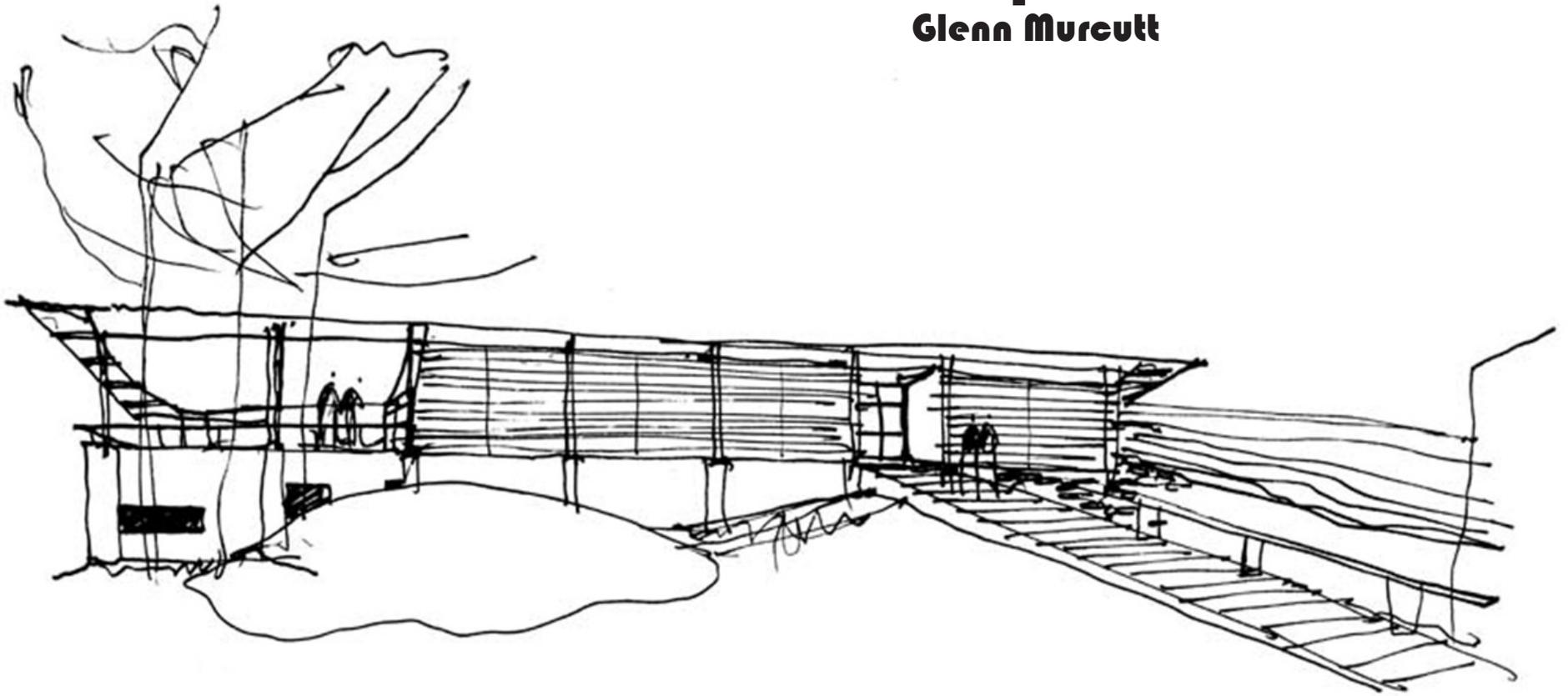


# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt



Early sketch, Ozetecture 2015

# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

## INTRODUCTION

2

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favela  
Petrie Studio: **Jessica Burkovich**



A

The Simpson-Lee House is located on Mt. Wilson of the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, Australia. Construction began in 1988 and was completed in 1993. The clients, Geelum and Sheila Simpson-Lee approached Glenn Murcutt and asked him to create a “secular monastic” design on their chosen site. According to the Miriam-Webster dictionary, secular is defined as “not spiritual: of or relating to the physical world and not the spiritual world.” Similarly, monastic is defined as “of or relating to monks or monasteries; resembling (as in seclusion or ascetic simplicity) or suggesting a monk or the life of a monk.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the Simpson-Lee’s wanted a calming and meditative oasis connecting with the natural environment around them.

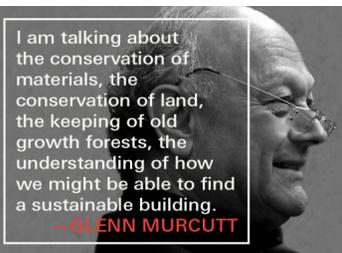


B

Glenn Murcutt, in turn, created just that, despite many oppositions from the Simpson-Lees, as they were involved in almost every aspect of the design and building process. The design of the house is of linear fashion, consisting of two separate pavilions. The larger one, to the south, consists of the main living spaces. The living and dining rooms and kitchen reside in the center, and lie in between the two bedrooms, one master, and one guest. The unique fireplace is the main focal point of that central living, dining area, and are showcased by a wall of windows on the east side. Connecting the main living space with the other smaller pavilion is a wooden bridge that bringing you by a small reservoir to the west of the bridge. The smaller pavilion consists of a pottery studio for Sheila Simpson-Lee, and also the garage. A small bathroom is also within the structure. The materials used



C



D

Image A: Simpson-Lee House, North View, Ozetecture, 2015

Image B: Glenn Murcutt, ArchDaily, 2015

<sup>1</sup> Miriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015

Image C: Scanned Plan on Mylar, JB

all have a simplistic quality to them: wood, steel, glass, brick and concrete<sup>2</sup>. They are used very subtly, just resting on the environment, the site that it was placed.

Although born in London, England, Glenn Murcutt has lived the majority of his life in or around Australia, now living in Sydney. Murcutt’s father first introduced him to the architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who is one of his major influences. He went on to study architecture at the University of New South Wales. His inspirations to design are van der Rohe and Richard Nuetra, but the architect that set the tone for Murcutt’s own design style was Alvar Aalto<sup>3</sup>. All of Murcutt’s building and houses are in his home, Australia. They all combine the nature and energy efficiency. Murcutt has received many awards for his designs, including the Alvar Aalto Medal and the Australian Institute of Architects Gold Medal in 1992, the Pritzker Prize in 2002, and the American Institute of Architects Gold Medal in 2009.

Although Murcutt now chooses to work independently, he teaches master classes throughout the year. His design vision for students is: “Architects thinking locally acting globally<sup>4</sup>.” Considered as a Modernist architect, all the houses show an evolution of his style, with his later designs being very conscientious to the environment, not only to nature, but also the angle of the sun, the climate, and conservation methods<sup>5</sup>. In this way, Glenn Murcutt created a style of architecture that is symbolic and unique only to Australia.

<sup>2</sup> Ozetecture, 2015

<sup>3</sup> The Native Builder, The New York Times Magazine, 2007

<sup>4</sup> Glenn Murcutt, architect and Environmentalist: About Architecture, 2015

<sup>5</sup> The Native Builder, The New York Times Magazine, 2007

Image D: Glenn Murcutt Design Philosophy, ArchDaily, 2015

# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

Documentation: **First Floor Plan**

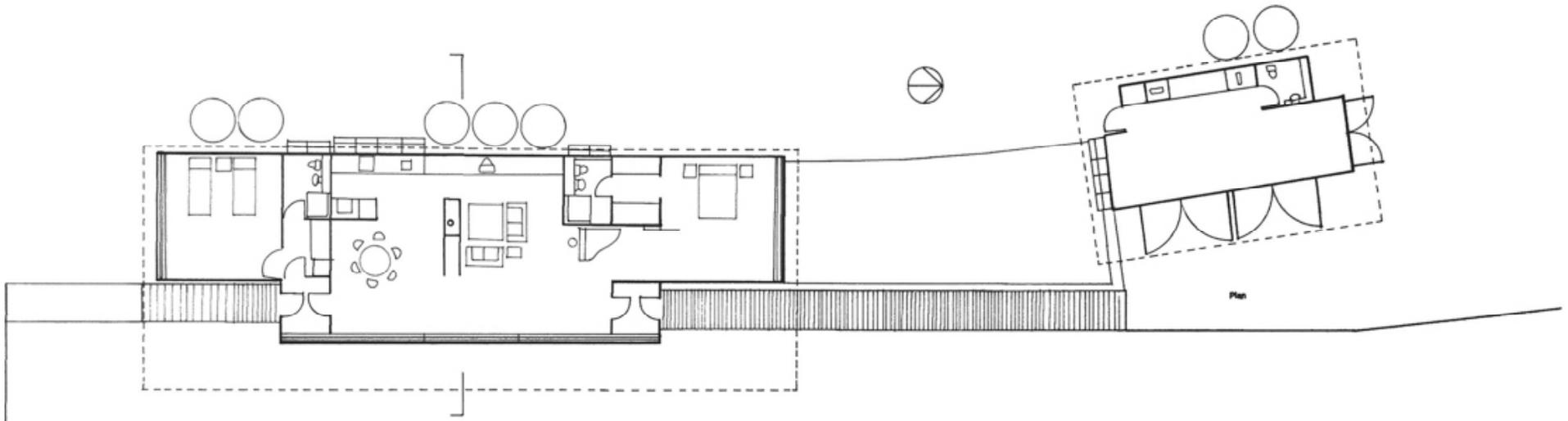
Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marlene Farley

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich



Scale 1/16"=1'-0"



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

Documentation: **Elevations**

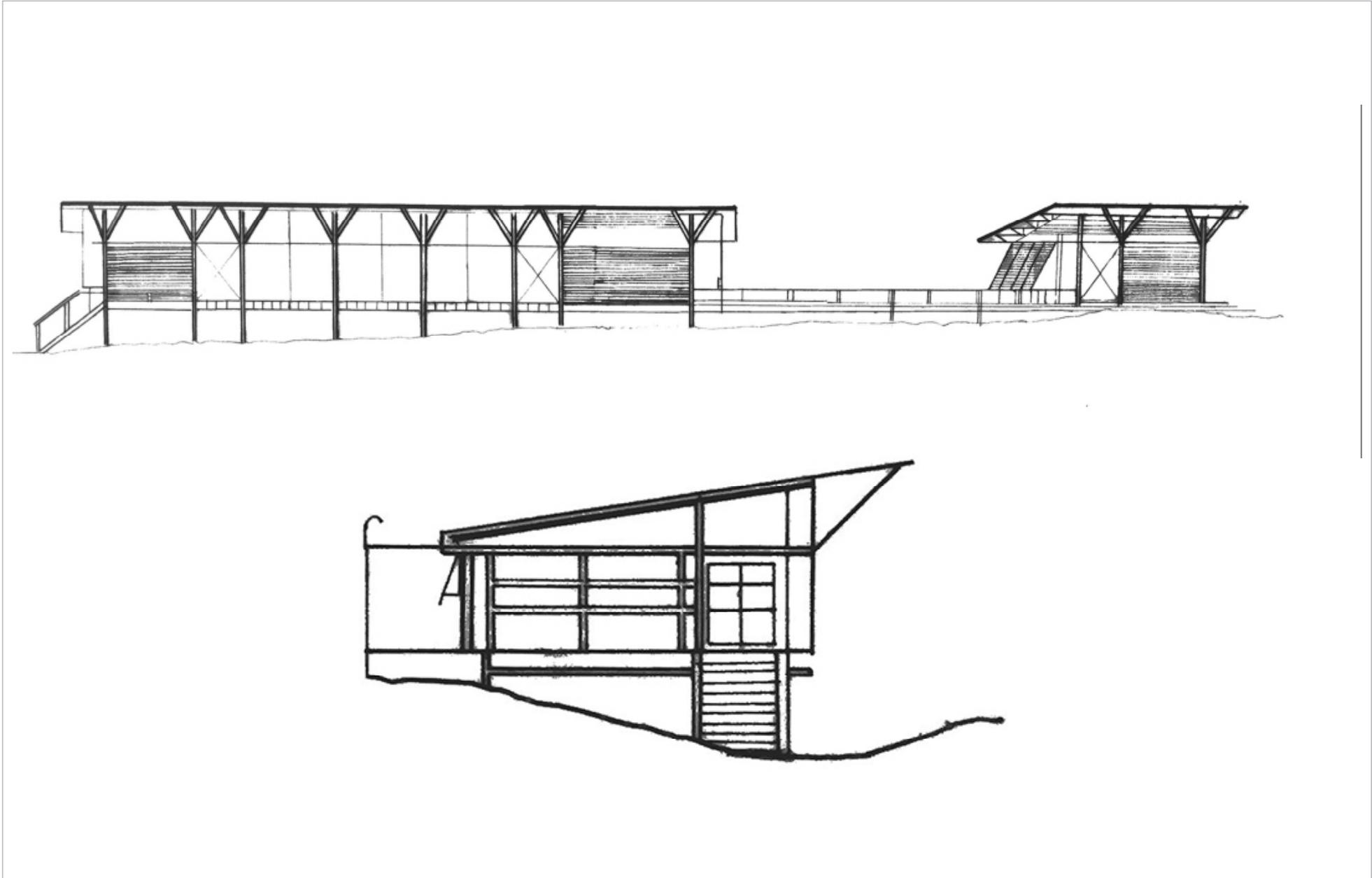
Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marlene Farley

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

0 5' 10' 25' Scale 1/8"=1'-0"

4



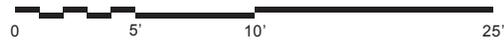
# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

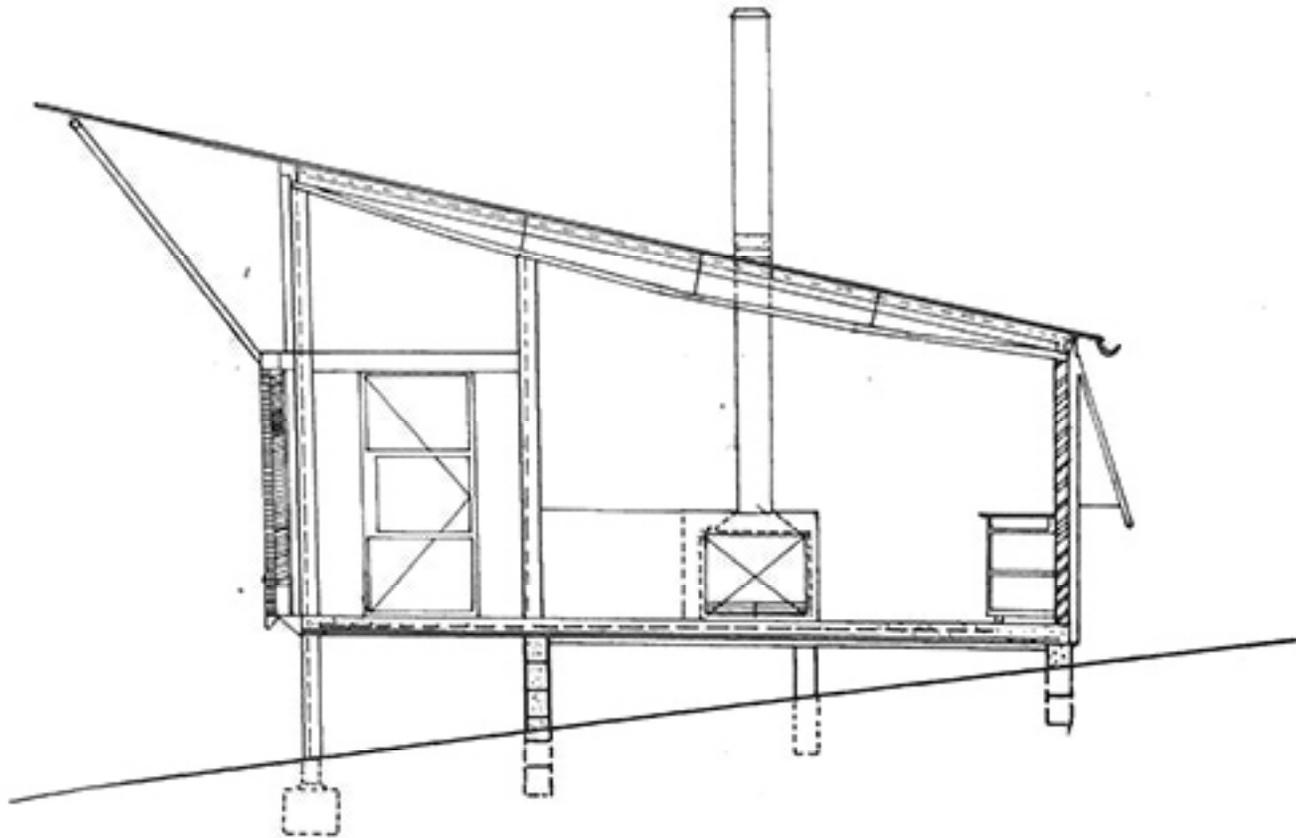
New South Wales, Australia, 1993

Documentation: **Section**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marlene Farley  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich



Scale 1/8"=1'-0"



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

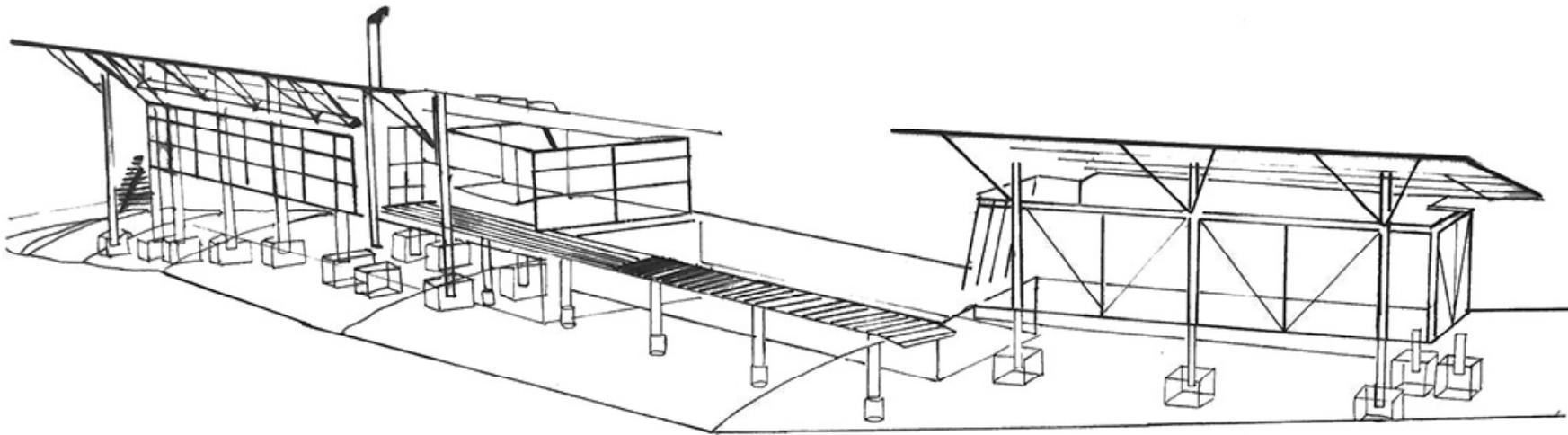
New South Wales, Australia, 1993

Documentation: **Full Axon**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marlene Farley

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

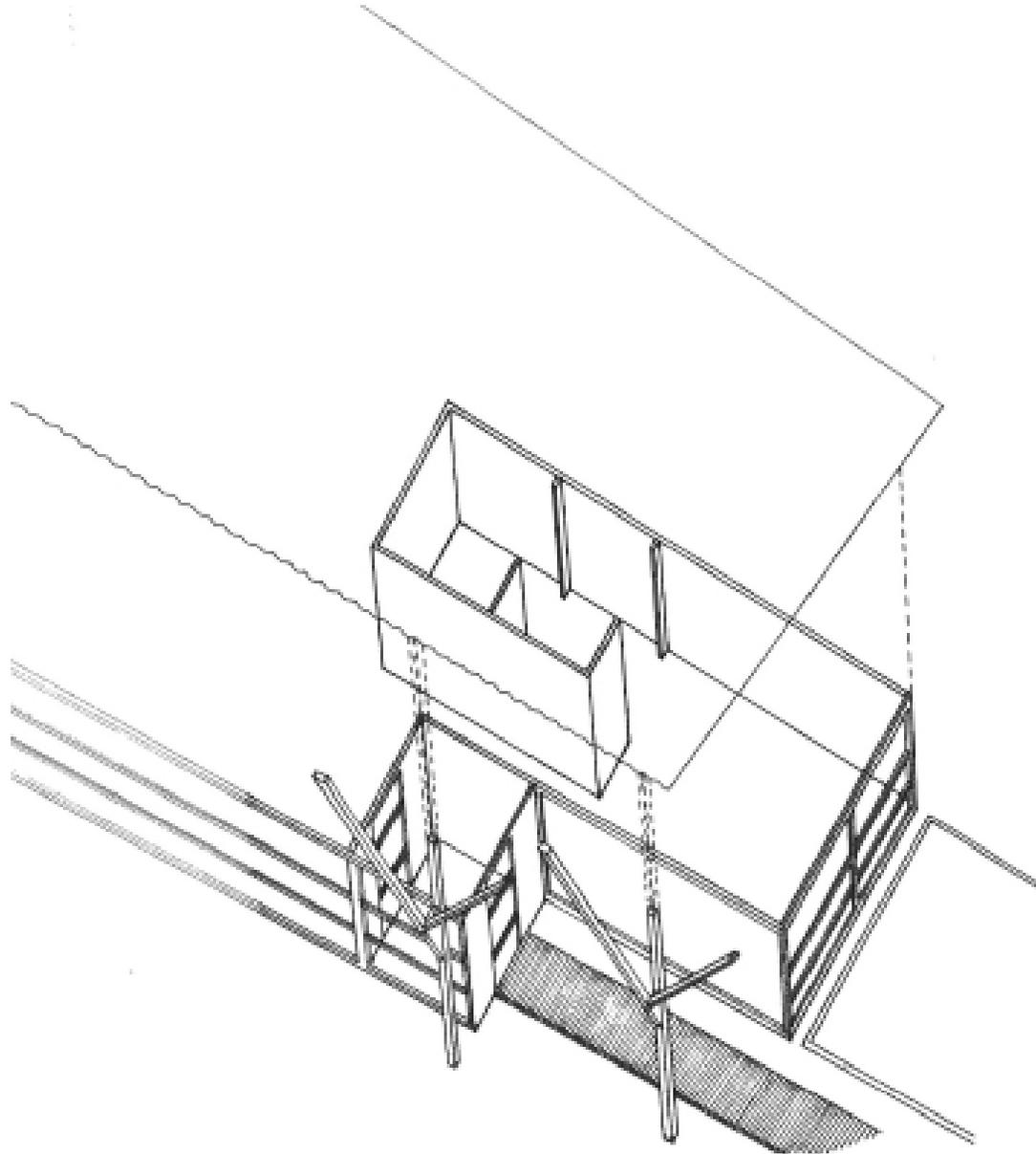
New South Wales, Australia, 1993

Documentation: **Axonometric Detail/Section**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marlene Farley

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

## Diagrams: Organization

8

### Description

### Plan

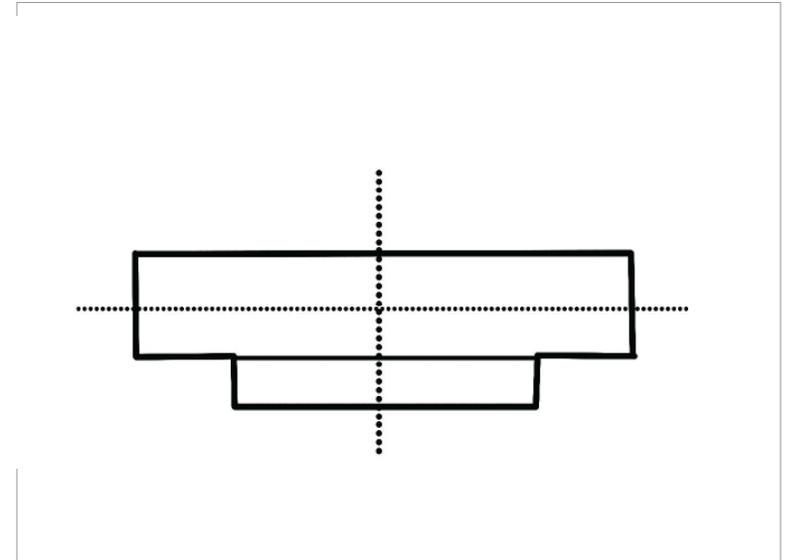
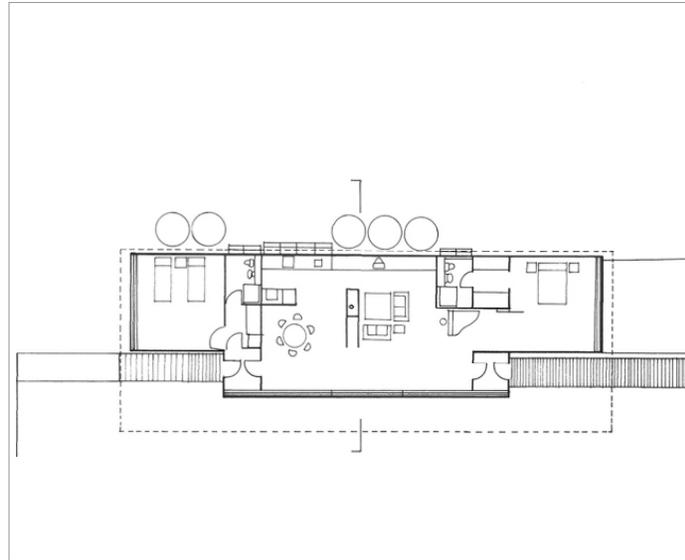
### Diagram

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favela  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

JB

### Symmetry/Balance

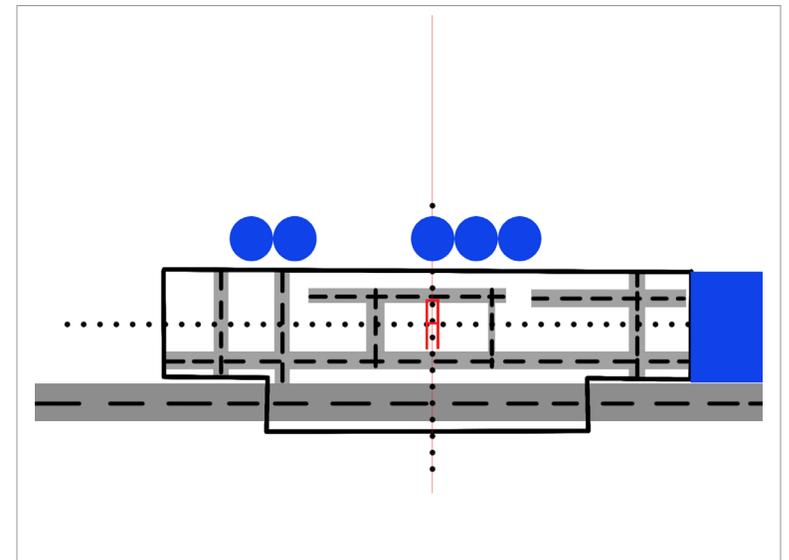
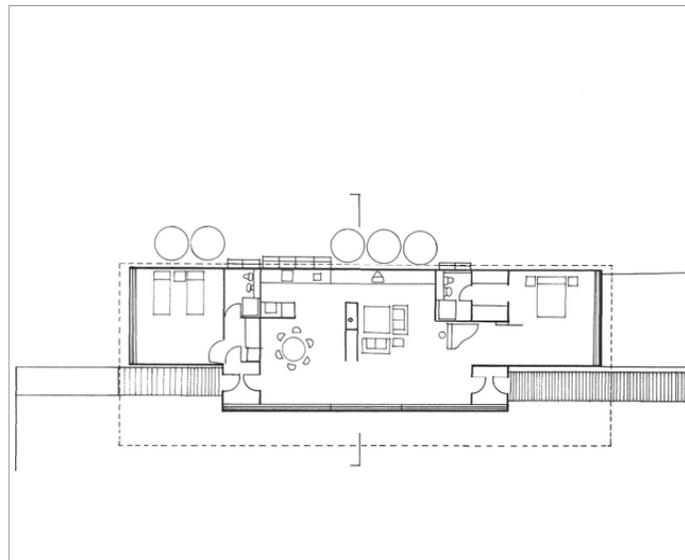
The symmetry of the main floor plan of the Simpson Lee house first is vertical. Then there is a local symmetry of the main living space that is horizontal.



JS

### Axes/Paths

The highlighted areas show the main areas and movements that the occupants would be going to; the paths they would take to each room.



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favela  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

## Diagrams: Form

9

### Description

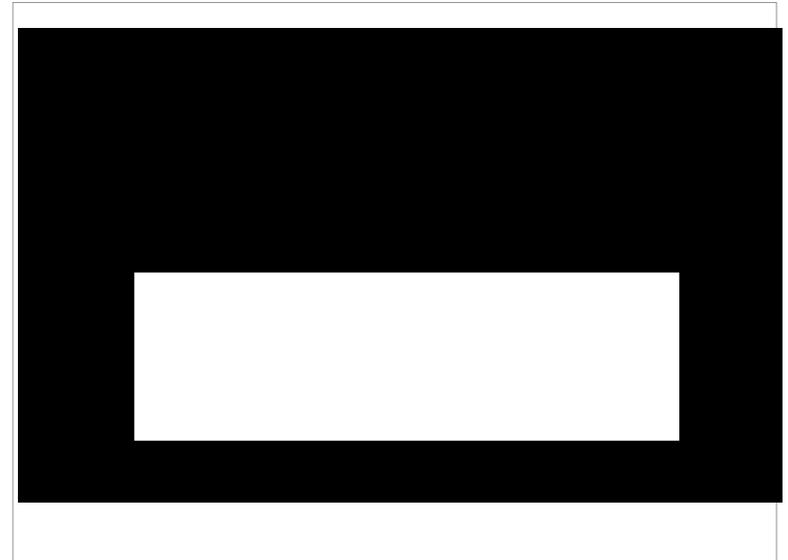
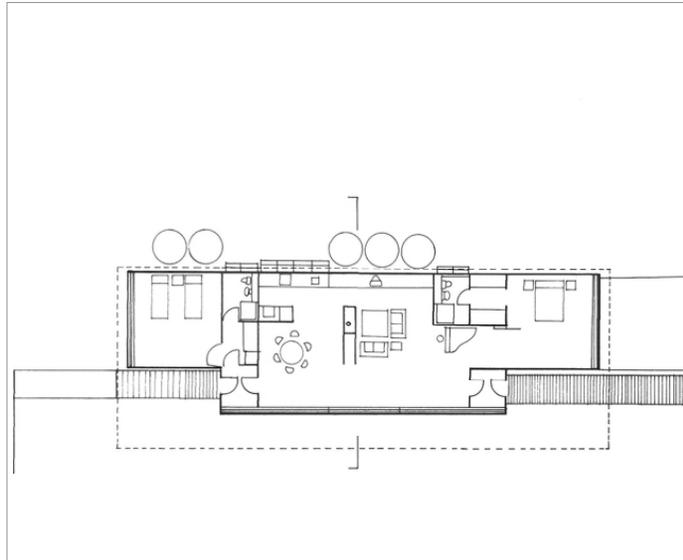
### Plan

### Figure Grounds

JS

#### Negative

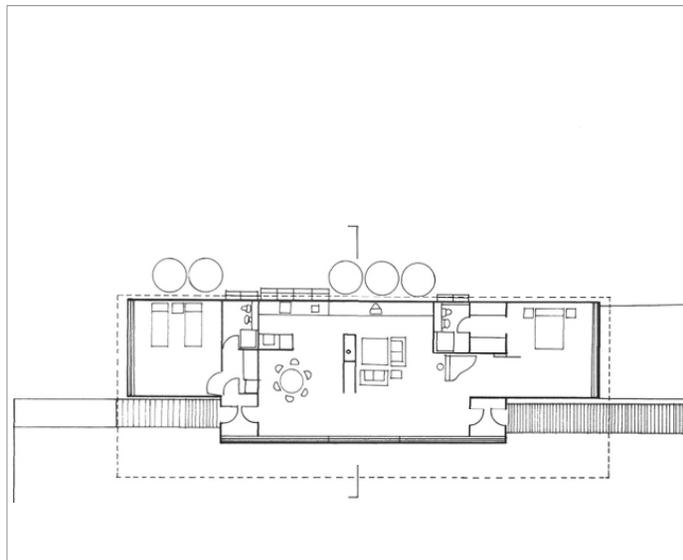
The negative figure ground is represented with the house being white and the surroundings as black.



JS

#### Positive

The main structure of the house is represented the house as black figure, while the surrounding landscape was all white.



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favela  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

## Diagrams: Space

10

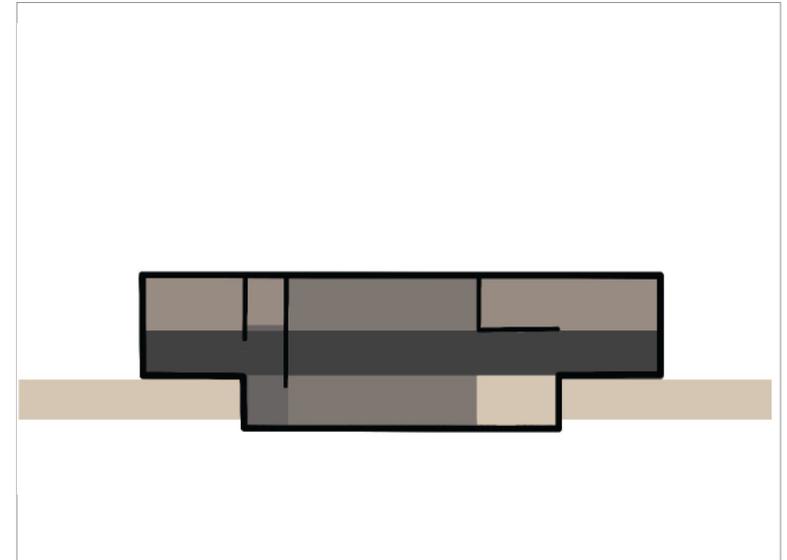
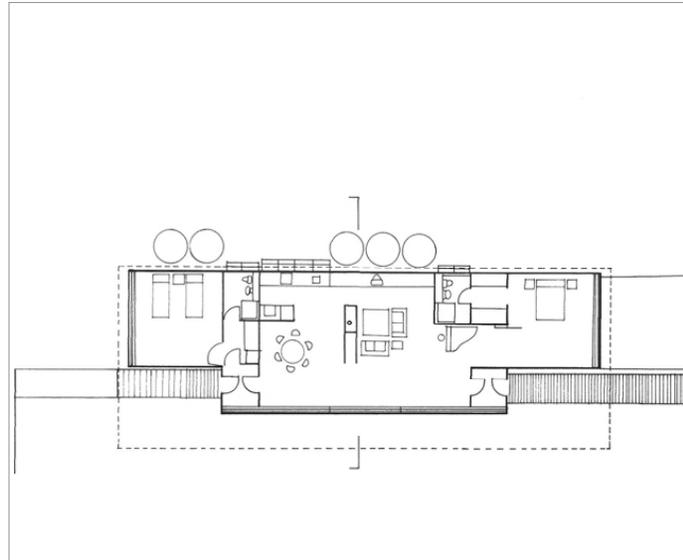
### Description

### Plan

### Diagram

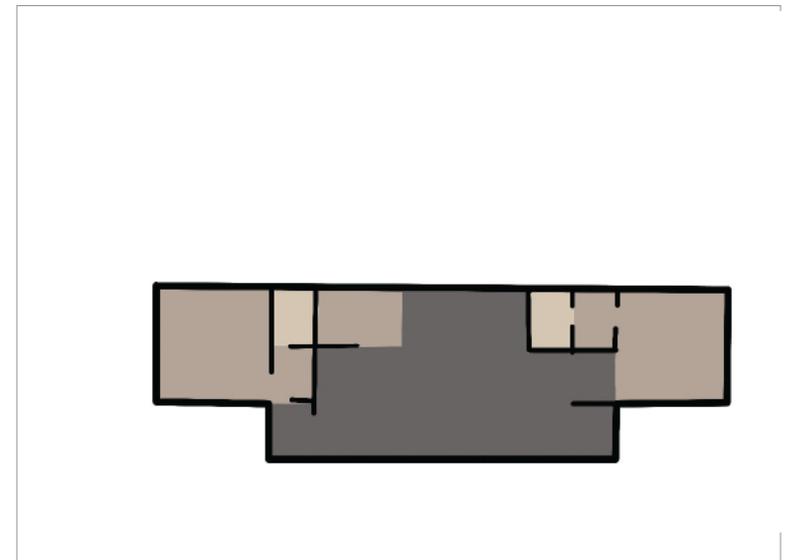
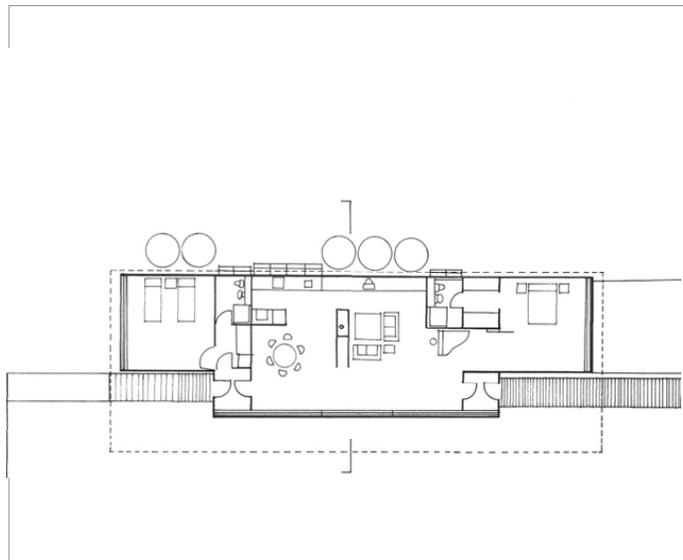
#### JB **Overlapping Agencies**

The living areas, the bedrooms and kitchen and living room, overlap with the vertical walkways and other hallways in the house. The tones of gray are a range of hierarchy based on areas most spent or walked in while in the house; the darkest area is highest traffic, and the lightest is least traffic.



#### JB **Served/Servant Spaces**

The service or primary spaces are the entryway and living/dining room and are represented by the dark gray. The served or secondary spaces, are the bathrooms and are represented with the lightest gray. The bedrooms and kitchens are the gray tones in between because they are not as private as the bathrooms, but are still important living areas.



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favela  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

## Diagrams: Space

11

### Description

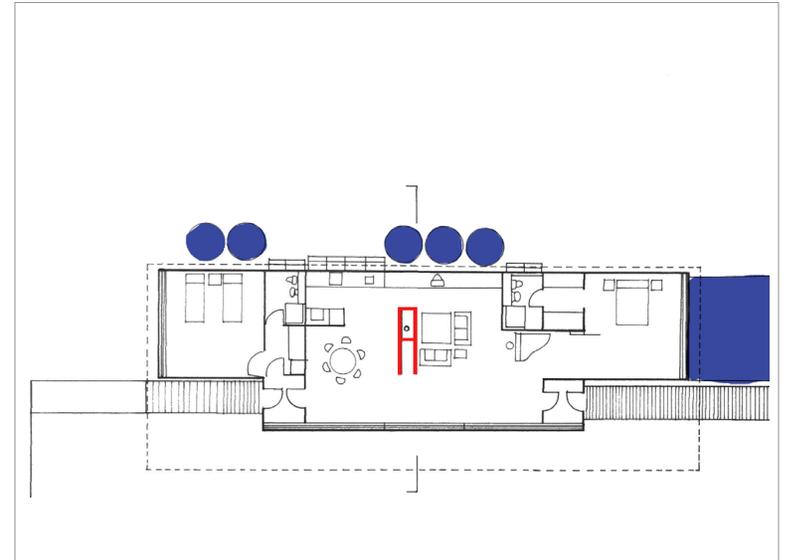
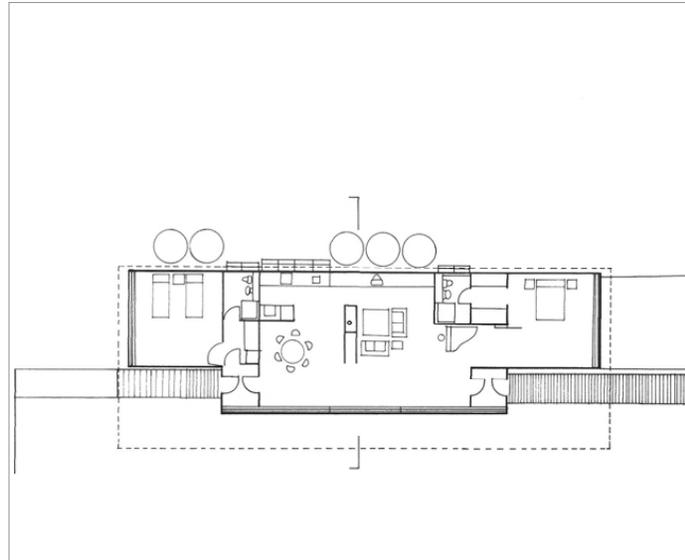
### Plan

### Diagram

MF

#### Unique Elements

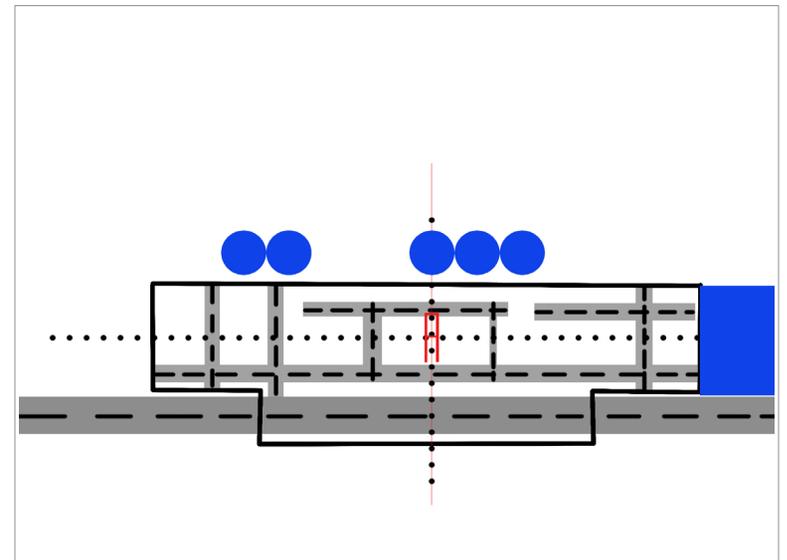
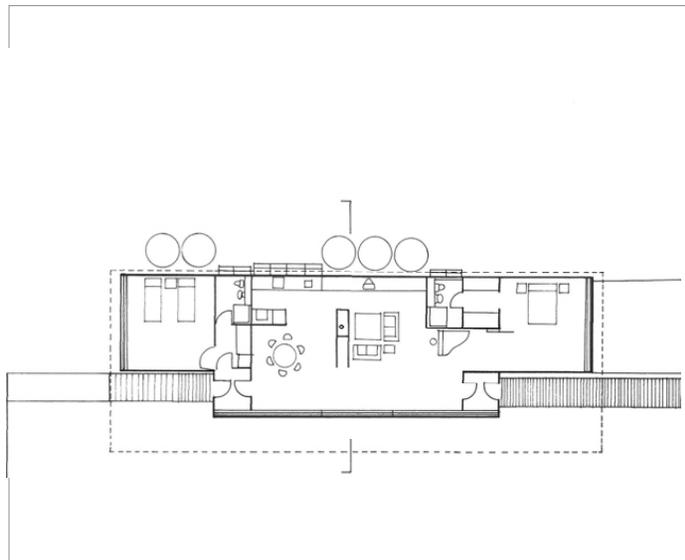
The water from the water drums and pond are unique aspects to the Simpson Lee house as is the massive fireplace in the center of the main living space.



JB

#### Parti

A compilation of balance and symmetry, paths/axes, and unique elements diagrams



# Project Name

Architect's Name

Location & Year of Completion

**CONTEXT : Historic**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marley Favela

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

## Australian Bicentenary

MF



The Australian Bicentenary marks a very important arrival, the first Fleet of British ships at Sydney in 1788 and in 1988 it marked 200 years since this arrival. Australia's independence day.

## The Parliament House

MF



The Parliament House is located in Capital Hill, Canberra. One of the biggest buildings in the southern hemisphere. 7 years of construction and 1.1 billion dollars to build this very know house.

## Native Title Act of 1993

MF



The Native Title Act was a law passed by the Australian Parliament which the purpose was to protect and recognize the indigenous tribes of Australia.

# Project Name

Architect's Name

Location & Year of Completion

**CONTEXT : Political**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marley Favela

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

## Post-War Australia: 1980s

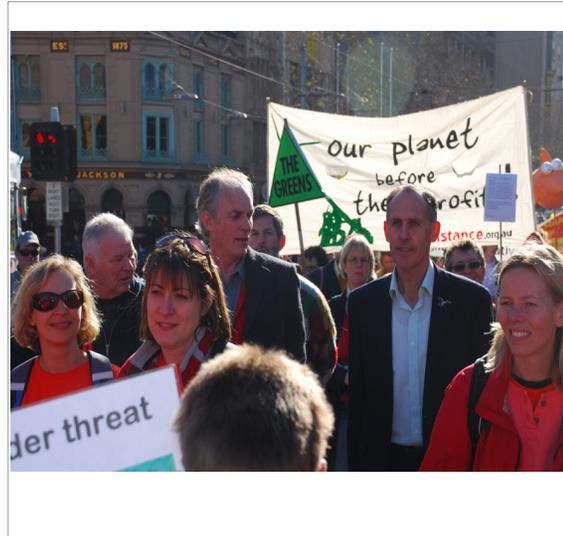
JB



The 1980s was a post war period for Australia after the Vietnam War. Australia emerging out of the recovery stage and gaining economic stability again.

## Environmental Concern: Late 1980s, esp. 1987

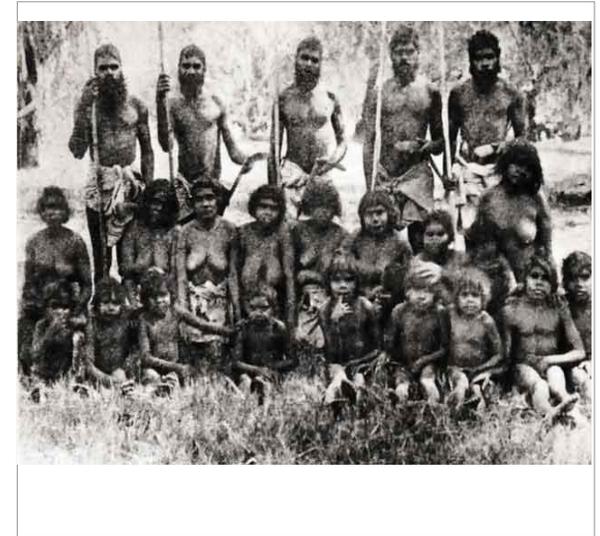
JB



In 1987, a controversy arose in public election campaigns over concern for the environment and a plea for the increase in environmental awareness. This is the time period when the world realized the ozone layer was being depleted due to CFCs. Not only was that becoming more conscious, but so was the conservation of water and nature.

## Aboriginal Tribes in NSW

JB



The land of New South Wales originally belonged to the Aboriginal tribes of Australia, who had strict concern for marine life and woodland resources. They mostly lived off the land, building their homes out of their surrounding.

# Project Name

Architect's Name

Location & Year of Completion

**CONTEXT : Site**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marley Favela

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

## Australia

MF



Australia is the only country that is also a continent. It has 6 states and several territories. Its mostly desert and semi arid. The South East and South West, including New South Wales, has temperate and moderate climate.

## New South Wales

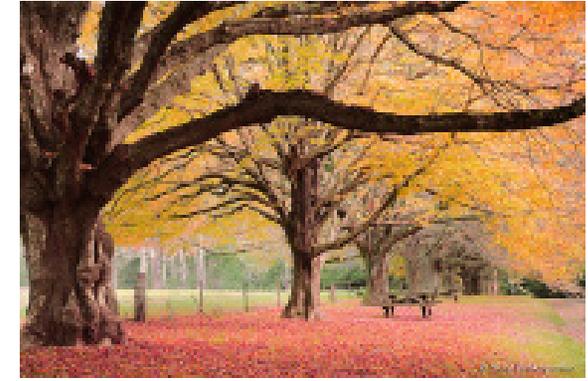
MF



New South Wales has undergone an increasingly rapid economic and social transformation. Old industries such as steel and shipbuilding have largely disappeared. New South Wales is bordered on the north by Queensland, on the west by South Australia, on the south by Victoria and on the east by the Tasman Sea. The Australian Capital Territory and the Jervis Bay Territory form a separately administered entity that is bordered entirely by New South Wales. The state can be divided geographically into four areas. New South Wales' three largest cities, Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong.

## Mount Wilson

MF



Mount Wilson is a village surrounded by the Blue Mountains National Park. Its famous for its private gardens that are fertilized by high rain falls and volcanic soils. The area is particularly popular in the autumn and its a perfect sight for photographers. It was also named after John Bowie Wilson who was the secretary for lands in the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales.

# Project Name

Architect's Name

Location & Year of Completion

**CONTEXT : Architectural**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marley Favela

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

Farnsworth House: 1945-1951

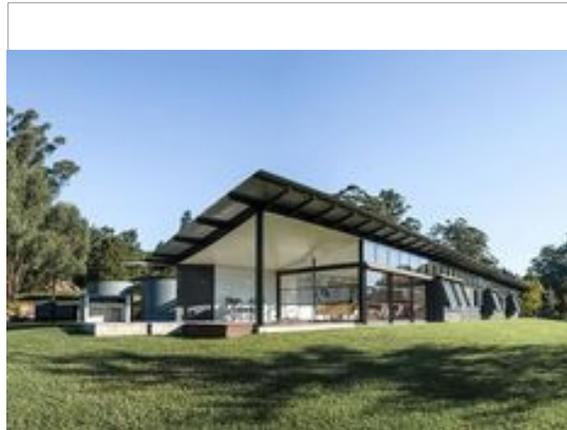
JS



The Farnsworth house is located in Plano, Illinois and was designed by Mies van der Rohe. The house is similar to Glenn Murcutt's, Simpson-Lee House because the house appears to be floating and the design is a minimalist design, as well as light visually and physically.

Walsh House: 2001-2005

JS



The Walsh House is located in Kangaroo Valley, New South Wales. The Walsh House was designed by Glenn Murcutt and it is very similar to his Simpson-Lee House. The structure of the house is the same design as the Walsh House. The materials used are also similar. Both houses are using "light" materials that focus on having simple and minimal presence.

Marika-Alderton House: 1991-1994

JS



Located in Eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, it combines a linear plan, a corrugated metal roof, and panels on the sides that open bring the outside in.

# Project Name

Architect's Name

Location & Year of Completion

**CONTEXT : Cultural**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marley Favela

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

World Expo 88: 1988

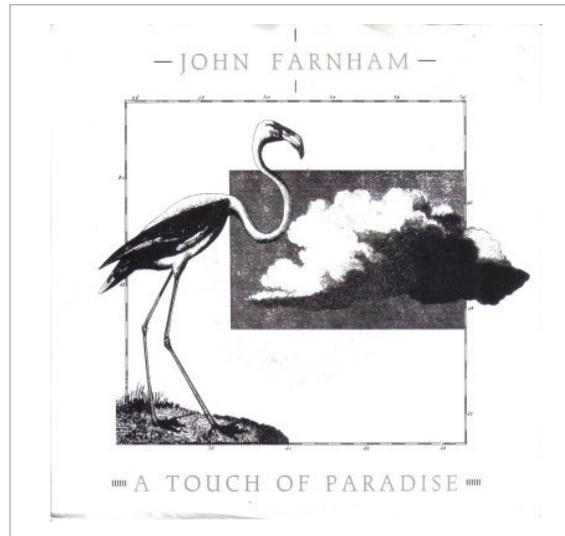
JB



1988 was a year for the World Expo and Fair. World Expo 88 had a theme titled “Leisure in the Age of Technology” and was held in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Located right on the coast the water mirrored the large structure of the main pavilion, and the Japanese pond and garden exhibit, which is now located in the Brisbane Botanical Gardens, which are tranquil and mirroring the surrounding rocks. The exterior of the Australia Pavilion was constructed to mimmick Ayer’s rock, a large sandstone structure in northern Australia. The aesthetics of the monorail that transported guests and tourists through the exhibit light colors and clean lines and form.

Music: 1986

JB



Released in 1986, the album Whispering Jack was released by Australian pop singer John Farnham. One song on the album was called “A Touch of Paradise”.

Art, 1975

JB



Located in New South Wales, Australia is the Art Gallery of New South Wales. An important and popular cultural experience for Australians, the gallery has several permanent pieces, as well as temporary. This piece is called Fearnleigh Montague, Mount Warning, New South Wales, 1975.

# Project Name

Architect's Name

Location & Year of Completion

**CONTEXT : Personal**

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter

Garrison Studio: Marley Favela

Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

Education: 1956-1961

JS



Attending The University of New South Wales, Glenn Murcutt studied architecture and was first introduced to some of his major influences and started developing his own style and broadened his knowledge of the environment.

Mies van der Rohe: 1886-1969

JS

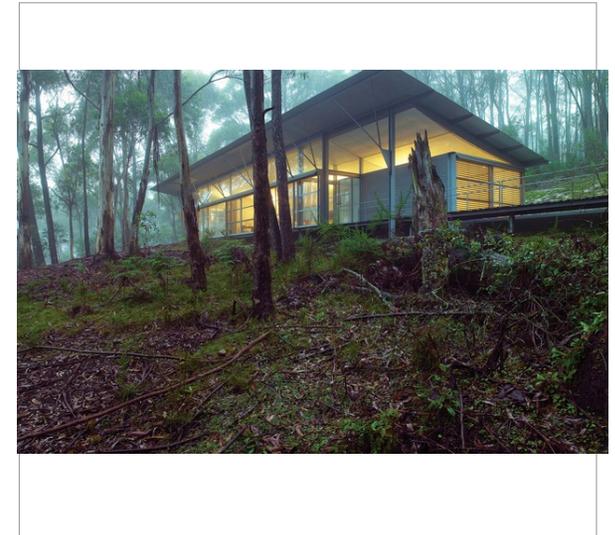


Mies van der Rohe is the very well known architect who was responsible for the design of many popular structures. His most famous building is the Barcelona Pavilion in Barcelona, Spain. He also designed the Barcelona Chair for this building. He is known for his modern minimalist designs. The Farnsworth House in Illinois is dubbed as one of the most minimalist houses ever built.

Geelum and Sheila Simpson-Lee: Simpson-Lee House

owners

JS



The clients of Glenn Murcutt's Simpson-Lee House asked for a "secular monastic" house that was minimalist and light.

The clients need for a light building meant they were looking for a visual and physical lightness and was also based around the environmental impact that the building had, which Murcutt is famous for how he works with the landscape and blends into it.

# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

## MURCUTT'S DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

18

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favala  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich



A

Glenn Murcutt has a very specific design philosophy to the architectural realm. Living a majority of his life in Australia, he feels a deep connection to the land and strives to protect and enhance its beauty; the water, the soil, the air. Every element of Australian land, he believes, should be at the forefront of his designs. Growing up New Guinea, an island north of Australia, Murcutt was first exposed to architecture. Life on the island was simple and primitive, which translated to their buildings and structures. His father read him the philosophies of Henry David Thoreau, with his thinking focusing on living simply and in harmony with nature, not detracting from it. He then went on to study architecture at the Sydney Technical College and the University of New South Wales from 1956 to 1961. Inspired by Mies van der Rohe, Richard Nuetra, Craig Ellwood, and Alvar Aalto, he started to create his own style with an Australian twist. He mixes together the clean and simple lines of Modernism with Australia's environment, with a stress on the aboriginal tribes that were first to hold the land<sup>1</sup>.

B

Murcutt used many aboriginal ideas in his designs, such as the orientation of the house according to the sun, and the communal spaces in and outside the home. He uses organic forms with materials like steel and concrete to create features that blend well with nature<sup>2</sup>. With one of Murcutt's earlier structures, the Marika-Alderton House, he designed the spaces strictly with that intent, as it was commissioned for a tribe leader. This house is located on the tribal land at a remote location, so Murcutt used

C

Image A: Papa New Guinea, north of Australia

Image B: Marika-Alderton House, Ozetecture

1 Glenn Murcutt, Architect and Environmentalist, About Architecture, 2015

2 The Native Builder, New York Times, 2007

environmental elements to stay true to the tribes' culture. With the site of the Simpson-Lee house right on an original indigenous pathway, Murcutt implemented a similar linear design as the Marika-Alderton House, being conscientious as to not disturb the land. The "circulation" of space that happens in the house is similarly set up to how aboriginal homes were setup<sup>3</sup>. With the sleeping areas surrounding the main living spaces, it became a communal center for gathering and entertaining. The tribes stressed family values and collaboration, so this is reflected in the Simpson-Lee House, as well as many others of Glenn Murcutt's.

With the Simpson-Lee House, he used the simple materials of wood, steel, glass, brick and concrete to make the house appear light on the environment. In fact, one of Murcutt's favorite quotes is an Aboriginal proverb, "Touch the earth lightly<sup>4</sup>." The eastern wall of windows allows for nature to enter into the living spaces, as they all swing open on hinges. The doors to the outside are also glass, so when you enter and exit, it feels like you still remain in the environment. In an article about Murcutt in the New York Times, the author states, "What all of Murcutt's work shares is a conception of architecture as minimal intervention, yielding building so efficient, and so deft in their design, that they hardly feel like buildings at all, though they provide all the comforts of more conventional edifices. At their best, they're as controlled and powerful as a sonnet: dozens of considerations seem to clock neatly into place, yielding a single, surprisingly

3 Ozetecture, 2015

Image C: Simpson-Lee House- wall of windows on the eastern side

Image D: Glass doors of Simpson-Lee House

4 Glenn Murcutt, Architect and Environmentalist, About Nature, 2015



D



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

## MURCUTT'S DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

19

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favala  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

simple structure<sup>5</sup>.” The design needs to emphasize the nature around it, not disturb or deplete it. It shouldn't take away from the true beauties that the environment holds. Receiving the Pritzker Prize, the architecture equivalent to the Nobel Peace Prize, Murcutt said, “I am talking about the conservation of materials, the conservation of land, the keeping of the old growth forests, the understanding of how we might be able to find a sustainable building,” and “Life is not about maximizing everything, it's about giving something back- like light, space, form, serenity, joy. You have to give something back.”<sup>6</sup>

Murcutt has argued that people have to start noticing what the land is telling them and build from that, not just sustainably, but with harmony. Sustainable architecture, which has been gaining in popularity among architects, Glenn Murcutt does not even agree with. He has some famous sayings about it, in fact, including, “Much of it isn't architecture, and some of it isn't sustainable<sup>7</sup>.” Yes, you can use sustainable means such as solar panels and water filtering, but if the rest of the building is made of materials that were processed with harmful chemicals, is that really sustainable? In Murcutt's designs, he oversees the whole construction process. All materials were produced with his knowing and only a small team constructed the house so as not to disrupt the existing land around. Similarly, he adds water drums to the design, which are used to catch and filter rainwater for the water utilities in the house.

Relating back to what the clients, Geelum and Sheila Simpson-Lee, requested for the design, “secular monastic,” Murcutt created this structure that related to the natural and physical landscape, while not overpowering it, on the secluded site on Mount Wilson that the clients chose. However, his design did not resonate with the Simpson-Lees, as they disagreed with his interpretation and incorporation into the design. After Glenn Murcutt explained his reasoning, with the structure floating and the pool in between as a reflection pond, the Simpson-Lees finally agreed.

In contrast, Glenn Murcutt's design philosophy and way of thinking has some spiritual quality to it. His respect for the environment in which he has lived his life, but while also building upon that in a way that enhances and enriches the landscape is one philosophy to be treasured. “This is my statement: Any work of architecture that has been designed, any work of architecture that has the potential to exist, or that exists, was discovered. It wasn't created. Our role is to be the discoverer, not the creator,” Murcutt stated in an interview with New York Times<sup>8</sup>.

Today, still in practice, he strives to spread his vision of “architects thinking locally acting globally.” He teaches international master classes throughout the year at the Arthur and Yvonne Boyd Education Centre in Shoalhaven, NSW with a couple of colleagues<sup>9</sup>. Despite those people and friends, he chooses to work independently in his own firm and avoids the public eye, which is why he is not known too much outside of his home, Australia.



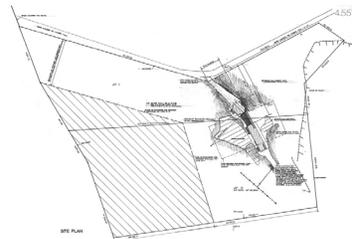
A



B



C



D

5 The Native Builder, New York Times, 2007  
Image A: Glenn Murcutt receiving the Pritzker Prize, 2002  
Image B: “Sustainable Architecture”, citatona.com  
6 Glenn Murcutt, Architect and Environmentalist, 2015  
7 The Native Builder, New York Times, 2007

Image C: Bridge and Pond of Simpson-Lee House  
Image D: Secluded Site of the Simpson-Lee House  
8 The Native Builder, New York Times, 2007  
9 Ozetecture, 2015

# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

## INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

20

Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favala  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich



A



B



C



D

Glenn Murcutt, like every designer, has his influences that inspire all of his designs. Murcutt was chosen to receive the 2002 Pritzker Architecture prize. In Murcutt's Pritzker Prize statement, Thomas Pritzker stated, "He acknowledges that his modernist inspiration has its roots in the work of Mies van der Rohe, but the Nordic tradition of Aalto, the Australian wool shed, and many other architects and designers such as Chareau, have been important to him as well. Add in the fact that all his designs are tempered by the land and climate of his native Australia, and you have the uniqueness that the jury has chosen to celebrate"<sup>1</sup>. With Mies Van Der Rohe being the influence behind Murcutt's modernist designs, we should look at Van Der Rohe's Farnsworth House as an inspiration towards Murcutt's Simpson-Lee House. A NY Times article states, "Mies Van Der Rohe was the master, and his Farnsworth House, built in 1951, was the model."<sup>2</sup>. Simpson-Lee House and they both had similar design concepts. The reason why the Farnsworth House is seen as an inspiration is because Murcutt employed similar ideas in the design, such as the choice of materials, open floor plan, and the use of pilotis. The materials used in both houses consisted of steel/ corrugated steel, glass, and reinforced concrete. Because Murcutt designed environmentally sensitive houses, he incorporated reinforced concrete pilotis into the Simpson-Lee house, along with his other homes. The clients of the house wanted a visibly and physically light design and Murcutt's use of pilotis on the Simpson-Lee

House give it the appearance of floating over the ground. The open floor plan and materials of the house also assist in the appearance of being light visibly and structurally. Murcutt's use of pilotis is also influenced by their role in the structure of Australian Woolsheds. Australian woolsheds are usually long, single-story buildings that are mounted upon wooden or steel columns that raise the building off of the ground. In the same NY Times article cited above, it is stated that, "To Murcutt, they were a template for sensible design, and he soon began working on variations on the woolshed, fashioned out of modern materials and customized for human life"<sup>3</sup>. Murcutt's Marie-Short House and Marika-Alderton House are prime examples of woolsheds being inspiration to Murcutt's work. Woolsheds offer open floor plans that allow air to be well circulated throughout the building and are also built so that they are able to take advantage of the sun and wind patterns. Another one of Murcutt's influences for his design was the Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto. Aalto was an architect that was a modernist to an extent. He wanted to use nature and incorporate more natural materials so that the buildings would blend more into the environment around them and when Murcutt went to tour around Europe to see the different styles of architecture, he reported that he liked the relation of materials and space and that it was a "fantastic discovery"<sup>4</sup>. Another building that was an influence on the materials Murcutt used, was the Maison de Verre, also

1 "Glenn Murcutt- Profile." N.p., n.d. Web. 4 May 2015. <<http://www.ozetteculture.org/2012/2Fglenn-murcutt%2F>>.

2 Lewis, Jim. "The Native Builder." The New York Times. The New York Times, 19 May 2007. Web. 04 May 2015. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/magazine/20murcutt-t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/magazine/20murcutt-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>.

3 Lewis, Jim. "The Native Builder." The New York Times. The New York Times, 19 May 2007. Web. 04 May 2015. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/magazine/20murcutt-t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/magazine/20murcutt-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>.

4 Lewis, Jim. "The Native Builder." The New York Times. The New York Times, 19 May 2007. Web. 04 May 2015. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/magazine/20murcutt-t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/magazine/20murcutt-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>.

# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

## INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

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Eckler Studio: **Josh Suiter**  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favella  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich

known as “House of Glass”, was designed by Pierre Chareau and is located in Paris, France. It was the first building to use exclusively glass and steel.<sup>5</sup>



A



B



C



D

<sup>5</sup> Ouroussoff, Nicolai. “The Best House in Paris.” The New York Times. The New York Times, 25 Aug. 2007. Web. 05 May 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/26/arts/design/26ouro.html?pagewanted=all>>.

# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

## NATURE AND SITE

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Eckler Studio: Josh Suiter  
Garrison Studio: Marley Favela  
Petrie Studio: Jessica Burkovich



A

Designed between the years of 1980s and 1990s, this house in Mount Wilson was enlisted by Geelum and Sheila Simpson-Lee in Sydney, Australia. They required an extremely light building. This was sometimes in the sense of a visual and physical lightness; at other times, it was unpretentiousness. Architecturally knowledgeable, their decision to work with Murcutt was deliberate. The site of the house could have not fit any better.

Located in the Blue Mountains, a world listed landscape towards Sydney's west, the site is in bushland on the edge of a national reserve. All projects here are subject to conservative regulatory prescriptions regarding appearance, heritage concerns and bushfire management. Murcutt has noted the difficulty of working in this context, his architectural preferences not easily accommodated. Terse argument and detailed adjustment gradually allowed the design to comply with governmental regulations. Reflecting on the arduous process, he commented, "It finally took twenty-one months to clear the planning and building authorities."<sup>2</sup>

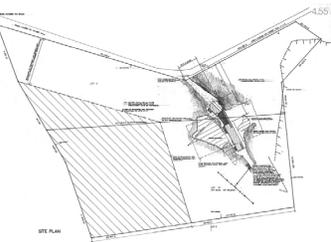
C

Client involvement at every stage of the design process led to vigorous debate and hard-won decisions. Murcutt specifically recounts a spirited critique of even the engineering drawings. The specified standard steel members were questioned, and a reduced size for each section was strenuously encouraged. Preferring a more expensive customized beam, Geelum argued, "What this country needs is more labour and less material." His conception of economic advantage valued a broader social ethic over cost savings. Bringing the house a great aspect to nature.

Alignments and tensions between client and architect, between shared environmental ambitions and local governmental conservatism, intensified Murcutt's inherently disciplined method. The architecture developed is newly austere and abstract, this quality extending from the overall building and its situation to all material details.

In early sketches the project follows a familiar initial strategy: a north-facing pavilion organized as bays, larger rooms on the northern glazed side with service facilities to a principally closed rear. Angled roofing protects the building in summer, allowing winter sun access. In the eventual siting, unexpectedly, this house plan was rotated ninety degrees to align with an existing bush track, the latter incorporated as the building's circulation. This kind of reorientation is unusual for Murcutt as the mechanisms of climatic control implied by his directional section are wedded to a northern aspect for their success. The new placement, the flatter site contours with minimal adjustment to the existing ground. It further oriented the pavilion outlook across a fall in the landscape.

The final built linear path connects a garage/studio to a major living pavilion. A bridge, passing an external pond, includes this liquid platform within the built extent of the house. Entry is via a vestibule, one of two that bracket glazed openings to the living areas. These vestibules accommodate a series of sliding screens, allowing a glazed wall to completely disappear and the living room to be experienced as an open verandah. In



# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

## INTEGRATION WITH NATURE

23

minimal shelter of a refined path and camp site.

With the location and principal components established, this project developed over several years and via continuous and subtle adjustment was gradually refined its evolution. These dry, economical drawings operate as both a mode of thinking and a medium for construction, and Murcutt's architecture seems to substantively appear through numerous re-workings of this section.

An intricate knowledge of many off-the-shelf materials and prefabricated building systems informs these working drawings. The documents are heavily notated and specifications form an integral layer. Studies of Lidco standard aluminium sliding door and window glazing systems are indicative. In spite of his clear familiarity with the product, in each project aluminium details are redrawn in plan and section at half and full scale to rethink and newly contextualize each element. The Simpson-Lee House drawings exemplify this process. Studies show stripped glazing extrusions coupled with rotated identical supports. Murcutt removes the handle on the sliding door and inverts the section to double as a handle. The interlocking of the elements improves structural stability and allows two vertical elements to read as a single view. The overlapping provides a weather seal and reduces the total width of the accumulated layers. Standard sections are in this way continually reconceived to use less material and yet perform more functions. This design process is alluded to by Murcutt: "I always felt if you found a solution which did three things rather than one that the solution was getting somewhere." Economy of means is implied as an ambition on several levels. In the Lidco example, the resultant elements

are finer, thinner, visually lighter and simpler in appearance, yet they satisfy several levels of desired operation.

# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

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### BOOKS

- <sup>JB</sup> This book shows Glenn Murcutt's sketches of how he got to his finalized rendered plans and elevations, which are also included with descriptions, as well as showing his other architectural works.
- <sup>JB</sup> A brief description in this book shows a simple floor plan with numbered areas showing the flow through the house. Each number is accompanied with a picture and description of the area.
- <sup>MF</sup> This book contains reflections on Glenn Murcutt's practice and his sketches and renderings of his works. It talks about how Glenn Murcutt's style is very unique being one of the most recognizable architects from Australia.
- <sup>JB</sup> A brief biography of Glenn Murcutt is included in this book, a description of the house and areas the of occupation.
- <sup>JS</sup> This book has all of Glenn Murcutt's projects throughout his entire career. It includes pictures and descriptions about each house including the Simpson-Lee House.
- <sup>JS</sup> The book shows different buildings designed by Glenn Murcutt, including the Simpson-Lee House. The book includes pictures, plans, and descriptions about each building.
- <sup>MF</sup> This book had tons of plans and information on the Simpson Lee house in general.

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# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

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## ARTICLES

JS This article talks about Glenn Murcutt's style of design and his approach to his buildings.

MF This journal talks about Glenn Murcutt's abstract way of designing, especially the Simpson Lee House.

MF This article was about how it all began with Glenn Murcutt.

JB An interview with Glenn Murcutt that gives us some knowledge of his design thinking and background to his philosophy.

8. Glenn Murcutt. (2009). *Architectural Record*, 197(5), 105. United States: McGraw-Hill Companies.

9. Ostwald, Michael. (2011). "Questioning the Primacy of Topology over Geometry: A Configurational Analysis of the Rural Houses (1984-2005) of Glenn Murcutt." *The Journal of Space Syntax* 2.2.

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11. Lewis, Jim. (2007). "The Native Builder." *New York Times Magazine*.

# Simpson Lee House

Glenn Murcutt

New South Wales, Australia, 1993

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## WEBSITES

- JS This talks mainly about the structure and design of the house along with materials used and the site it is on.
- JB Introducing us to Glenn Murcutt and his early influences.
- JB Giving us a better sense of how Murcutt implements the materials and knowledge of the climate to design his houses.
- JB The different areas of this website helped us get a better understanding of Glenn Murcutt, the Simpson-Lee House, his other works, and his master class.
- JB Helped us piece together what the clients were looking for in their requests.
- JS Helped in seeing Glenn Murcutt's influences to his designs and buildings.
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