

# GODWIN RULES IN STONEHAWKE

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To the outskirts of Brisbane, and into the tailor-made world of **Shawn and Natalie Godwin**, where a mindful approach to creating the ideal family home meant a little rolling of the sleeves. Pappa knows best.

**B**ase Architecture, led by director Shawn Godwin, is a young architecture and interior design practice that in recent years has built a name and a reputation for well-considered, sustainable design, with an energy of place-making that is very appealing. This house that Godwin and his interior designing partner Natalie Godwin have made for themselves (two daughters included) is situated on the edge of a well-established suburb called The Gap, in Brisbane's north-west. Bounded by protected bushland, the house exemplifies a very effective response to the challenging conditions of a western aspect and a steep east/west slope.

Informed by a principled approach to resource use, the house is passively ventilated and effectively defends against the western sun. It sits slightly above, rather than on or in the earth. Cuts into the landscape are minimal and the overland water flow has been maintained. The defensive stance and approach to conserve, as far as possible, the conditions of the site have resulted in a response that is spatially very various, with wonderful moments of contrasts and connection, containment and release, cultivation and bushy wildness.

Between exterior and interior the house shifts its character. From the outside it is a series of boxy connected light and dark forms. The most dominant of these affects a charred roughness and contains the private retreats of parents and children. Counterpointing this projecting, yet recessive form, the white frame of the main body of the house makes of pool, deck and living spaces a delicate rampart, looking out to the west as the hills roll down into leafy suburban vales.

Climbing up inside the black box, an engaging sequence of sleek, yet differentiated spaces unfolds. The Godwins' private space in the lower half of the box is coolly toned and reclusive. The north-western corner of the box has been opened on this level to create a charming outdoor pocket at the interface between the very private and the suburban landscape beyond. Here, the depth and variation in the colouring of the only timber species used in the interior is richly felt in

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- /01**  
Customised light fitting over the staircase, designed by Base (Shawn).
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Look to the north, with a view of the natural slope and surrounding terrain. It is a varied, but well interconnected, set of spatial experiences.
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Dining area leads to the living on the left, while a 'pyjama' deck open on the right to a groomed landscape, where wallabies graze on occasion.
- /04**  
A delicate enclosure gives the small pool a room-like quality, integrating it with the interior space as oppsed the the natural exterior.

the flooring, in the broad surface of the thick western wall of storage, and in the transformation of standard batten sections into the support for the polished finish of towel rail in the en suite. Godwin's first-hand experience with construction – weary of working in architectural offices, in his third and fourth year of architecture, he worked as a builder – facilitates his senses of opportunity and invention in design, informed by the objective of creating a 'tactile and tectonic', but not over-detailed quality.

With faith that experience of building enhances understanding these qualities of design, he set a competitive challenge for each member of the practice to design and make an item of furniture. With the aim of generating prototypes he also promoted a culture of exploration and entrepreneurship from the broad talents of the staff. The bedside tables in his and Natalie's room were designed and made by him in response to this challenge.

The form of the home is a t-shaped figure, and the stairs that climb up from the parents' space arrive at its crux. From this intersection, the spatial extent of the house opens horizontally and the interlocked and complementary relationship between inside and outside is revealed. The outdoor living

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This corner aperture yields to the day's natural light, while adding some creative detail in the stair case. It's a practical solution and a striking aesthetic quality.

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Shawn and Natalie's private retreat opens on to a pocket balcony. Rich in texture, the timber veneer (of the wardrobe) also works well with that of the balcony.

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One tile used for all applications. Standard battens of spotted gum have been used to create the vertical supports for towel rails.

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A look from the lawn area through the 'pyjama' deck, into the dining and kitchen.

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The main right portion of the house has a dominant look, with its charred exterior.

areas are clearly as volumetric as those indoor, contained within light frames of doubled posts and battens, the 'tactile tectonic' contrasting with a restrained range of interior surfaces types (one species of timber, one type of tile). In large part, the interior gets character from the rich tone and fiddleback figure in the spotted gum framing the openings and facing pelmets and cabinetry. The latter, in several long runs, co-locates storage with need as a true servant of order in this busy household. The perception of depth in these joinery elements is heightened by playful excisions at turns or transitions; for example, adjacent to the three steps that lead up to the children's area. A low cut makes something more suggestive of the first step, and a high cut-out in the corner creates a place to display a ceramic piece.

Up those few steps from the living area is the children's set of spaces; two bedrooms, each the mirror image of the other, open onto a play area with a long low run of storage/bench along the half wall to the stair void. The slight elevation of the play platform, gives the girls an independent space within sight and sound of their parents. The light here is gentle, washing in from high windows to the south. The west facing bedrooms have carefully recessed and shielded corner louvres, integral to the passive ventilation of the house.

At the other end of the short axis is the wing of bathroom, guest room and laundry, opening onto a drying garden, complete with Hills hoist. An extremely pleasant spot, this has become a favourite place for the girls to play as parents do domestic duty. In the hallway is a bench, which in the spirit of the Godwins' multifunctional agenda does equal time for children's crafts and gift-wrapping, laundry sorting and folding. It is an effectively simple solution to a range of everyday needs, offering a view out across the landscaped lawn where wallabies often come down from the protected slopes to graze.

In the long axis of the T is the main body of the house: the nexus of kitchen, dining, living and three outdoor rooms. These three inside/outside each have a different character

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and role. The smaller deck, which Godwin calls the 'pyjama deck', catches some eastern light and is perfect for morning coffee and papers while the girls easily move between house, deck and lawn in play. The deck at the northern end is for larger gatherings. This space nestles back into the slope and looks out, across the surface of the pool (literally the third outdoor volume) to leafy suburbia in the west and up into the protected bushland that wraps around to the north. The main living zone, and indeed the entire house, was anchored, says Godwin, by the location of the small pool. Everything evolved from that point. Getting the level of the water correct, so that with a minimum of enclosure it complied with stringent fencing laws, was a challenge, but one that has paid off for the benefits of amenity, visual and aural beauty, and microclimatic effects it affords the interior.

With this house as a case study, it could be argued that Base is consolidating an idiosyncratic language of design elements. There are formal, material and spatial ideas in the Stonehawke house that are familiar from other works such as SheOak at Casuarina. But probably these all unfurl from a longer lineage of the 'traditions' of Queensland houses from earlier generations of architects. We can even relay these associations through Godwin's undergraduate thesis, completed in 2000 – a study in the historical basis for, and the contemporary expression of, in residential architecture of south-east Queensland. His research supervisor was Ian Mitchell, once in partnership with Lindsay Clare, and the wealth of Mitchell's knowing mentorship permeates Godwin's analysis. Godwin also discussed ideas with the late Peter O'Gorman, whose work in partnership with Professor Brit Andresen is the embodiment of highly poetic and sophisticated tectonic architectural understanding. Highly prized in the latest round of regional and state architecture awards, the house consolidates Base Architecture as a practice offering thoughtful, well-detailed responses to the most common of design projects, the single family home. (inside)