

# MATERIALITY

BRICK AND BLOCK IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN ARCHITECTURE

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EDITOR AND CURATOR





# SMEE SCHOFF HOUSE

SAM CRAWFORD ARCHITECTS

**PROJECT:** Smee Schoff House  
**LOCATION:** Petersham, NSW  
**FUNCTION:** Single residential  
**ARCHITECT:** Sam Crawford Architects  
**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER:** Northrop Engineers  
**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Brett Boardman

**BACKGROUND** In this project, located in Sydney's inner west, the client commissioned us to design a textured home for their family of four. Anything but minimalist was their overriding concern, which was unsurprising considering that the existing house was an imposing freestanding residence, heavily defined by masonry walls.

The house backed onto a yard, and on one side was proscribed by tall, imposing buttresses, whilst to the rear was an equally tall rendered wall, with a retaining wall neatly framing a grass area. From the outset we noted that outdoor spaces had a room-like feel to them.

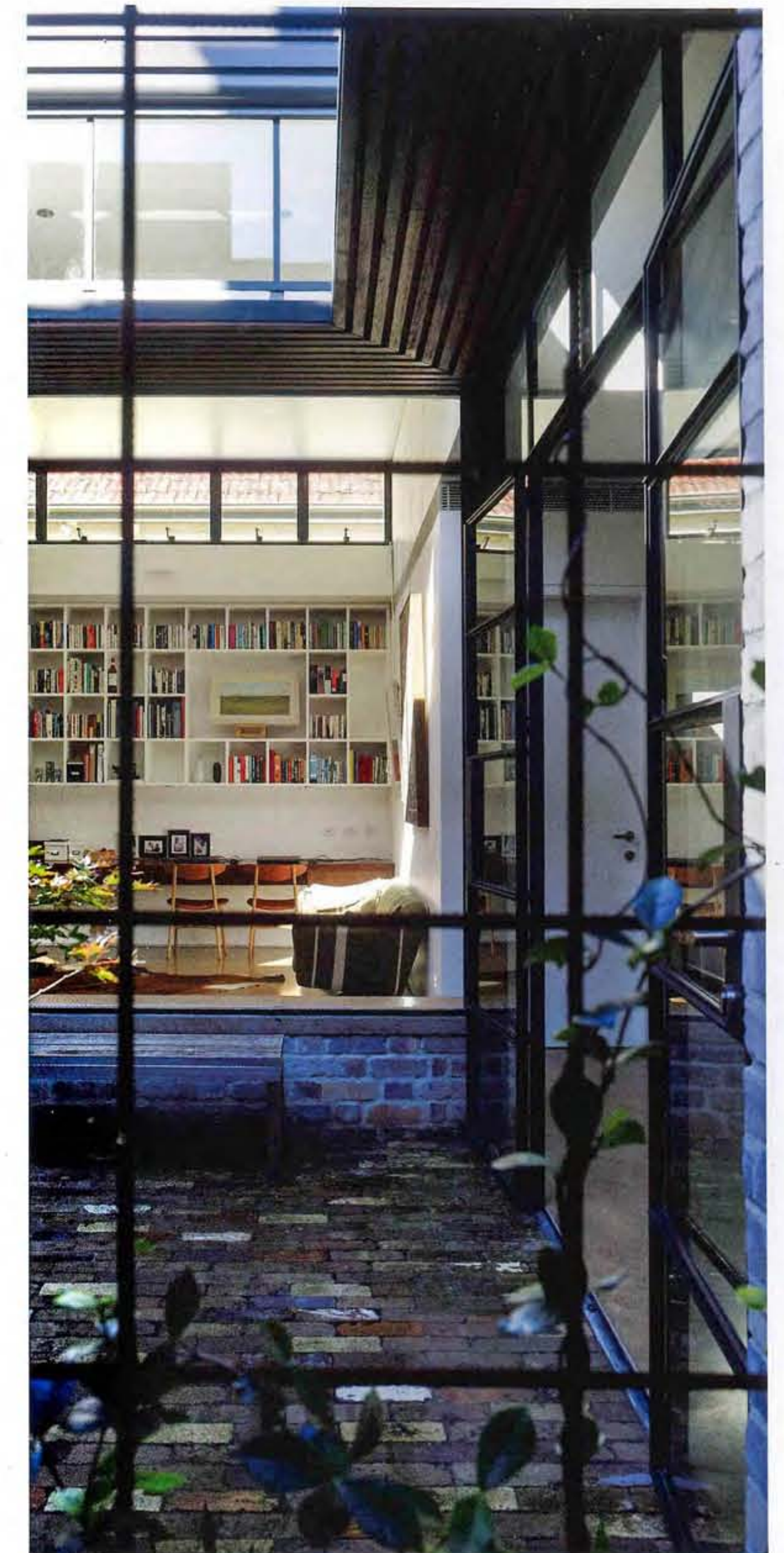
**DESIGN** The evolutionary nature of the design process raised challenges, encouraging us to explore the use of robust and flexible materials that could perform a number of roles beyond that of being merely building components. In fact, this project was our first opportunity as an architecture practice to fully explore—and enjoy—the compelling beauty of brick and the stories attached to our use of recycled brick material.

Whilst it did not start as such, the project evolved organically to become a fitting exploration of the many facets of brickwork. Within its unassuming setting, the completed house became a showcase of material and technique, the result of a delightful synchronicity of process between architect and client.

**MATERIAL** Beyond the initial brief, our client was closely involved in determining the palette. All agreed that recycled brick was best able to enunciate the differing expressions of brickwork and create a simple 'language' needed to clarify spatial volumes. In turn, this served to establish a strong relationship between internal and external spaces.

This process was, by nature, both charming and possessed great vitality, which ultimately led us to abandon sandstone as a landscaping material in favour of further use of recycled brickwork. This simplified the overall building palette, unified the various building elements and ultimately enriched the entire scheme.

**LEFT:** THE WARMTH OF BRICKWORK CLEARLY EVIDENT IN FRAMING THE VIEW INTO THE HOUSE FROM THE REAR YARD. **RIGHT:** A GLIMPSE THROUGH LANDSCAPING ELEMENTS REVEALS THE PALETTE FOR THE EXTENSION.







ABOVE: PAINTED BRICKWORK PROVIDES A RESTRAINED BACKDROP FOR FURNITURE, INSTRUMENTS AND ARTWORK.

ABOVE: THE POROSITY OF BRICKWORK HAS ENABLED NATURE TO ADD PATINA.





## FLEMISH BOND IN THE EXTERNAL WALLS CREATED A MORE COMPLEX INTERPLAY WITHIN THE COLOURED ARRAY OF SELECTED, RECYCLED BRICK STOCK.

Interior walls are of a painted brick, exterior walls are of a recycled face brick, and hard landscaping components such as paving and retaining walls are constructed from bricks on edge or laid flat as circumstance dictates. Flemish bond in the external walls created a more complex interplay within the coloured array of selected, recycled brick stock.

In contrast to the dark, sinewy restraint of steel window and doors, the tactile nature of recycled brickwork sits well. The result is a discrete robustness, softened as much by the play of light as it is by the loose furnishings preferred by a creative family.

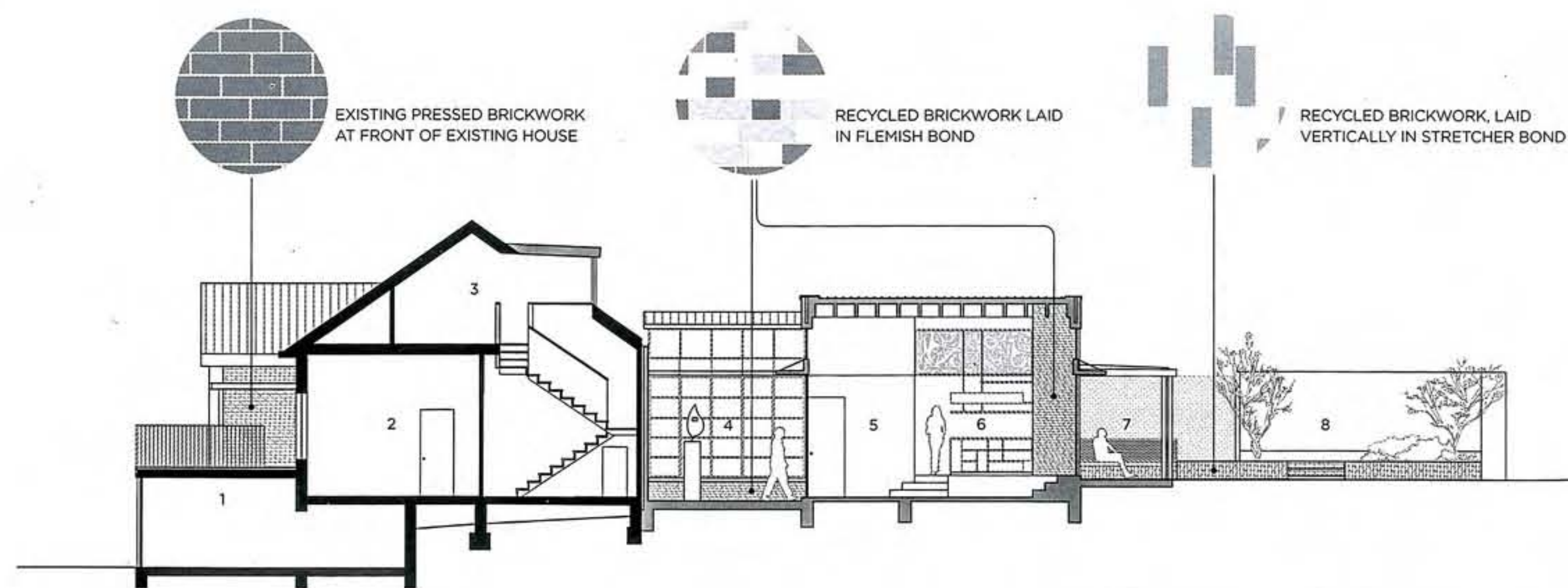
The recycled dry-pressed common bricks were sourced from a local recycler of bricks and stone, the Brick Pit, and were hand selected by the architect and client. Mock walls were laid out and critiqued in the brickyard.

One of the incidental pleasures of the construction process was observing how the bricklayers' initial hesitation—having to lay brick in irregular patterns and directions—quickly turned to pride in their work as the fruits of their labour became increasingly apparent.

ABOVE: THE ORIGINAL HOUSE AS FRAMED BY IMPOSING NEIGHBOURS. RIGHT: RECYCLED BRICKWORK AMALGAMATES AN ARRAY OF BUILDING FORMS.







- LEGEND**
- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 GARAGE            | 5 DINING/MUSIC ROOM      |
| 2 BEDROOM           | 6 KITCHEN/EATING         |
| 3 STUDY             | 7 COVERED OUTDOOR LIVING |
| 4 CENTRAL COURTYARD | 8 GARDEN                 |

ABOVE LEFT: RECYCLED BRICKWORK LAID VERTICALLY REPLACED SANDSTONE AS A LANDSCAPING ELEMENT.  
RIGHT: A TEXTURED RESPONSE TO A CONTEMPORARY RENOVATION.

