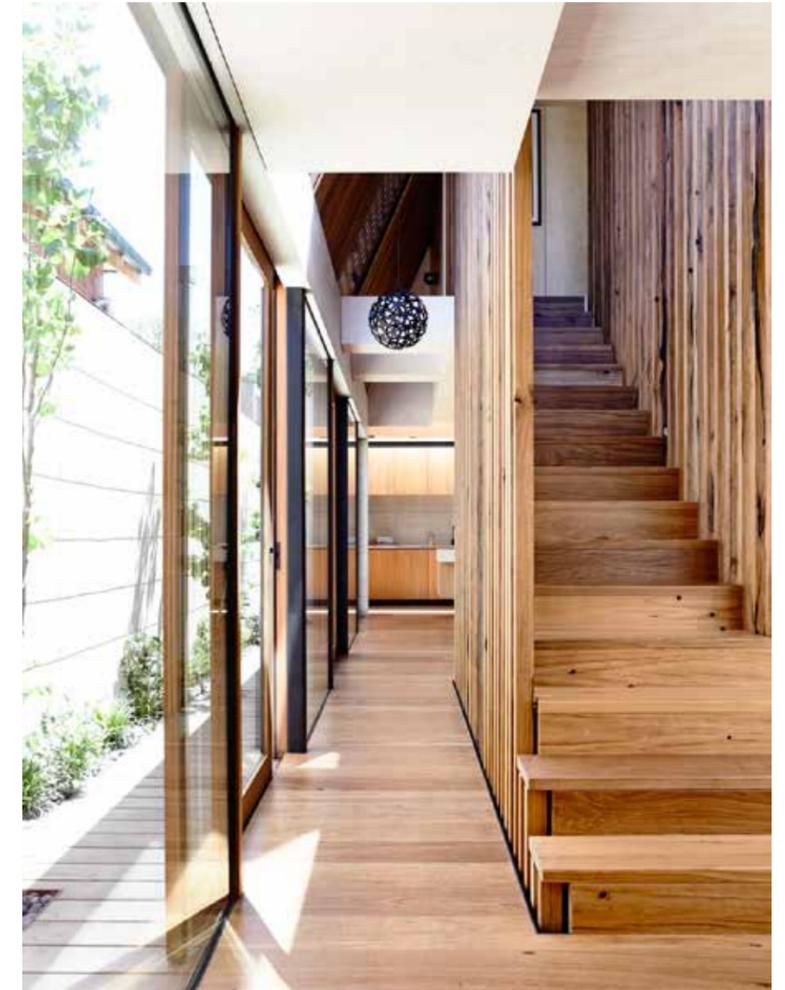
From this subterranean space, the stairwell climbs up to the next floor and continues up as a three-storey visual element, emphasised by a continuous, solid timber screen. The front door, adjacent the stair, is linked to the lane car parking by a 16 metre long landscaped pathway. This middle floor also contains the main living area, kitchen and dining, with light sources from four sides: a long southern breezeway, a northern corner courtyard and two long skylights. The courtyard has timber joists with a clear Perspex floor to admit light to the basement courtyard below.

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Below: Insulated concrete walls double as structure and aesthetic elements whilst providing thermal mass to moderate temperature changes internally. The skylight is a key feature to ensure a balance of light throughout the floor plate, and the floor light shares light from this level down to the basement powder room and laundry. Art credit: Monique Williamson. Sofa: Modular Dune system by Carlo Colombo for Poliform.



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Above: This view from the front door looks past the stairwell to the kitchen beyond. Sliding doors open to the southern breezeway, which has planting along the boundary wall to provide a green backdrop.



Off-form concrete extends into the kitchen with a cantilevered concrete benchtop and splashback. The workbench is stainless steel, and timber is used in the tall timber box housing for the fridge, pantry, appliances, and cupboard fronts. A long skylight in the kitchen creates patterns of light and shade. Stools: Black Leather Counter Stools by Erik Buch.



Above: Each ensuite has a mesh curtain but is otherwise open to the bedroom and raised garden to maximise the sense of space. Sloping ceilings allow space for high-level windows and maximum light penetration. Porcelain tiles line the bathroom floors and walls, the benchtop and sink are made of Corian, and joinery fronts are in rough-sawn American oak. Limed hoop pine lines the rest of the room.



Above: The top floor houses two bedrooms and two ensuites. Separating them is a lush raised garden, accessed by large sliding doors. Cross-ventilation is achieved with this central lineal courtyard and screened external windows, boosted by fans. Materials include: tallowood eucalyptus windows, carpet and hoop-pine walls and ceilings. Careful detailing allows this volume to present itself as a single integral piece of joinery.

The eucalyptus floor on the two living levels is recycled from an old bridge in NSW. Sliding doors are also made of the local tallowood eucalyptus, as are the gnarled recycled stair balusters. The walls and basement ceiling are off-form concrete, while the middle floor ceiling and bedroom linings on the top floor are finished in a limed hoop pine plywood. The contrast between the timber and concrete is striking, and the varied hues of the timber create the warmth required in the brief. The builder displayed great care and craftsmanship in this regard.

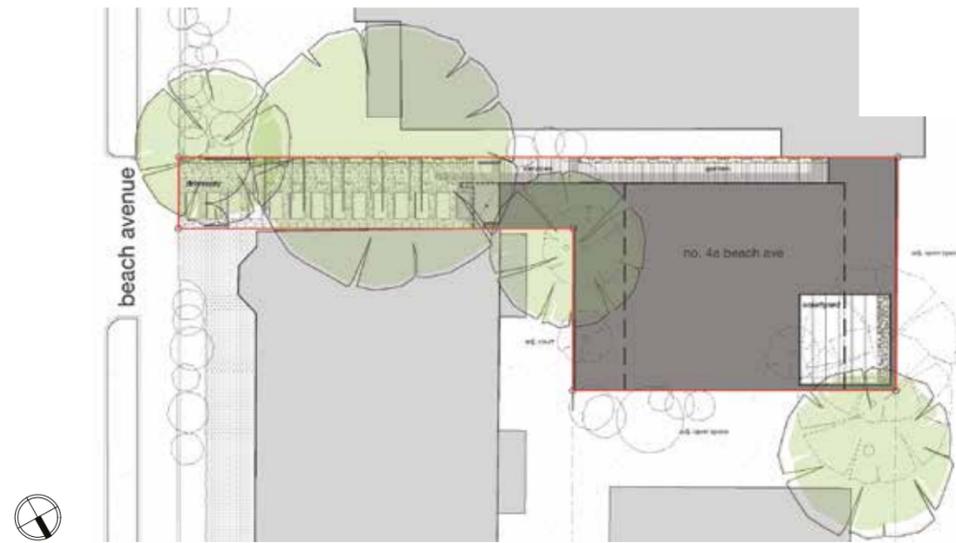
A lightweight timber 'box' on level three completes the scheme, and contains the two bedrooms and ensuites.

Its floor plate is narrower than the floors below to comply with town planning setbacks, and to allow generous natural light downstairs. An internal courtyard between the two bedrooms contains a raised garden bed for screening, air cooling and the amenity provided by planting. On the exterior, tallowood cladding and window screens soften the concrete boundary walls and maintain privacy between neighbours.

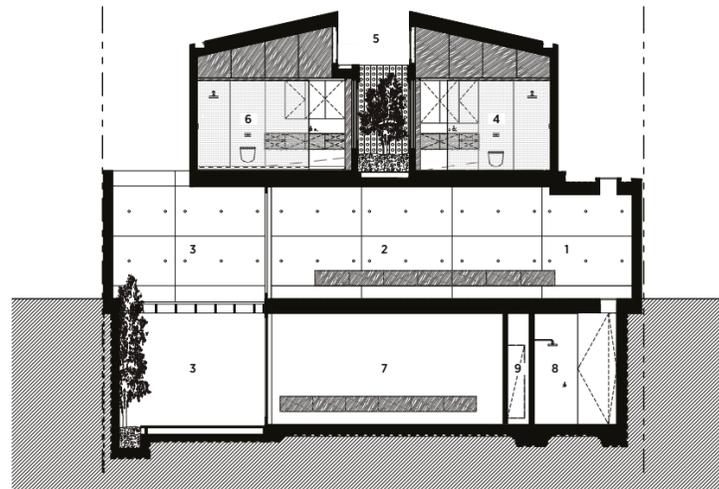
Whilst pushing the envelope on this minute site to gain high-quality space and light internally, we have maintained a respect for the neighbouring properties. In collaboration with an adventurous client, we have created a design solution which is warm, open and filled with light. ■

# A VERY SMALL SITE

## SITE PLAN:

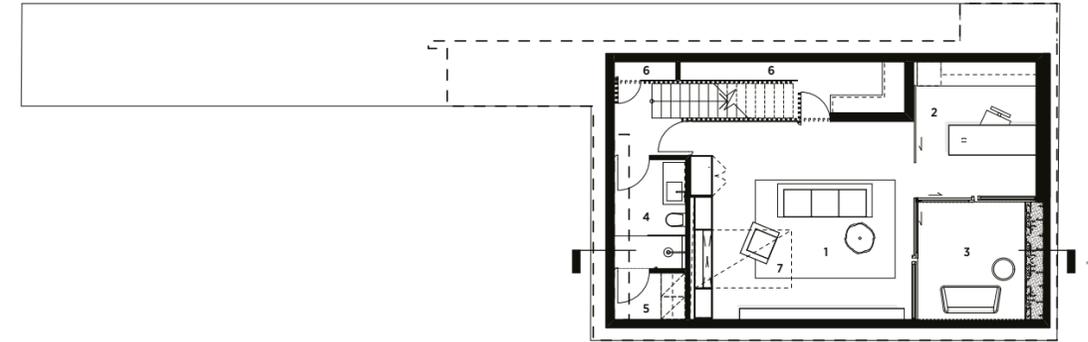


## SECTION:

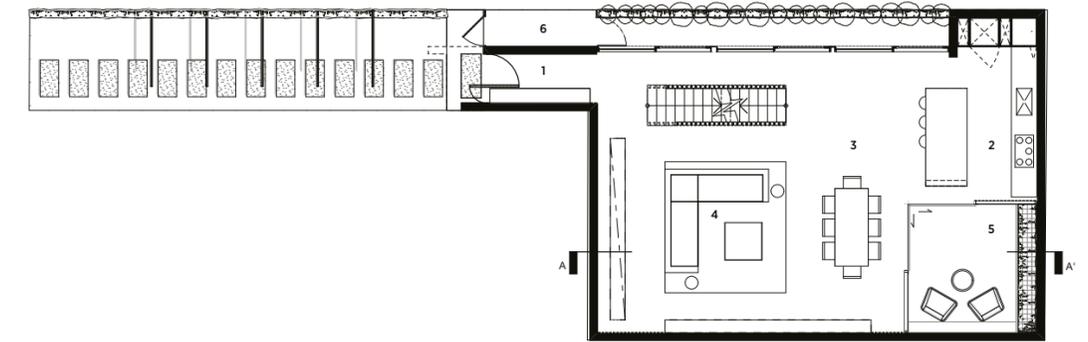


Cross Section: 1. Living, 2. Dining, 3. Courtyard, 4. Bedroom/Ensuite, 5. Light well, 6. Bedroom/Ensuite, 7. Home theatre, 8. Bathroom, 9. Fold-Down Bed.

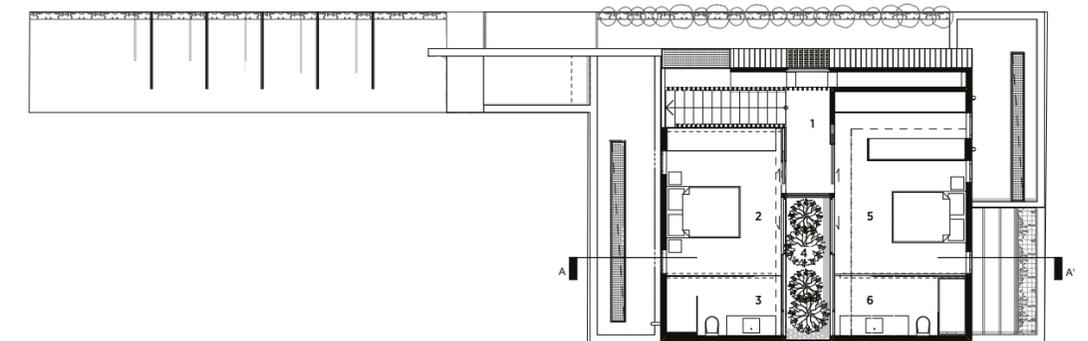
## PLANS:



Basement: 1. Home Theatre, 2. Study, 3. Courtyard, 4. Bathroom, 5. Laundry, 6. Store, 7. Fold-Down bed.



Ground Floor: 1. Entrance, 2. Kitchen, 3. Dining, 4. Living, 5. Courtyard, 6. Service area.



First Floor: 1. Entrance, 2. Bedroom, 3. Ensuite, 4. Light well, 5. Bedroom, 6. Ensuite.

## A VERY SMALL SITE

### PROJECT INNOVATIONS:

- **Building a good-sized, free-standing family home in a dense neighbourhood, which adds architectural interest and value.**
- **Creating a sense of space and light despite having no exterior windows on levels one and two.**
- **Innovative use of light wells, courtyards, breezeways, skylights and floor lights to illuminate the interior.**
- **Blending interior materials to achieve robust family spaces with warmth and comfort.**
- **Creating options for the future with a flexible basement plan, which can allow family living, home office, a future master bedroom or a semi-self-contained accommodation unit.**

### PROFILE:

Schulberg Demkiw Architects work in a vibrant studio that values artistic expression, encourages exploration and problem solving, and encompasses a highly professional, efficient structure of management, process and project delivery. The design focus is for a creative yet relatable design response to a client's brief. It is intended to integrate all aspects of the architecture, interiors solutions and external spaces to work as one whilst also creating points of difference, both spatially and aesthetically. A careful balance of space, colour, material, texture and light is used to create solutions that range from dramatic and dynamic to calm and soothing to suit the client's purposes and requirements.

[www.schulbergdemkiw.com](http://www.schulbergdemkiw.com)

Floor area: 230 square metres  
Site area: 153 square metres,  
buildable area 108 square metres  
Builder: Frank PL

# ADVERT