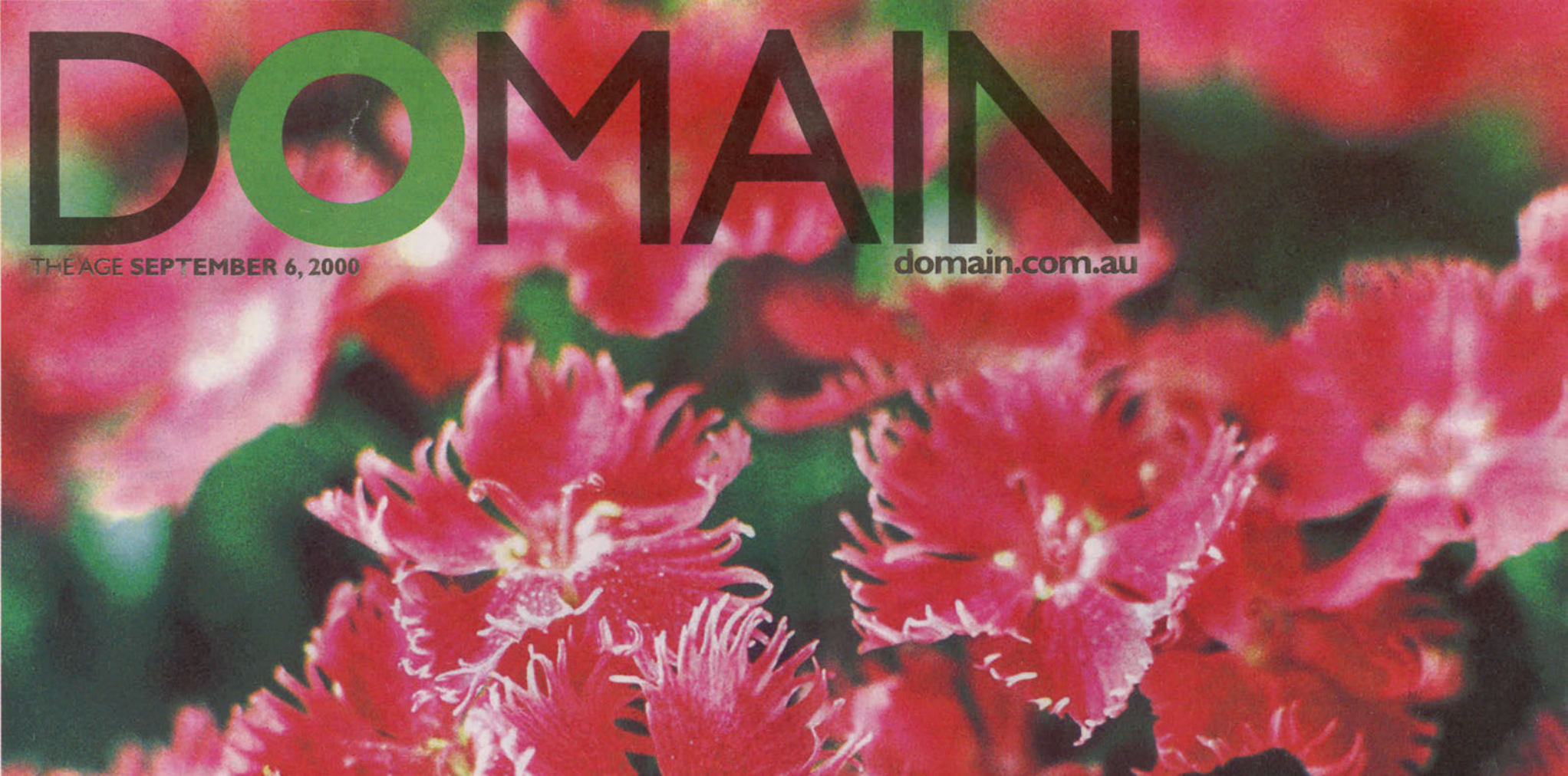


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Brearely Middleton Architects made a concerted effort to create a new look.



The kitchen floor, above, and left, was inspired by a beach, where the water washes in the pebbles and scatter them across the sand.



Pictures: JOHN GOLLINGS

ARCHITECTURE

One out of the box

Don't fence me in could be the catchcry of a small South Yarra townhouse. By **STEPHEN CRAFT**

A high fence concealing a simple, box-like townhouse could have been the formula used to develop this property. Measuring only seven metres wide by 20 metres deep, the site didn't allow for too many options. However, Brearely Middleton Architects weren't interested in repeating the standard formula.

The street, near Chapel Street, in South Yarra, is well represented with high brick fences. This new house and its neighbor (also designed by Brearely Middleton), make the narrow street feel significantly wider as a result of the open pebbled courtyards. "Without the fences, it's a form of passive surveillance," designer Luke Middleton says.

Conscious of the inner-city location, Brearely Middleton designed the facade to reflect a sense of urbanity. One side of the facade resembles a traditional dwelling with symmetrical windows, with the other evoking the nearby proximity of shops and offices. As a counterpoint to each reference, the form of the asphalt footpath dissects the house and makes an appearance in the living room.

"With the three different elements, it's like three houses compressed into one. We've taken the party walls away," Middleton says.

Driving the design was the brief to create flexible space. With two main bedrooms, a combined kitchen lounge and living area, the brief also included an office area, with its own separate entrance and ensuite bathroom.

"This room, which is being used for an office, could alternatively be used for another bedroom or a gymnasium," Middleton says. Likewise, rather than sharply defining the north-facing kitchen and living area, the spaces are blurred. As with the idea of three compressed houses in one, the floor surfaces are made of three different materials. The band across the kitchen floor features concrete with inlaid black pebbles, the middle strip is a fine-grained pebble mix (echoing the footpath), while the living and dining area features polished white concrete.

"The kitchen floor was inspired by a beach, where the water washed in the pebbles and scatters them across the sand," he says.

Instead of lining the kitchen with laminated cupboards that would easily define any kitchen, stained hardwood ply was used. Framed with tinted grey glass that doubles



concerted effort to create something that was new. Our client, who works in the fashion industry, was really prepared to go on that journey," Middleton says.

Unlike many townhouses, of one main bedroom and one or two smaller bedrooms, there is no hierarchy in the house. Instead, the two large bedrooms include similar-sized dressing rooms and each with an ensuite bathroom. The sliding timber shelves that emerge from the dressing room cupboards, with their folded articles of clothing, was one of the ways fashion instructed the architecture.

While the initial design wasn't altered, the scheme was occasionally modified. The revolving door to the two ensuite bathrooms was tapered back. "It's more of a half revolving door now. In its full form, its continual movement would have interfered with the person sleeping on the other side," Middleton says.

Fortunately, the bathroom's design did not require modification. With diagonal sports stripe tiled walls, the effect is like coming through a revolving door. "The stripe leads the eye around the bathrooms, starting on the floor and following up the wall. The boundary isn't defined," he says.

Like the tiles in the bathroom, this house is about bands and activities within the spaces. The crossing of boundaries is encouraged, with formal zones appearing at odds with the design.

"It's a 'placeless' house. Everything appears to be in its place, but nothing is really restricted," Middleton says.

Brearely Middleton Architects have recently won a worldwide competition for a large urban design project in China. The 46-hectare parkland will include a people's square and a conference centre.



Tiled stripes, left, on the walls create the effect of coming through a revolving door.

