

Architecture

Australia

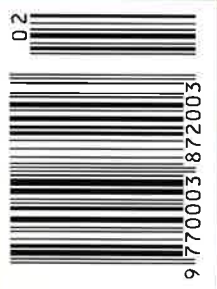
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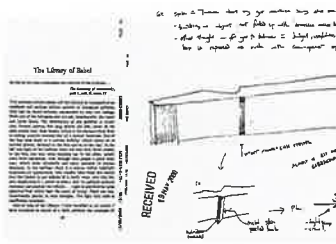
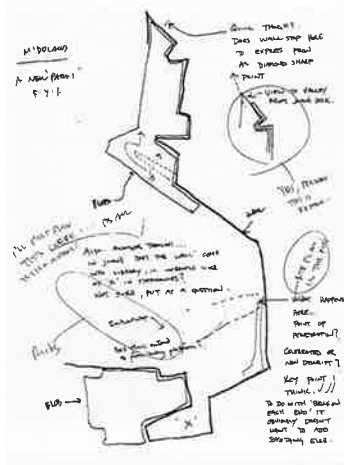
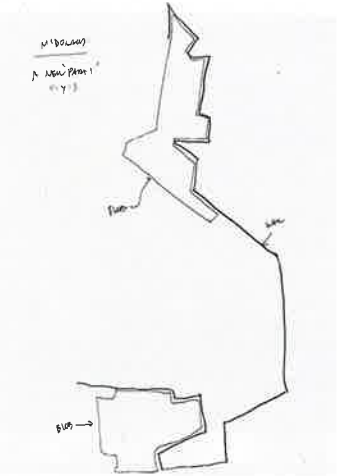
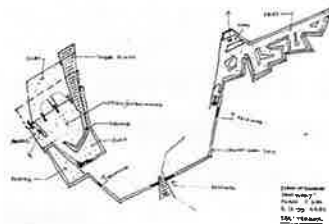
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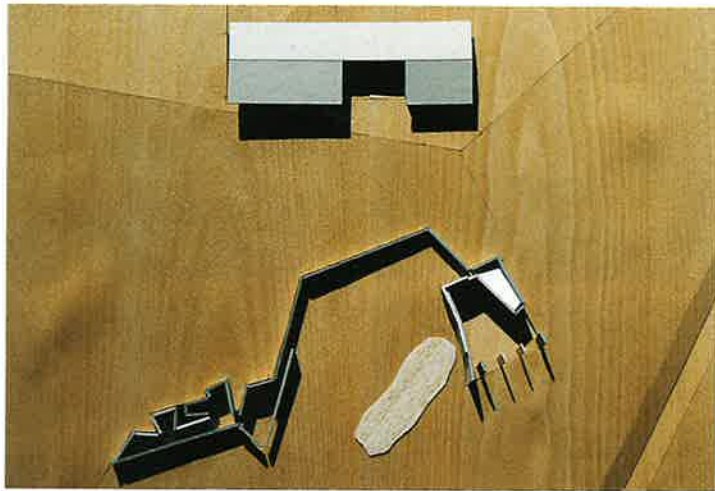
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Modes of working become modes of making – at the scale of both landscape and fittings – in a new project by RBB Terroir. Charles Rice explores the jump-cut.



Top Fax communication between the three different office locations of RBB Terroir made it possible for the three designers to work together. The increasing resolution of the project is registered as a series of "jumps" in the faxes. Above Model of wall, forming the studio and library, in relation to the existing house.

In cinema, the jump-cut introduces temporal disjunction into what should be a unified visual and narrative space. It is a device which shifts attention to the very processes by which visual and narrative continuity may be constructed – or refused. Such a concept seems apt for reviewing an unbuilt project from Terroir, which exhibits the way in which its design collaboration is constructed.

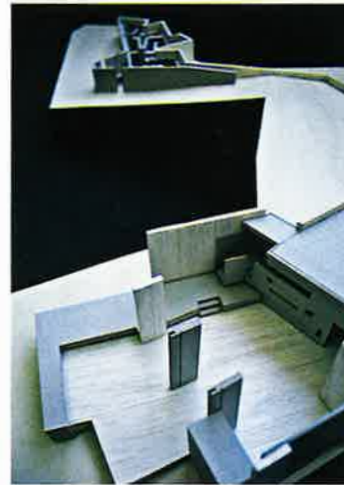
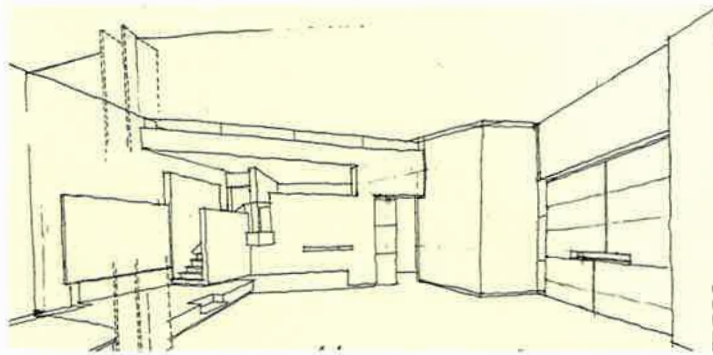
The project by Gerard Reinmuth, Richard Blythe and Scott Balmforth of Terroir provides a studio and exhibition space for a sculptor, and a library and study for an art critic, on a five acre site 20 km north-east of Canberra. The spaces are situated on a slope below an existing north-facing house. A meandering wall in the landscape encloses a labyrinth for the library, and directs the outlook from the adjoining study to expansive views in the east. The wall then cuts back into the earth parallel to the existing house, and reemerges folded through the studio, which opens up to the west and to the noise of a natural pool. The direction of the wall's line is tightened to a radial geometry which extends from the centre of view in the existing house. This radial geometry, derived from Doxiadis' geometric analysis of the seemingly random topographical distribution of buildings over several ancient Greek sanctuaries, also gives rise to a certain associative and

functional naming of the spaces in the project: the library initially proposed as stoa, the existing house as propylaea and the studio as treasury.

The wall is interpolated into furniture elements at each end: bookshelves and writing desk in the library; exhibition platform and thick, operative storage wall in the studio. A notion of defining and detailing building form is skipped here, with a rapid movement from a cutting into the landscape leading directly to questions of fabricating and installing the fittings of workable space.

This movement from gestures conceived at the scale of the site and its greater environs to the pragmatics of furnishing workable space attests to the process through which this design – I do not like the word "evolved" – came to a certain resolution. The office of Terroir exists in three distinct localities. Blythe lives in Launceston, Balmforth in Hobart and Reinmuth in Sydney. This distance meant that the design process was highly mediated. The fax machine and email were utilised throughout the design process, not as form-givers or tropes in an architectural translation, but as facilitators for the very possibility of the three designers working together on one project.

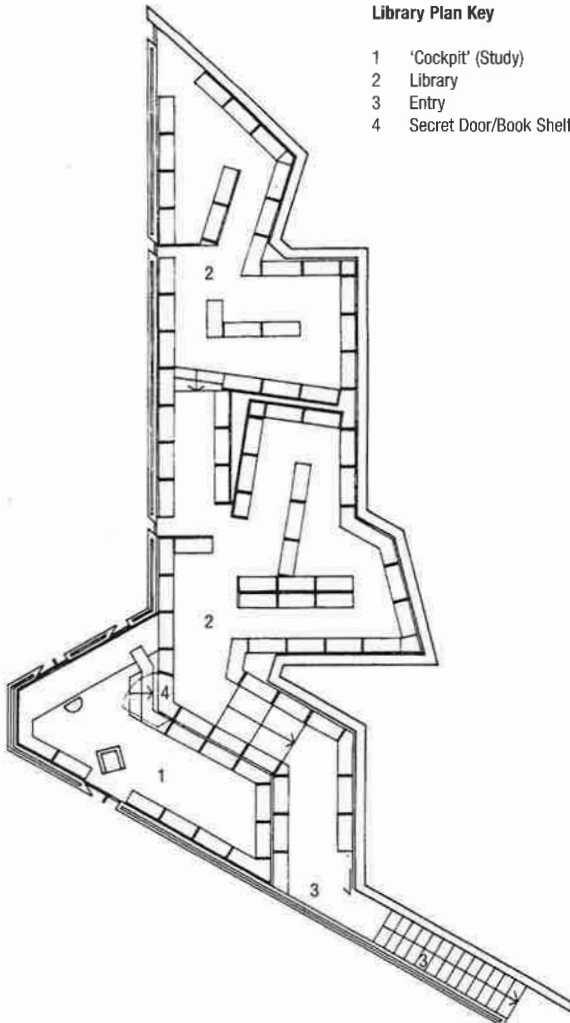
This mediation is visible in the project in two related ways, and here we must take the project not as a supposed building, but



Top Perspective of the library. The wall cutting into the landscape leads directly to detailed strategies for fabricating workable space. Far left View of the model with library in foreground. Left Model with sculpture studio in foreground. Below Library plan.

Library Plan Key

- 1 'Cockpit' (Study)
- 2 Library
- 3 Entry
- 4 Secret Door/Book Shelf



as the design process itself. Firstly, there is an increasing level of resolution visible from initial diagrammatical sketches to architectural model. This rapid forming up of the projects results from the three designers having developed a language, both drawn and spoken, that renders concepts and ideas quite transmissible between them. But secondly, this increasing resolution of the project is visible as a series of jumps or leaps. It is this second feature I am more keen to follow up on in thinking about this project. These are not so much leaps of the imagination or faith, or great leaps forward, but leaps or jumps in the sense of the jump-cut. The project gives a sense that the mediation involves a stitching together of three different perspectives and senses of time in respect of the common project.

The wall is, in some senses, the line of this jumping and cutting. It is its organising structure. It initiated the project, but one gets the sense that it will survive the project as well. It will survive it as the landscape will survive the specific spaces imposed on it, and it will survive the project by becoming the datum, even if only conceptually, for other Terroir projects. The wall maintains a continuity and an openness in the project, the sort of continuity and openness that suggests projected endings are yet to be decided,

but have a structure within which to be articulated.

As I cannot – and do not see reason to – determine its adequacy as inhabited architecture, I can only project certain scenarios myself to test the promise of the project. One such scenario, in lieu of my judgement, would be this: the art critic may very well enjoy being lost in his labyrinth, and the sculptor secure with her work in the treasury. The house may provide the prospect, and geometry may govern the relation between these structures. But is there another sense of space, another sort of space that exists between these clients that can transform such a robust set of relations between the structures? This other sense of space would arise through another jumping and cutting, this time by the inhabitants: the introduction of work – with words, with plaster and clay – and objects – books, sculptures – into the spaces, and possibly out of the original places and niches assigned them.

The project has thus reached a sufficient resolution to begin a discussion, and to sustain itself further in the process of being translated into built and inhabited architecture.

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