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# MORQ

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The notion of the typical Australian home has been quietly eroding away over time despite our best efforts to maintain a sense of 'streetscape character' described in planning codes across the country. To satisfy those codes, our verandas and front porches have been reduced to mere symbols or 'porticos' addressing ubiquitous paved driveways so visitors can find the front door. Due to increasing traffic, the front yards of houses on arterial roads are becoming uninhabitable and it's no wonder people campaign against density, as the more homes we build, the more our identity fades, and the harder we cling to what we've already lost.

The Cloister House sits on a subdivided block of land with no vegetation, no privacy from the neighbours and no protection from the four lanes of traffic on Cambridge St. MORQ made an unusual proposition by combining front fence and front façade, absorbing the setback within a simple, but masterfully composed rammed concrete volume. For abandoning the pretense that a front façade of a suburban house needs to be adorned with a

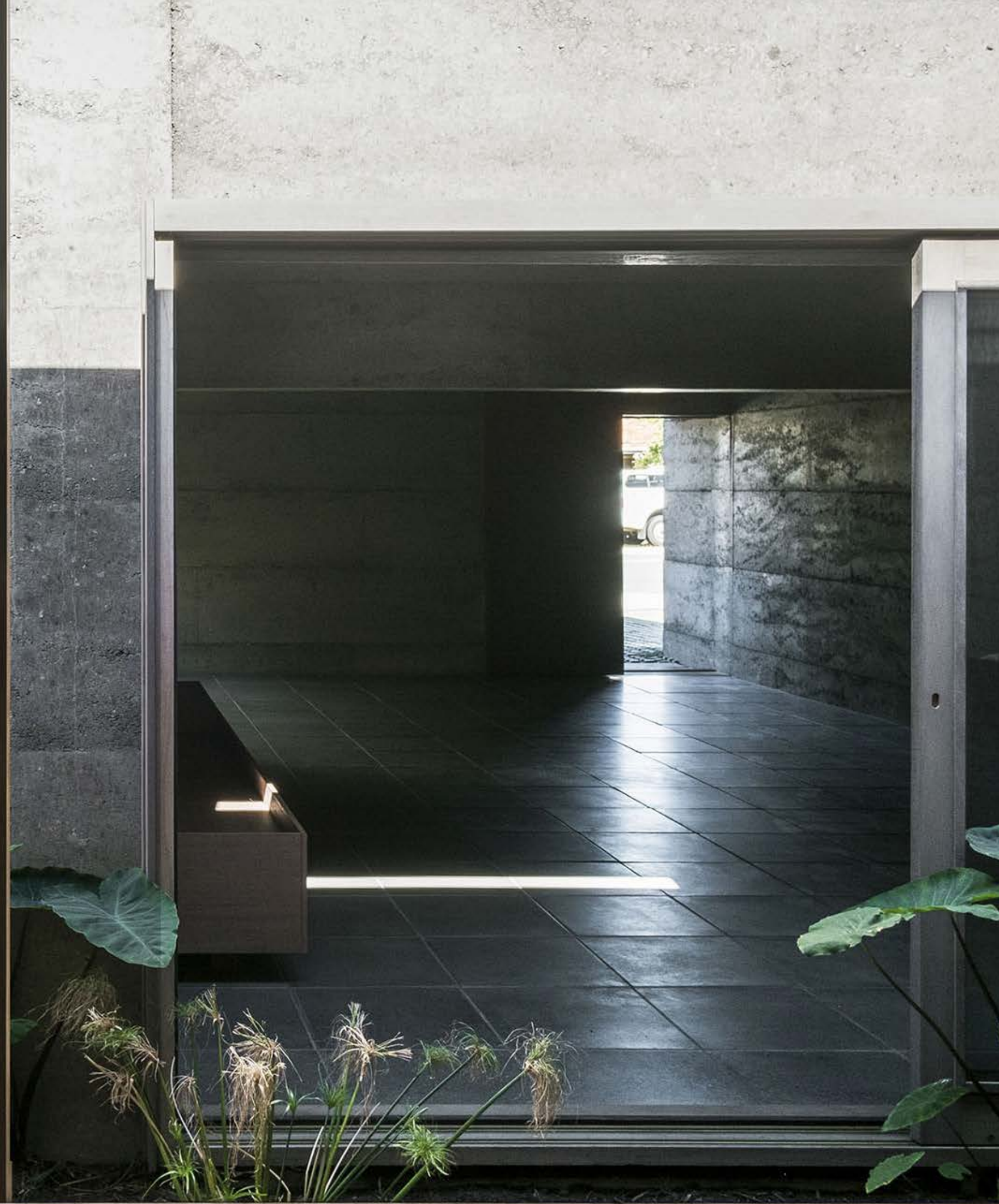
sentimental veneer, MORQ have both weathered criticism and won accolades.

The project began when the clients commissioned MORQ to design them a place of refuge; from the sun, the noise and the busy pace of life. It was to be a meditative space for the clients to contemplate, and to peacefully enjoy the next chapter of their lives - a challenging brief for a site on a busy road. MORQ employed thick recycled concrete walls to dissolve the outside world, absorbing temperature, noise, and almost movement itself, to achieve a breathtaking level of stillness. The sepia-toned walls wrap around an internal courtyard and like so many other quintessentially-Perth gardens, it's a tropical paradise that entirely resembles someplace else. Internally, MORQ has crafted precise shafts of light within the space, illuminating the surface of the walls to suspend sheer mass, texture and light in an ancient harmony that is felt as much as seen.

All three founding directors of MORQ, Matteo Monteduro, Emiliano Roia and Andrea Quagliola, studied architecture









at La Sapienza University of Rome. Today, MORQ has studios in both Rome and Perth, and their material palette has been influenced by their Roman background, a place where there are “materials that tell you a story, materials that are washed out by the time; materials with a natural feeling and texture”.

Materials like oiled, rough sawn red hardwood are used with rhythm and repetition that creates its own texture on the ceiling, while concrete pavers create a simple geometric surface on the floor. There is something refreshing about an Australian Institute of Architects National Award-winning project of such soaring monumentality being carefully crafted using a palette that includes classic Bunnings pavers. For MORQ it is about striving for ‘an extraordinary result through ordinary means’ and the magic of the Cloister House isn’t in the materials themselves, but the rigor and skill of the architects who composed them into a timeless symphony. Mark Jecks from MORQ recalls the months of testing, prototyping and hard work to achieve the

perfect tonal balance that gives the Cloister House its monastic feel: “We cast many rammed concrete samples to find the tone that worked in harmony with the material palette of the house, and the colour of Perth’s light...If we had even a few percent variation in the oxides it would have made the interior feel completely different... “MORQ also acknowledge the valuable technical assistance provided by the UWA School of design Workshop technicians to aid in this process.

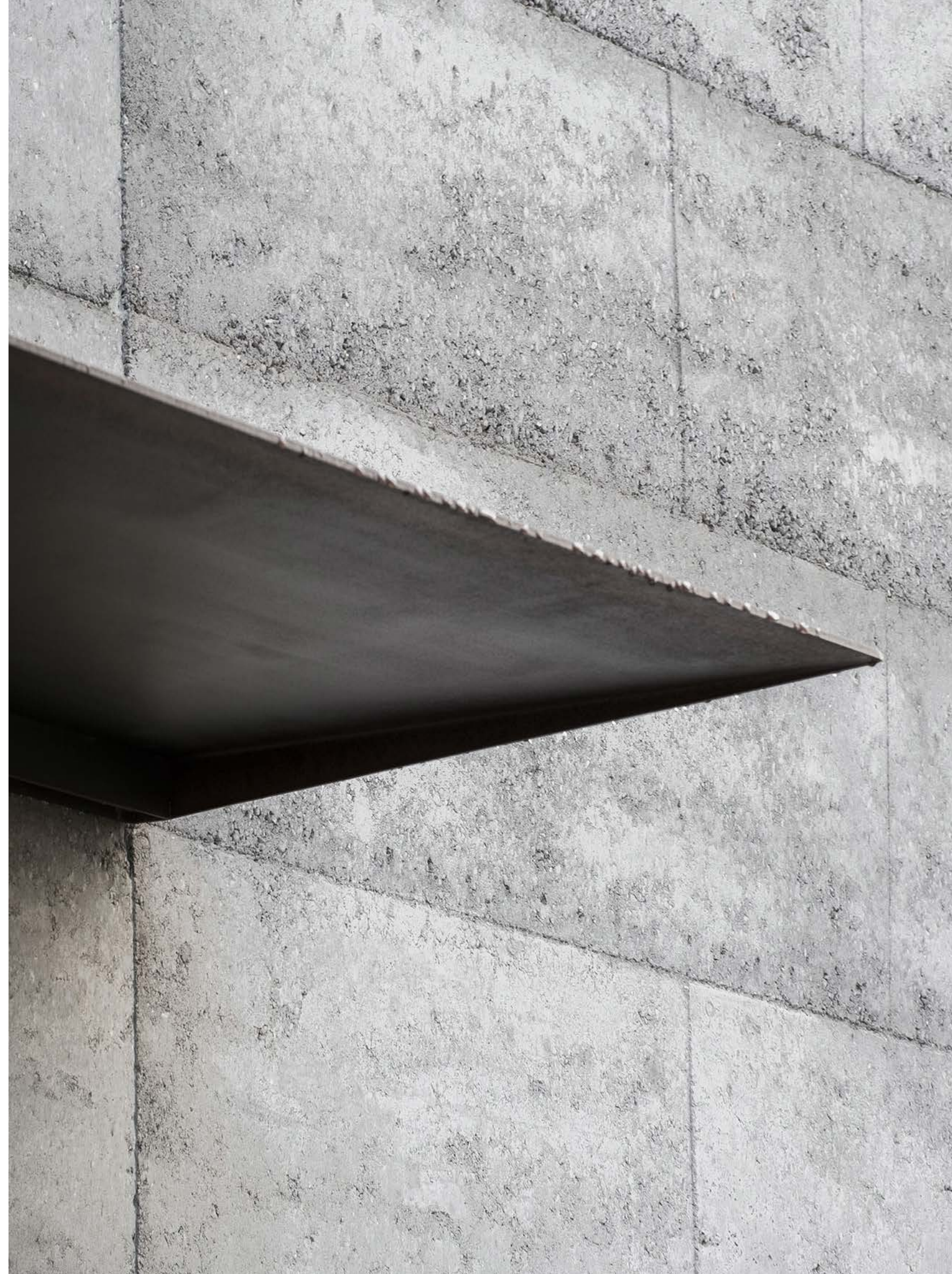
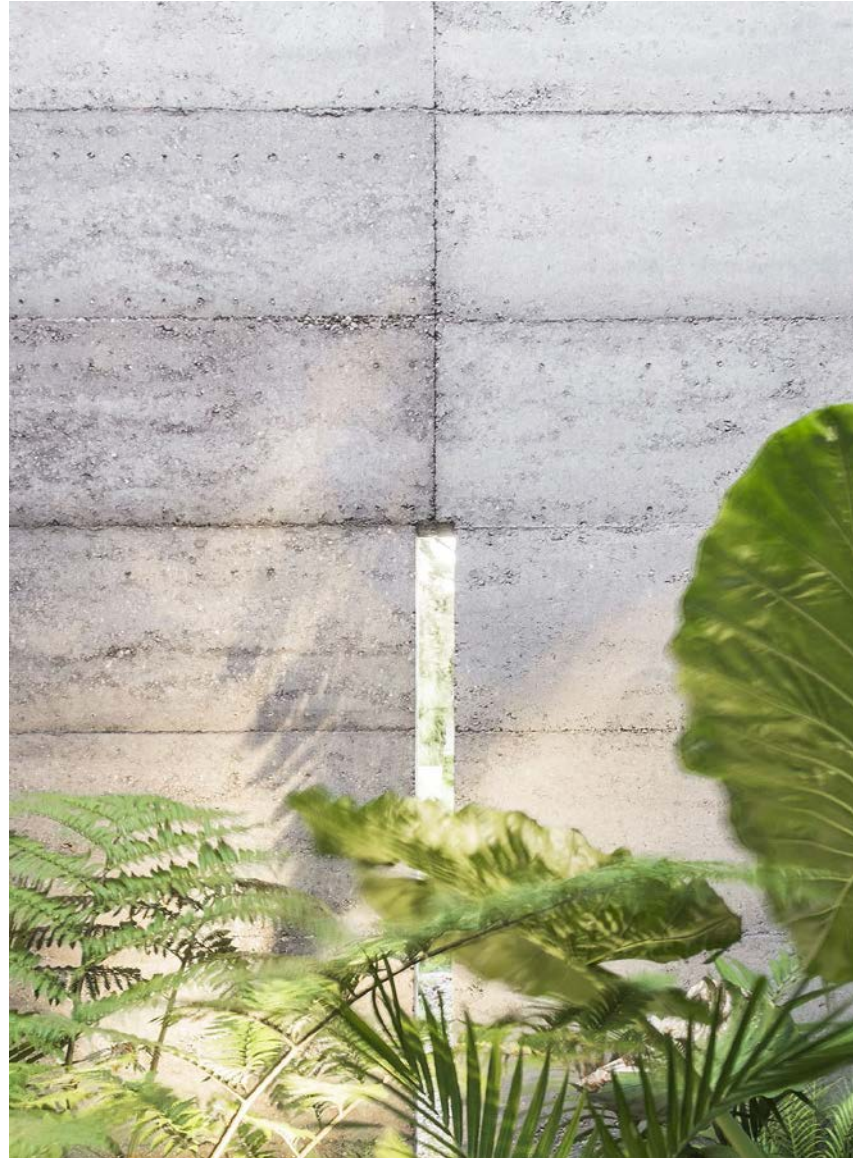
When the project opened last year for Perth Open House, almost 1000 people waited in hour-long queues to experience the project, and MORQ received an overwhelmingly positive response. Mark recalls one visitor felt compelled to hug him just to convey their thanks for the work we had done, as they ‘just didn’t realize a house could be like this’.

The sentiments of those who experienced the project are juxtaposed by negative online criticism that brings the cultural context of the Cloister House so sharply into focus; “The front of that house is just crying out for some lurid graffiti. No doubt, the





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neighbourhood teenagers will oblige” or MORQ’S favourite mean troll’s line “Give the architect some Xanax please”... a hilariously ironic statement, considering the house was designed with the defining purpose of enhancing mental and spiritual well-being.

The emotive response to the Cloister House illustrate that the broader, social context of this project is wrapped up in our collective nostalgia for the suburban homes of the past. The front façade of the Cloister House isn’t a blank wall, it’s a mirror and it sublimely reflects what we already know – We’re densifying. As the State Government is currently drafting new planning

guidelines that will define our future housing, we rely on projects like the Cloister House to challenge us.

Leon Van Schaik writes in Spatial Intelligence of tourists flocking to spaces in a desperate search for something that is missing in their modern lives, crowding destinations like the ‘hushed’ cathedral, the ‘contemplative’ gallery or the ‘untrodden’ mountain pass. Van Schaik also writes that to find this missing piece we must ‘learn again how to satisfy this need for spatial quality where people live and work’ and MORQ have done exactly that in the quiet, monastic atmosphere of the Cloister House.