

A PLACE IN THE SUN

STUART HARRISON

INNOVATIVE HOMES DESIGNED FOR OUR CLIMATE
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

Thames & Hudson

A PLACE UNDER THE SUN

STUART HARRISON



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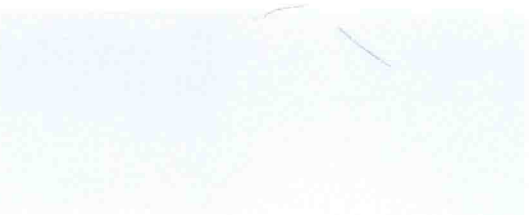
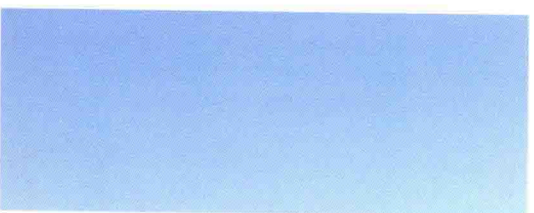
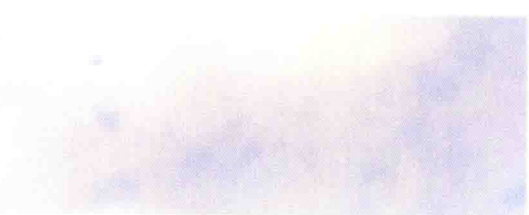
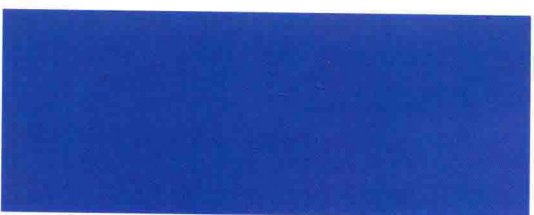
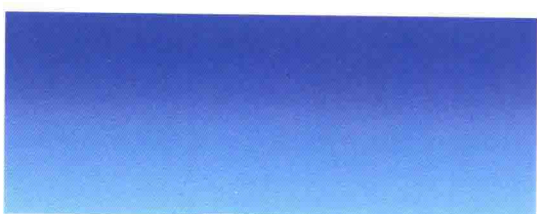
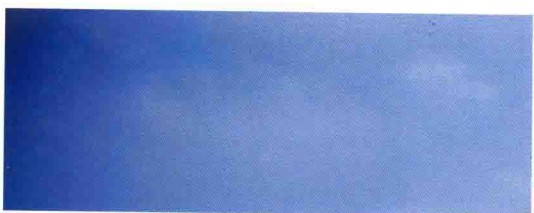
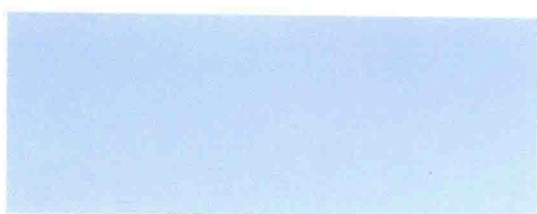
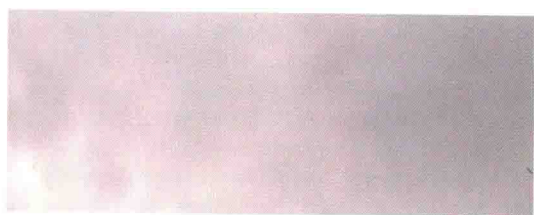
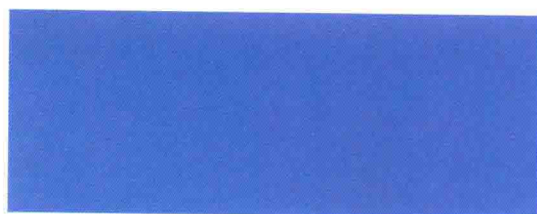
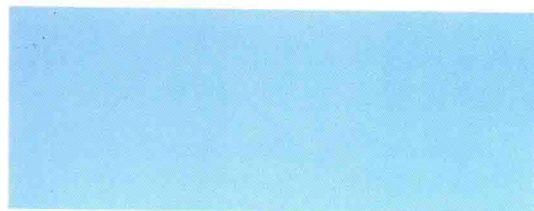
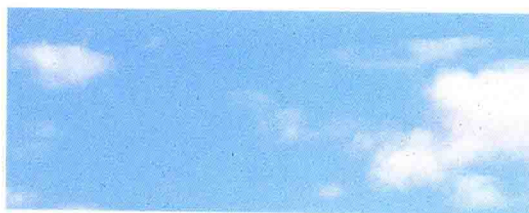
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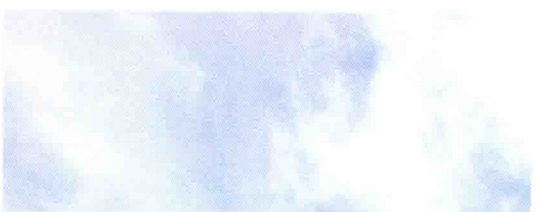
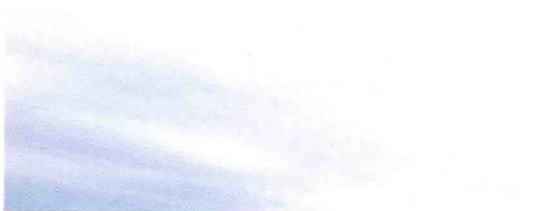
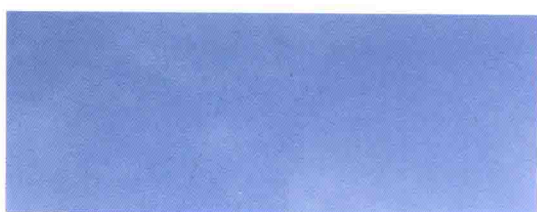
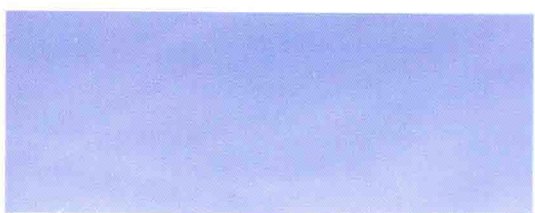
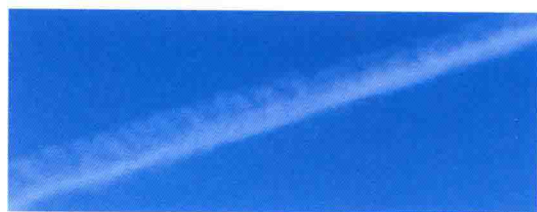
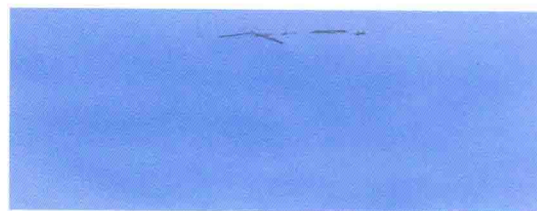
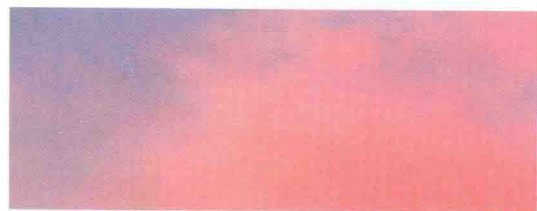
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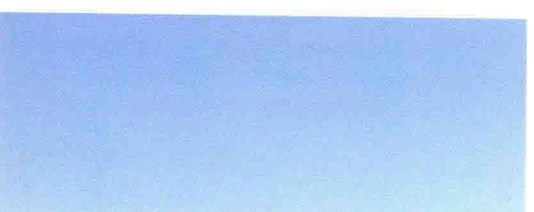
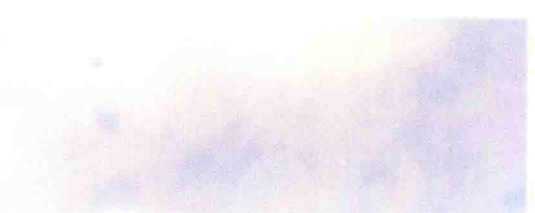
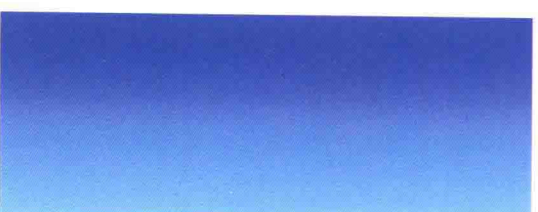
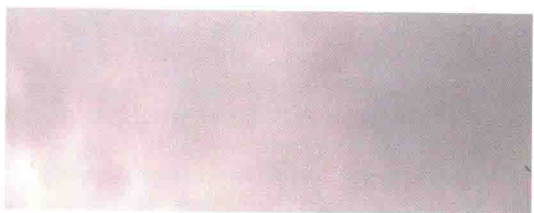
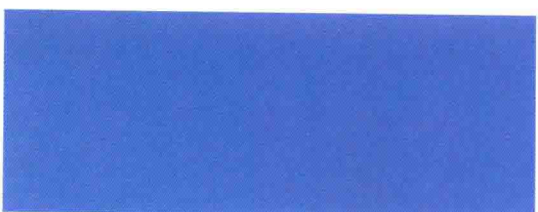
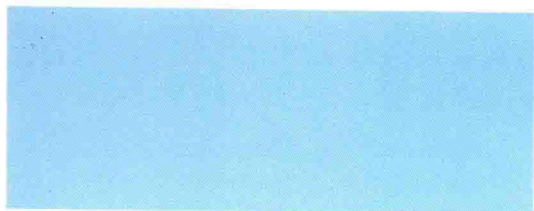
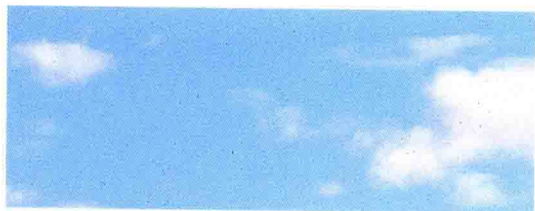
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INTRODUCTION

Since ancient Egypt the sun has been central to architecture. For the Egyptians, the sun was God, and their structures were always considered in relation to the sun. Today good architects continue to work with the sun and design to maximise its potential to make living spaces better, and their responses depend on location, on the place's abundance of sun. This book is about houses, and how they deal with the greatest source of light, the sun.

This is a collection of superb recent houses across Australia and New Zealand. As I write this, it is the end of summer here in Melbourne, a place reasonably far south of the equator, and I have just stored a sunshade that protected my east-facing glazed doors through the warmest months of the year. These doors are hit with daily morning sun. In winter it is welcome – it warms the floor and living room for the rest of the day – but in summer the room becomes unbearably hot. At the beginning of the summer my air conditioner broke, but instead of having it repaired I designed a simple screen to shade the opening. It made a significant difference to the temperature of the room while still allowing light to enter. As I packed it away, it occurred to me how important it is that we help buildings along at different times of the year, and even times of the day, and that we can maintain a comfortable temperature and level of light manually, rather than by pressing a button or flicking a switch. In a world of increasing energy costs we can save money and carbon by being more conscious of how our buildings perform, as well as how they look and feel.

The houses in this book approach the sun with intelligence – they are designed to work with the sun, not against it. They take different architectural approaches – some projects reveal good passive design to reduce energy, and others focus on how light adds magic to an interior, and makes simply being inside a fulfilling experience. Generally, Australians and New Zealanders like being outside and opening up rooms to the light and to the outdoors, as long as it is moderated – warm enough, but not too hot, nor too windy. Herein lies the design challenge for the architect – to consider and design for the climatic conditions that are ever-changing, whilst adding to the particular environment they are working in. And of course the sun is a changing equation itself: always moving, on a slightly different path each day of the year. Fortunately we can design to this. It requires more thinking, but that is what good design is: to consider the best approach. The end result is a better place to be, and to live.

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RIVER ROAD HOUSE, ARCHITECTURE WORKSHOP

So do we want more sun in our houses? Someone living in a fully glazed and unshaded west-facing house will probably want a lot less; someone in a Victorian terrace house that gets no light and was never designed for the sun wants a fair bit more. Orientation is a key issue, and so is location. Common strategies emerge in the houses featured, such as pavilions, courtyard houses, bunkers and hybrids of these forms. For a large swathe of the middle band of Australia and New Zealand, there is a general principle that we need the 'good' sun and not the 'bad' sun. It's a little like cholesterol or bacteria, with good and bad versions. Key to this is that the sun is higher in summer – the planet's axis is tilted so we are closer to the sun in summer, therefore the sun is higher in the sky and warmer. Good sun, then, is the lower one of winter, and we typically want to bring it indoors to help warm our living spaces. The bad sun is that of the summer, and like avoiding too much time in the sun ourselves, well-designed houses should block the sun coming indoors and adding heat, reducing the need for air conditioning. The availability and affordability of split-system air conditioning units have made it too easy to compensate for the poor design of houses – ultimately our houses, and the planet, would be better without them.

In the post-war period, houses in our suburbs were full of optimism and often demonstrated a keen awareness of the sun and how to use it effectively. Principles became widely shared by architects and designers alike, and the golden age of suburbs was born. At some point in the early 1980s things began to shift, as air conditioning became cheaper and more widely available, and the supply of materials was no longer limited. With increased wealth, people wanted bigger houses. There was also a return to style in architecture, and the combination of these phenomena resulted in a multitude of available styles and themes, but not in better houses. Although differing on an aesthetic level, housing was often very similar, particularly in its disregard for orientation.

Australians have forgotten how to do good suburban houses. At some point in the late 1980s, things moved away from amenity, solar design, social interaction and decent outdoor spaces to the mess that dominates most new and redeveloping suburbs.



CANOPY HOUSE, PHORM

The book is organised by the ‘southness’ of the projects. We start with houses in the north of Australia and move by degrees of latitude through Australia to the southern islands of Tasmania and New Zealand. This is an interesting exercise in comparing the position of cities. Auckland, for example, is further north than Melbourne, and southern Tasmania is further south than most of New Zealand. We can see the way designs change as a result of latitude, as climatic conditions alter. Generally we see more openness and less shading as we go south. The need to protect interiors from the sun is reduced, and it becomes a desirable element in indoor and outdoor living spaces for more of the year. In the northern projects we tend to see more year-round protection from the sun. The Phorm’s Canopy House (above) in Noosa is a great example of a big roof canopy that provides this kind of essential protection, like a tree itself.



LONG WEEKEND HOUSE, SIMON ANDERSON AND KATE HISLOP



HAMILTON COURTYARD HOUSE, GUNN DYRING

The issue of ventilation is also important in domestic design. If we can encourage cross-flow of air, we can further reduce the need for artificial cooling. The linear house type is perfectly suited to cross-ventilation, and we have several of those in these pages. Simon Anderson and Kate Hislop's Long Weekend House (above) in Western Australia does this well – smaller openings on the south side draw air across to larger ones on the north. Courtyards in the middle of wider houses not only bring light into dark centres but make cross-ventilation possible. Gunn Dyring's house (left) in regional Hamilton, Victoria, is one such example, where air can easily flow through the house, placed on a conventionally sized suburban block with houses surrounding it. More compact sites often look to the courtyard type, and this is a lesson we are learning from our regional neighbours in Asia. The use of screens is another regional influence also featured in this collection, as is the more direct engagement with the life of the street, rather than hiding away from it.