

# House IN NOOSA by MORQ

• SUNSHINE COAST, QLD •

Nestled into a hilltop forest above the bright sands of Noosa's Laguna Bay, a house forgoes bold form for the quieter pleasures of flickering shadows.

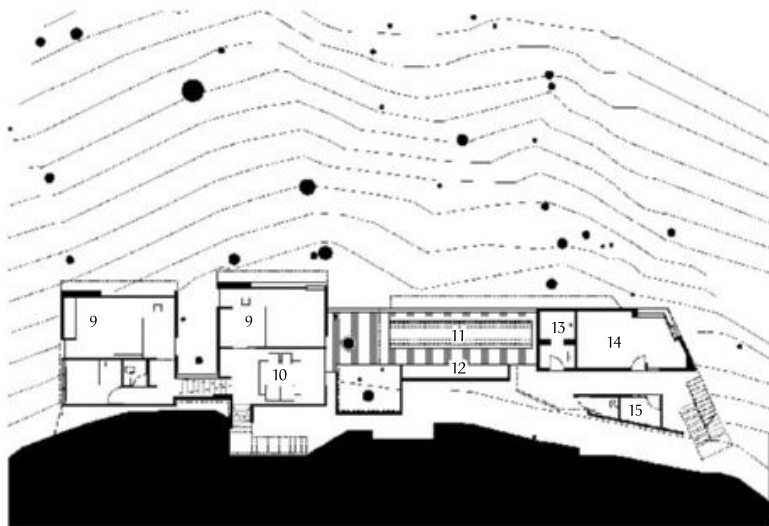
Words by Margie Fraser  
Photographs by Peter Bennetts



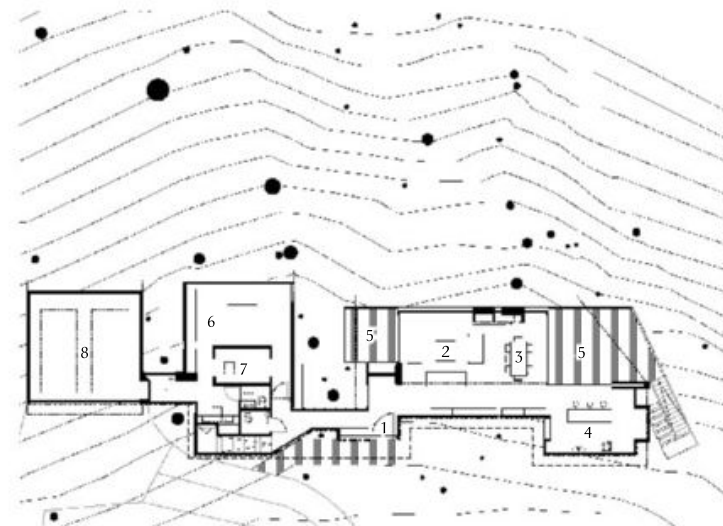
01 Located on a prominent hilltop site, the house is designed to recede into its leafy surrounds.

02 The interior plays with nuances of light and shade, avoiding heavy-handed emphasis on "big picture" views.

03 Weathered timber and copper blend the house in with its leafy surrounds.



Lower level 1:400



Upper level 1:400

- |           |                |               |
|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| 1 Entry   | 6 Main bedroom | 11 Pool       |
| 2 Living  | 7 Walk-in robe | 12 Daybed     |
| 3 Dining  | 8 Garage       | 13 Steam bath |
| 4 Kitchen | 9 Bedroom      | 14 Study      |
| 5 Deck    | 10 Lounge      | 15 Laundry    |



Given the gorgeousness and sheer drama of this site on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, the obvious architectural gambit might have been the cantilevered treehouse. Perched above Noosa's main swimming beach Laguna Bay, the steep slice of thickly forested land faces west over the water. An arc of white sand traces the edge of the continent, broken by the entrance to the Noosa River. Look north and on a good day you'll see Double Island Point and Teewah's dunes of banded coloured sands. Inland, Mount Cooroy and Mount Cooroora in Pomona show their pyramid shapes in smoky blue.

Because of the gradient, the road at the base of the slope is barely noticeable and instead you feel as if you are peering through the foliage directly onto the heads of the beachgoers and surfers. Voices float up in a staccato beat, interrupted by the rhythmic crash of waves. The site had been sliced off the back of an existing property, and no doubt was once dismissed as too tricky for building.

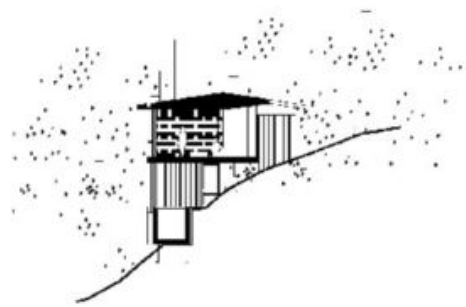
Andrea Quagliola of MORQ architects (Monteduro Roia Quagliola) was initially tentative about building on such a fragile site. He wanted to explore a more subtle arrangement of spaces than that of the projecting deck, and his design instead plays with nuances of light and shade, and avoids the "big picture" grab of the panoramic view. "We were keen to establish a strong connection between the house and the environment," says Andrea. "It was challenging because the site faces west and there was an initial request for views. I don't believe in full walls of glazing."

Determining where the views might be best framed and curated was difficult, with much of the slope inaccessible. Early in the design phase, scaffolding helped establish which moments were best celebrated. Trees were plotted so they could be salvaged and built around.

Andrea's practice is based in Perth and Rome, and it was through a mutual Italian friend that the Noosa client discovered his work in Europe. A passion for windsurfing and an attraction to building significant works from scratch were the forces driving Andrea to set up a practice on the opposite side of the globe. These days he divides his time between the practice and his teaching duties as associate professor of architecture at The University of Western Australia. "I came out to the Margaret River years ago, and loved it. Here was a place where I knew I could do buildings in the natural environment. It is almost impossible to see your work built in Italy, since the territory is so densely built up."

On arrival down a long easement driveway, the house in Noosa is camouflaged as a discreet wall of ironbark battens over black fibre cement, curving in sympathy with the contour on which it rests. The weathering timbers blend with the tree trunks visible behind. A copper roof, also discreetly blending into the bush palette as it ages into greens and greys, folds over and down to meet the undulating, striated wall.

A central door opens to the home's spine of spaces that run along its eastern edge. The three split levels share a sense of being



Cross section 1:400 0 5 m

strongly anchored into the earth and into the side of the cliff face. Andrea describes how the plan was conceived as “an elaboration of a retaining wall.” Council placed tight restrictions on both the footprint and the height, resulting in a long, skinny building. While the spine serves kitchen and bathroom spaces, living areas and bedrooms take up the dress circle positions in the treetops. Each is scaled to a considered, humane dimension, with diagonal axes to neighbouring spaces or around protruding tree trunks that spear up from niches and courtyards. A high degree of craftsmanship is evident in internal joinery and exterior ironbark and copper cladding, and Andrea stresses the importance of the skills of the builder and the copper roof installers for the “highly tailored” elements.

But it is Andrea’s passion for the aesthetic observations of early-

twentieth-century Japanese author Jun’ichirō Tanizaki that is the driving force behind the shadow play that lends the building its sense of reverence and subtlety. In *In Praise of Shadows*, Tanizaki eulogized the simplicity of Japanese architecture and the importance and essential beauty of shadows. MORQ’s portfolio of Roman interiors also celebrates chiaroscuro. The Noosa house manipulates the strong contrast between western sunlight and the deep shade proffered by the forest shadows, and celebrates both conditions. Materiality and natural weathering play their part instead of conventional ornamentation. Pauses, notes Andrea, are as important as views: “Moments where the sunlight is borrowed, and the presence of the trees is only felt through changes in light or shadows, rather than through a direct visual connection.”

- 04 Anchored into its steep site, the house was conceived as “an elaboration of a retaining wall.”
- 05 Shadow play lends the building a subtle sense of reverie.
- 06 The House in Noosa balances bright, western light and views, and the deep shade proffered by the forest.

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**Practice profile**  
MORQ is a small-scale architecture office dedicated to professional practice as well as university research and teaching (The University of Western Australia), based in Rome (Italy) and in Perth (Australia). MORQ’s work ranges from small residential buildings to large-scale speculative projects and it has been widely published internationally.

**Project team**  
Andrea Quagliola, Emiliano Roia, Matteo Monteduro

**Collaborators**  
Lorenzo Donin, Josh Saunders, Tor Dahl, Ken Yeung, Catherine Farrell, Clare Porter

**Builder**  
Bev Jenner Constructions

**Consultants**  
**Documentation architect:** Tom Van Den Berg  
**Engineer:** Alliance Design Group with Steve Biggs and Alan Becconsall  
**Landscaping:** Greenscapes Nursery and Design  
**Carpentry:** Brad Anderson  
**Electrical:** CE Electrical  
**Tiling:** Pro Tile  
**Stonemason:** Warren Fraser

**Products**  
**Roofing:** Copper roof by Australian Metal Craft  
**External walls:** Grey ironbark timber in Cutex finish  
**Windows:** Aluminium window frames by Hughes & Hesse  
**Flooring:** Grey ironbark  
**Lighting:** Inlite  
**Kitchen:** Miele appliances  
**Bathroom:** Reece bathroomware  
**External elements:** Natural stone

**Floor area**  
1,120 m<sup>2</sup> site  
350 m<sup>2</sup> floor

**Time schedule**  
**Design, documentation:** 18 months  
**Construction:** 24 months