This house is sited on the dune facing Wonga Beach at Bundeena, on the northern edge of the Royal National Park on Sydney's southern edge. It is an environmentally fragile place, requiring substantial architectural sensitivity.

The client brief to the architect was for a simple, unpretentious beach house that would shelter the occupants from the weather but still allow them to experience the surrounding environment.

The 175-square-metre house is raised off the ground, set on steel posts driven into the dune, braced against a northeasterly sea swell that can, at times, send a surge of energy through the dune and into the buildings fabric. The house, built of a composite steel/timber frame and clad in rough sawn plywood and corrugated iron, is designed to be both strong and flexible.

The living rooms are positioned on the dune ridge to make the most of the stunning view. On the beach side a breezeway room sits protected from the morning glare of the water by operable timber louvred walls; on the bush side, an open deck sits protected from a sometimes bracing breeze.

The main bedroom is perched above the living rooms, well back from the beach for privacy, commanding 360-degree views of the beach, the bay, the bush and the hamlet of Bundeena. Another bedroom and an office on the ground floor are accessed via an open, roofed timber walkway, gently forcing visitors and occupants to experience the elements.

Sustainable and energy-saving measures that have been implemented include natural cross-ventilation to each room, orientation of spaces and protection of openings to maximise winter solar gain and minimise summer solar gain, use of gas space and water heating in lieu of electrical, use of ceiling fans for summer cooling in lieu of air conditioning, provision of water storage tanks to reduce town water consumption, and use of renewable and recycled materials where possible.

Other measures have been implemented as much in response to the site as for environmental reasons. For instance, lightweight construction was chosen, allowing the building to sit off the ground, thus minimising disturbance to the site and obstruction of natural sand, water and fauna movements.

This project has won a number of awards, including the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Colorbond Award 2006 for Innovative Use of Steel; the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Commendation 2006 for Single Housing, New; and the 2005 Australian Timber Design Awards Residential Class 1 – Open.

1. The main bedroom sits perched over the living spaces, set back from the beach for privacy.
2. Each ground-floor room has direct access to stepped timber platforms that form the entry sequence for the house.

Sam Crawford Architects

Bundeena Beach House

Bundeena, New South Wales, Australia
3 The house floats just over the dune, affording glimpses of water as one enters the site.
4 The breezeway room sits protected from the morning glare of the water by operable timber louvered walls.
5 First floor plan
6 Ground floor plan
7 The main bedroom sits perched over the living spaces, set back from the beach for privacy but enjoying 360-degree views.

Photography: Brett Boardman
Designed for a growing young family, this house is an expression of the clients’ very clear vision of what constitutes a family home. Their brief was for a cool, sun-drenched house for a family of six. Specific requests were for privacy, some lawn, a pool for the kids, plenty of storage, a passive solar design and provision for rainwater storage.

The relatively narrow west-facing site, overlooking Sydney Harbour, presented common challenges, uniquely configured. The brief required maximising the permissible built to unbuilt ratio. The neighbouring dwellings, none being architectural masterpieces, were in very close proximity, compromising privacy, light and views. A natural rock-shelf split the site in two. Council codes, if taken literally, provided an awkward and relatively narrow building envelope.

The ground floor of the 290-square-metre house is a double-ended living space, capturing both the winter sun and stunning views. The rear, informal zone opens to a lawn and a pool cut into the existing sandstone ledge. The front, more formal zone, opens to a private deck and expansive views of the harbour, the Sydney Opera House and the city skyline. The kitchen, at the centre of the living level is the hub of the house. The living spaces, study, entry and main stair all flow from the central kitchen.

The first floor contains five bedrooms; the main bedroom opens to a protected, west-facing, entertainment deck offering more encompassing views and an extended sunset viewing platform.

The central stair void, with clerestory over, carries winter sun to the heart of both the first and ground floors. The basement holds car parking, plant, storage, cellar and water tanks.

The material palette is limited to rendered and set white walls and clear-finished Australian hardwood timbers, inside and out, unifying an otherwise complex form and plan.

1 View across rear deck to swimming pool; the pool is cut into the sandstone ledge
2 The formal living room opens to a small deck and lawn, with views west over the harbour
3 View of rear elevation, lawn and rear deck, through to informal living rooms and kitchen

Sam Crawford Architects
Harbour House 1
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
4. Ground floor plan
5. First floor plan
6. The kitchen is the centre of activity in the house – all living spaces are connected to it
7. View from kitchen to entry and dining room
8. A private deck and daybed adjacent to the main bedroom offers privacy as well as stunning views of Sydney Harbour and city skyline
9. View across dining table to living room; each space is defined yet open to the next

Photography: Brett Boardman