



THE FINE: Columns set beyond the glass allow a fresh view into the main.
OPPOSITE: The main faceted glass partition was decided on the subject to be subversive to the existing Victorian-style homestead.



formal establishments

ROBERT MILLS ARCHITECTS TAKES ON THE TASK OF DESIGNING AN ANNEX AND FINDS OPPORTUNITIES FOR SO MUCH MORE.

Designing a completely independent construct already poses quite enough problems on its own. Designing an addition to an existing building is, quite possibly, ten times harder. Still, it's not impossible. And more importantly, not impossible to have it done well, as Robert Mills Architects demonstrates with their re-design of a grand homestead in Victoria, Australia.

Situated in the hills of the Goulburn Valley, the Sutherland Country House was built in the late 1800's and originally consisted of a late Victorian-style building and a smaller, connected farmer's cottage. Still, the owners needed more space in preparation for the impending birth of a child and commissioned Robert Mills Architects to design an adjoining wing. Far from a mere functional annex, the additional wing that principal architect, Robert Mills designed is one that manages to establish new relationships on varying levels, and introduces a new way of living – one that does away with formalities for a more relevant, casual lifestyle.



THIS SPACE WAS TO PHASE FROM THE
DESIGN CLEARLY HAS A MEXICAN INFLUENCE.

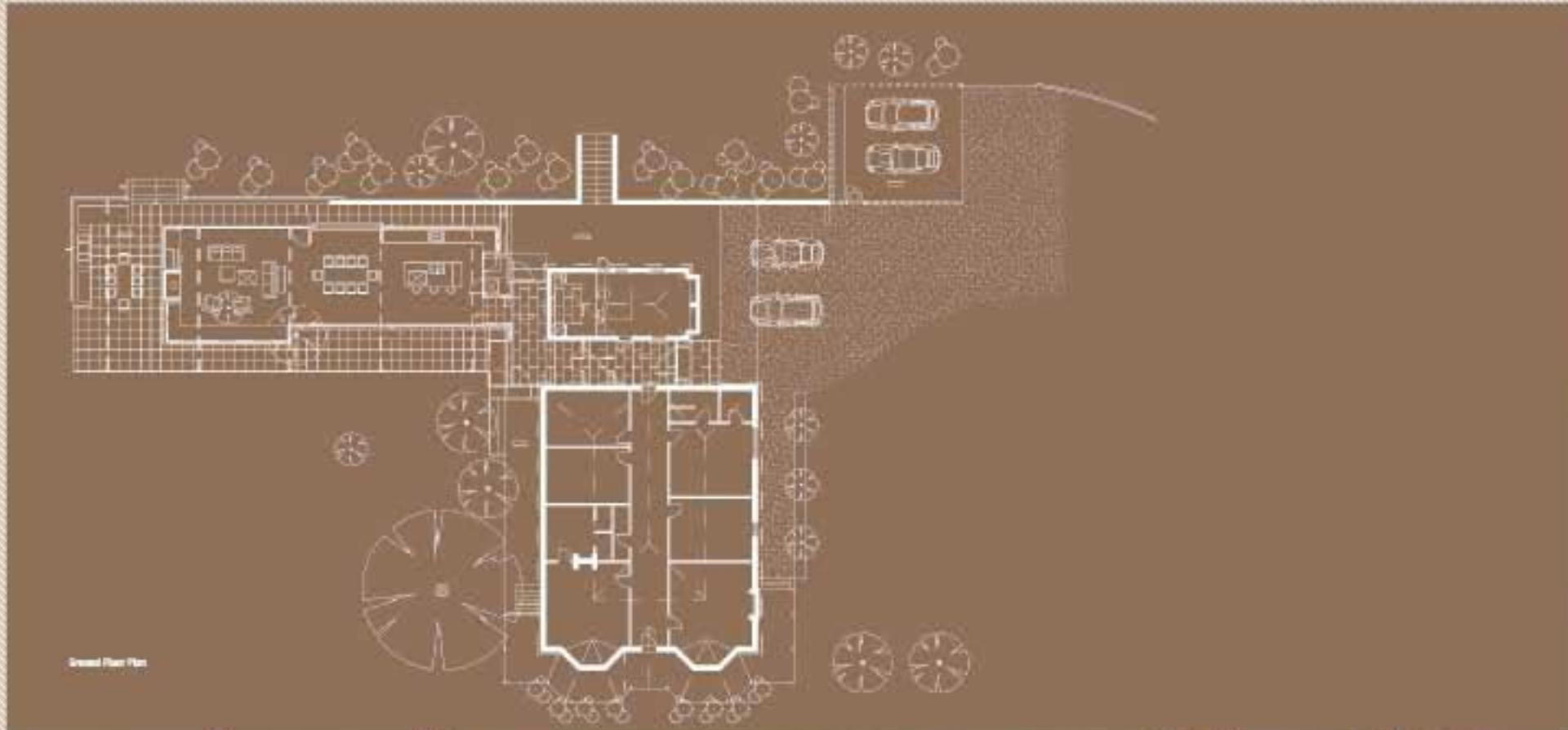
The glass pavilion, which hosts all of the residence's communal spaces, extends out from the side of the homestead, which in turn holds the private rooms and study. It attempts to marry old and new in a way that sees the juxtaposition of two very different aesthetics. Not willing to go the way of hollow nostalgia with a replica of the Victorian style in the new addition, Mills was very clear on the relationship between the two, deciding from the outset that the new addition was to be subservient to the old – hence the sleek, understated, modernist glass pavilion. However, the pavilion is subservient to more than just the existing homestead.

"Our works have been most influenced by the likes of Mies van der Rohe, Louis Kahn and John Pawson," Mills reveals as he starts to explain the aesthetic of the glass pavilion. The design of the glass pavilion clearly has a Mexican influence with its pristine linear language and in particular, it draws inspiration from the Farnsworth House. "The Farnsworth house sits so delicately in its landscape, and we wanted the new wing to have the same relationship with the surrounding landscape as well," Mills explains, pointing us to the second of the two main concepts behind the design.

The house is surrounded by a large farm and is privy to a view of the river valley in the distance below. The views are impressive to say the least and Mills designed the glass pavilion to take advantage of its advantageous siting. The glass pavilion, with north and south facing walls, has been positioned to sit unobtrusively on the land, allowing the land to visually travel uninterrupted up the hillside and through the building to the other side, almost as if the pavilion were not there at all.

Even while Mills took reference from the Farnsworth House with respect to the glass pavilion's relationship to the landscape, he was sure to do a few things differently "out of respect", he says. But more than that, the differences, above all else, are a result of contextual factors. "Unlike the Farnsworth House, the Sutherland House sits on the ground. This makes it blend into the landscape more and makes it less prominent," Mill points out. Also, instead of butting the columns against the glass, the columns have been set beyond the glass, creating a much wider eave that is absolutely necessary for combating the harsh Australian sun.

While the building intentionally takes a backseat to the landscape during the day, as night falls, the glass building comes to the fore, taking on increasing prominence as darkness settles in. Once the landscape is hidden under the cloak of night, the glass pavilion shines forth as a lantern, exposing the interior of the new wing to the outside.



OPPOSITE: From the glass box, each space looks out to the changing winter outdoors. THIS PAGE: White leather sofas and modernized furniture and fittings allow the landscape to come to the fore.



Within the glass pavilion proper, kitchen, dining room and living areas stretch out from the main entrance in order. With no walls separating one area from another, each space stretches out as a part of a greater linear whole. This free and open plan falls directly in line with the client's call for a communal space that relates to their informal lifestyle. Deliberately planned, the areas that stretch out further away from the connecting point between the homestead and the pavilion are privy to greater views, with the best view culminating at the living area. Always keeping in mind the intention of allowing the landscape to come to the fore, the interior is filled out subtly with neutral-toned furniture pieces and fittings and warm timber floors, in the kitchen and living room.

In inserting the new wing, not only did Mills create a new relationship between old and new, he also re-established the relationship between the homestead and its adjoining farmhouse. Before, the homestead and farmhouse had been joined as one unified whole, but as Mills re-worked the circulation from the old building into the new, he saw an opportunity to

re-instate the independence of the two old buildings. Having gutted out the existing service area, Mills replaced it with a hallway that mediates between the homestead, the farmhouse and the new wing all in a single swoop, allowing each construct to stand independent of each other, even as they function in tandem with one another.

Despite the obvious difference in form, there is a seamless spatial transition from old and new that comes off as making the most perfect of sense. The sleeping areas and study area are kept suitably private in the existing homestead, with its reserved mien and strict partitions within, while the communal areas in the glass pavilion are offered a more relaxed and open feel with the landscape sweeping in and out of the interior. And in the most peculiar of ways, it is almost as if the addition of the glass pavilion has finally made the 17th Century homestead complete, as it introduces new liaisons, even with the removal of old ones and then the re-introduction of fresh alliances all over again. ■

OPPOSITE: A free and open plan allows each space to stretch out as part of a greater linear whole. THIS PAGE: With each wall made facing south, the glass pavilion has been positioned to its advantage on the site.

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