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Bark Studio House

Site area: 5000 m²
Building area: 100 m²
Location: Tinbeerwah, Sunshine Coast
Completed 2001

An elevated steel and glass pavilion in the Noosa hinterland, **Bark Studio House** was conceived both as an inspiring domestic space and, in its semirural location, a successful alternative to the urban studio for Lindy Atkin and Stephen Guthrie's architectural practice. Perched on only four steel footings in order to slot between two mature eucalypt trees, the modular 20-metre long structure of steel portal frames features windows and fixed glazing on three sides that reveal broad views of the Pacific coastline.

Bark Studio House acted as a significant precursor or prototype for future projects, including **Hervey Bay House** (2004). It provided Atkin and Guthrie with the opportunity to showcase their design approach and philosophies in environmental, economic and aesthetic terms. Their success at conveying these can perhaps be measured by the fact that Bark was subsequently commissioned to design a house for the neighbouring site, **Tinbeerwah House** (2006), in which several features are echoed.

The environmental strategies employed include maximising and controlling breezes with natural cross flow and 'chimney effect' ventilation (in which warm air rises and is drawn up and out of high openings, while cooler air is drawn in from below); the use of lightweight materials, including plantation-grown plywood sheets for walls, floors, ceiling and joinery, and recyclable steel; and minimising earthworks so as not to disturb extended root systems of the surrounding trees, including the two 'feature' gum trees.

A key feature of **Bark Studio House** is its structural legibility — the frame of the house is clearly visible, there is no extraneous ornament or decoration. Aesthetically, it could be likened to Mies van der Rohe's **Farnsworth House** (1951) — the ultimate steel and glass pavilion. Arguably, however, the appearance of **Bark Studio House** is a direct reflection of its prioritising of function and its desired responsiveness to climate and landscape. As has been argued, it is 'not Miesian, but rather high-tech, Queensland style'.[1]

Economy and simplicity were driving factors in the design and detailing of the building, which now contains work spaces for the practice's nine staff. Standard building modules were used to minimise wastage and labour time. The main linear work space was conceived as an open veranda with compact service spaces (kitchen, laundry and toilet) 'plugged in' along its length.

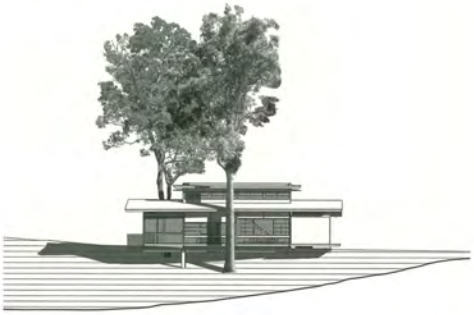
From the main studio platform, stairs ascend past the large 'shopfront' window (displaying models of past and current projects) to a mezzanine level, which houses an architecture library as well as a bedroom and bathroom. The architects describe the project as belonging to the 'shop house' typology commonly found in densely populated South Asian cities, with a small shopfront at street level and living area above. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that this tiny 100-square-metre structure (72 square metres of which is internal space) should be situated on a 5000-square-metre site. However, minimal means as well as a minimal aesthetic have made best use of the site's topography to create a flexible and functioning pavilion with breathtaking views, and taking up only a fraction of the land with built space.

1 Haig Beck and Jackie Cooper, 'Bark Design Studio House', *UME*, no.20, 2006, p.4.

1 Bark Studio House occupies minimal space along the site's western boundary (Bark's Tinbeerwah House is glimpsed in the background)

2 A large 28 m² deck marks the point of entry

3 Studio work spaces look across bushland to the Pacific

Photographs: Christopher Frederick Jones

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