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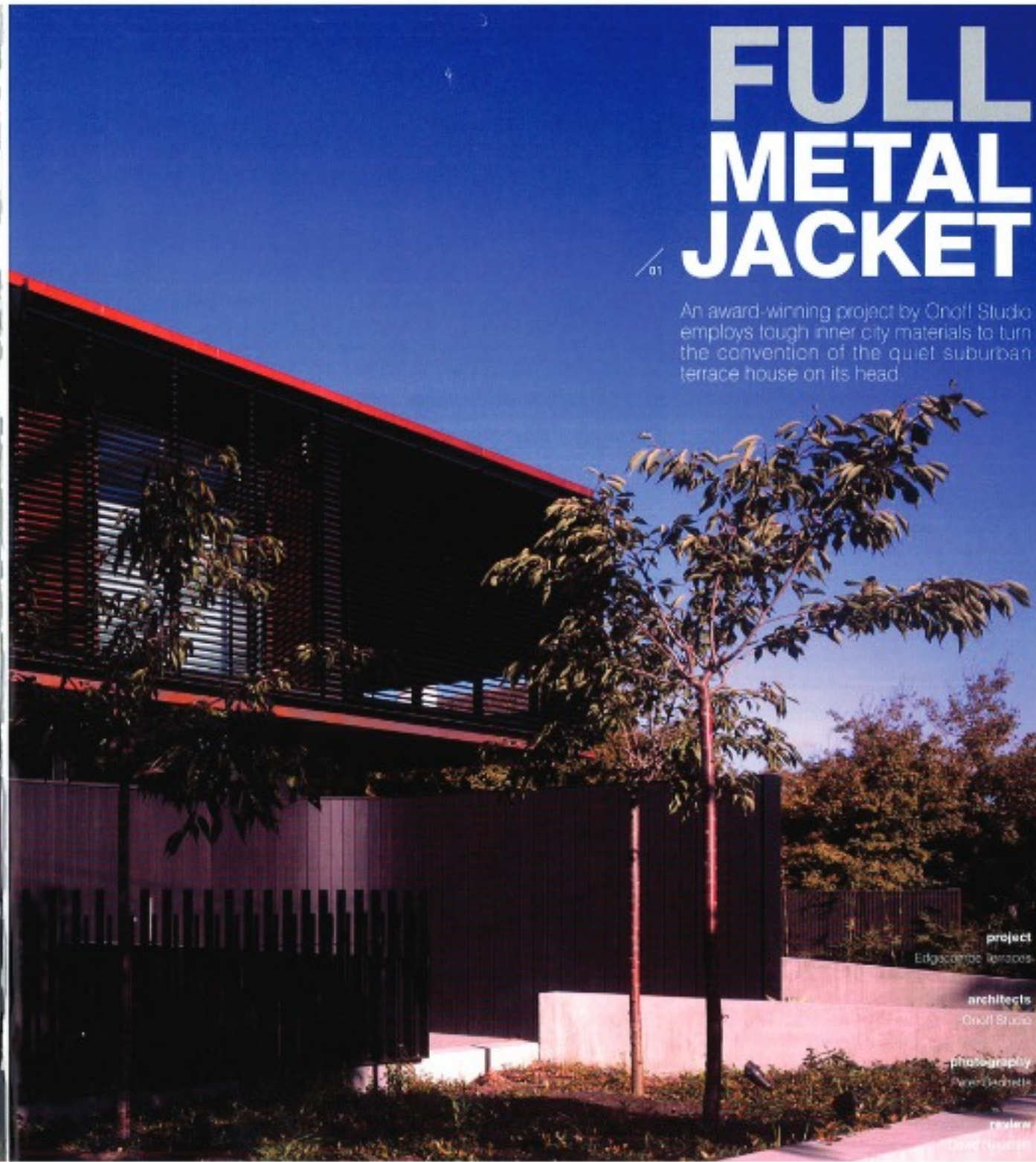
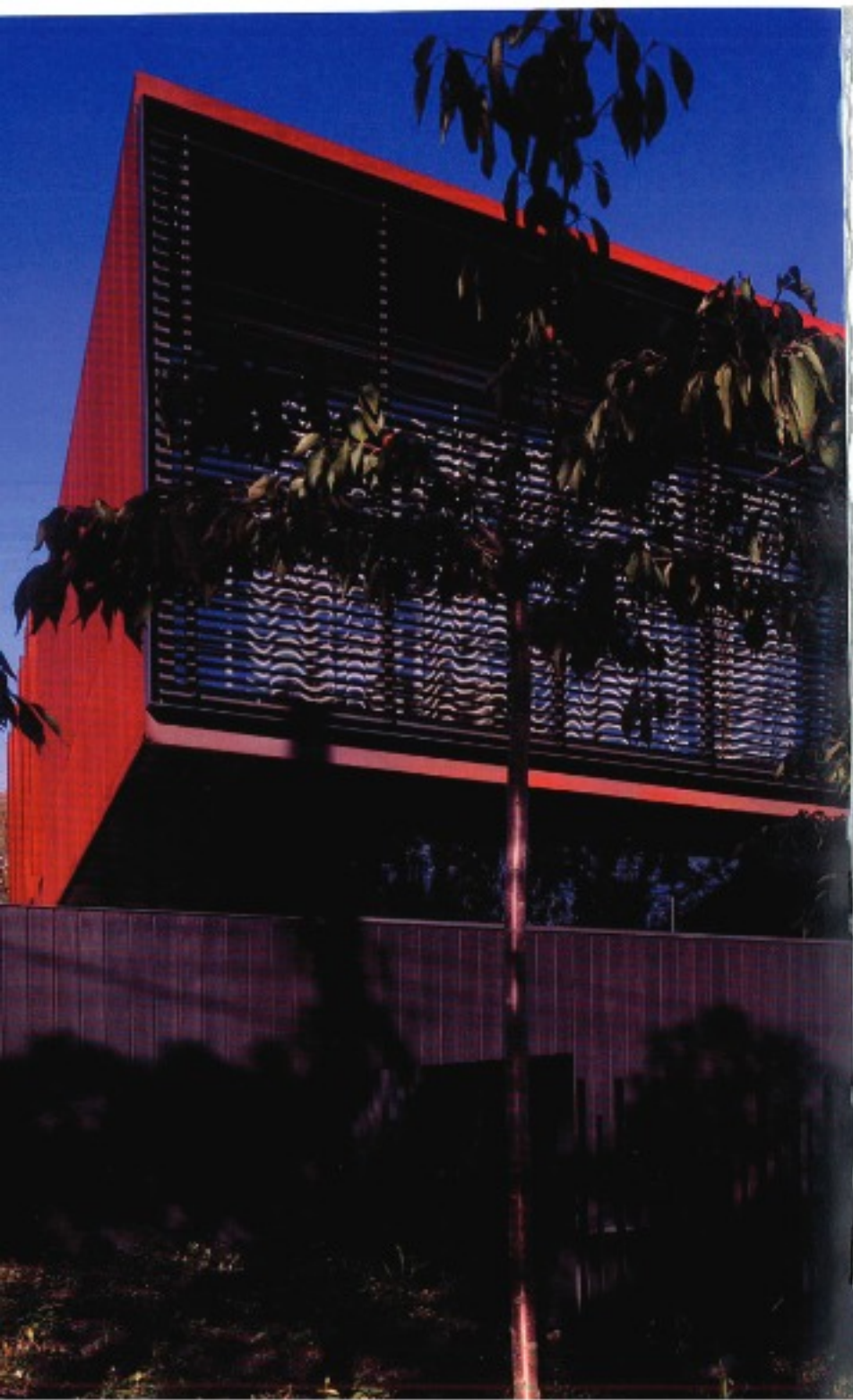
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FULL METAL JACKET

01

An award-winning project by Onoff Studio employs tough inner city materials to turn the convention of the quiet suburban terrace house on its head.



project

Edgacomb Terrace

architects

Onoff Studio

photography

René Ledette

reviewer

Onoff Studio

/01

While containing two individual units, the building presents as a singular object.

/02

Courtyard space of the northern unit.

/03

The northern unit's ground floor living area, with courtyard at left.



architect's statement

The development brief for this project was to provide two townhouses on an irregularly shaped block of 800 square metres in the Studley Park area of Kew. The project is concerned with the default issues that most designers approach in multi-residential unit projects, namely, a developer's brief to fully exploit the site, context and building typology.

Edgecombe Street contains a readymade model for suburban consolidation in that it holds a row of six 1940s era duplex terrace dwellings. They present a singular/consolidated form to the street that relates well in terms of image and morphology to the predominant pattern of single dwelling housing in the neighbourhood. This form of medium density housing was attractive as it provided a less intrusive form of development than the normal approach to terraced townhouses that accurately define their property divisions and alter the allotment calibration of the streetscape. Thus the design strategy for the building was to disguise a duplex terrace as a single house.

The singular form and the continuous louvre panel of the upper level are the main unifying elements of the building. The upper level is aligned with the Victorian mansion to the north that sits

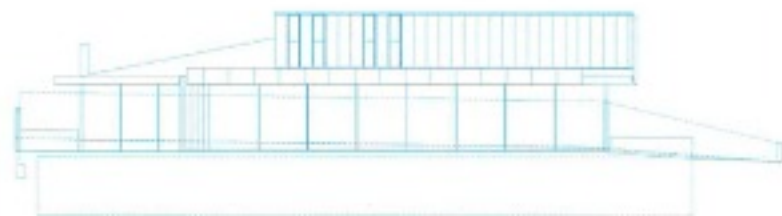
slightly askew to Edgecombe Street. The ground level is slightly more fragmented by the car entry ramp and is aligned with the street and properties to the south. Elements such as party walls and pedestrian entries that could mark the building as a dual occupancy project are left largely unexpressed.

The plan form is generated from the irregular allotment geometry and site orientation. The varied plan forms of each unit is about distributing space so each unit can enjoy a north aspect to both living and outdoor areas. Unit A is compressed and configured as a courtyard house. Unit B slips around the back of Unit A and is terminated with a north-facing courtyard. The resulting typology is a duplex terrace/courtyard house hybrid.

The project utilises a basement level for habitable space and outdoor courtyards in addition to car parking and storage. The basement courtyards and habitable spaces are offset from the main body of the building and occupy portions of the site normally allocated to street and boundary setbacks. The benefit of utilising site area that is normally lost to planning setbacks was obvious to the developer. The basement areas are earth covered to retain site permeability and garden space. **Onoff Studio**



A corten steel box atop a striated black timber plinth, the development appears strikingly machine age against a stately streetscape of porches, chimneys, white rendered brickwork and casement windows.



/north elevation



/south elevation



review: edgewise terraces

Some architects encase their built works in lowering scaffolds of words: narratives, metaphors, witty homages and symbolic references. These verbal constructions can suggest another architecture altogether, one buried deep under the surface, a great frozen mass of meaning and intent concealed beneath the iceberg's tip. Michael Larsonoff, of Graft Studio, is not one of those architects. To hear him tell it, his latest project derived simply from the combination of the geometry of the plot and local planning regulations. "It was really just shaped up from the Res Code diagram and the site constraints," he says, with barely a trace of irony. Clad in an understated baseball cap and sandals on a hot Melbourne day, Larsonoff rides his bicycle to the AR site visit, where he lets his client do most of the talking.

Kew's Studley Park in Melbourne makes an unlikely location for the 2008 winner of the AIA's best multi-residential project in Victoria. This award category is typified by stark and punchy housing developments nestled into gritty urban surroundings. Studied with grand homes, the Studley Park precinct has long surpassed its humble origins as a squatter's claim. Indeed the site for Larsonoff's awarded Edgecombe Street townhouses was once the gap between the main residence and stables in the grounds of a Victorian-era mansion. The mansion remains today in a slightly

ramshackle state, having outlasted later extensions and conversion into a nursing home. After the demise of the nursing home and the subdivision of the grounds, client Brendan, a builder and developer, purchased the land and divided it once more, bleeding the 600-square-metre site into two attached dwellings. Brendan and Larsonoff had previously collaborated on medium-density housing in Richmond.

"It was important that the design look like a singular house on a street of singular dwellings," says Larsonoff. Drawing on the example provided by a row of 1940s dual occupancy terraces across the street, the architect consolidated the mass and articulation of the project to make two dwellings appear as one; however, Brendan had never intended to create two identical houses – "a pigeon pair with a party wall". Accordingly, Larsonoff slid one terrace beyond the other, maximising northern solar access on the site's long side boundary for both dwellings. The common wall between the terraces hints to negotiate the irregular geometry of the site, resulting in non-identical twins. One house is compact in plan, the other elongated. "[Boroondara] Council was supportive once they saw the plan," says Brendan. "Their planners effectively green-lighted the project based on the plan." Objecting neighbours on all sides withdrew once Brendan explained his intentions.



While Larsonoff is quick to shrug off the eloquence of this project, subtle shifts in alignment between levels speak volumes about his architectural intent.

Not only does the pair of terraces appear as a singular dwelling, it is uncompromisingly singular in appearance. A corten steel box atop a striated black timber plinth, the development appears strikingly machine age against a stately streetscape of porches, chimneys, white rendered brickwork and casement windows. Like tilted eyes, a row of black aluminium louvers delineates the street-facing western elevation. This costly metallic aesthetic continues within, with polished concrete floors, flush black-stained grey ironback joinery, reflective black glass splashbacks and black steel stair heads and handrails. Black oxide was mixed into the plaster coating the sound-insulated party wall to give off a grey sheen, while the master on suite is clad in blue-toned tiles. Brendan, who occupies one home with his young family of five and leases the other, sought a palette of darker tones. "I'm interested in really ultramodern architecture," he says. By night, garden lights cast bamboo shadows onto the corten façade. Like a metallic Medusa, a 38-bulb chandelier from Italy's Covellani and Smith hangs ominously over the dining table.

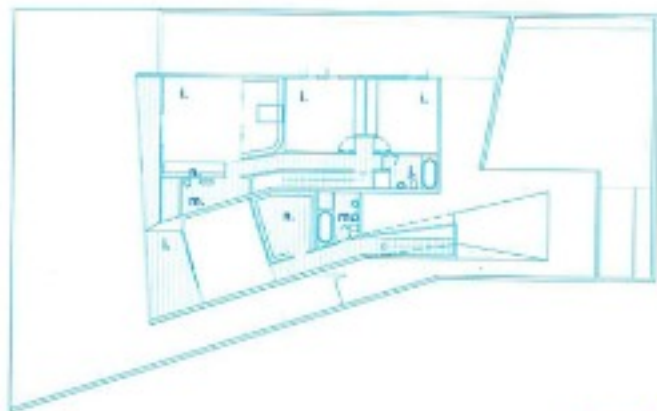
With so much metal on display, it's fitting that the true ingenuity of this project can be found underground. In order to keep the terraces visibly slender while accommodating an array of rooms, Larsonoff distributed rooms below ground. Subterranean courtyards

on the site's eastern and western boundaries admit light to the basement. This shrewd move enabled Larsonoff to place rooms within the required street setback zone, taking pressure off the terraces' other two levels. Soaked water for washing, ablutions and gardening is stored in 12,000-litre water tanks, while the basement also incorporates a ramp accessing two multi-car garages. "It was almost commercial in scale," says Brendan of the basement construction required to support the levels above. His team spent two days spraying 9412 of concrete to create 20-centimetre-thick shotcrete retaining walls and deep spanning concrete walls.

A close relationship between architect and owner/builder has clearly yielded results. "There was not too much going and fixing with the design," says Brendan. And while Larsonoff is quick to shrug off the eloquence of this project, subtle shifts in alignment between levels, where a joinery unit seems to float over a precisely detailed stairwell, or a skylight opens like a fissure above a void, speak volumes about his architectural intent. **AR**

David Newsham has regularly contributed to a number of Australian design publications and has studied architecture and industrial design at the University of Sydney, 1967 and Padova, Italy. He currently runs his own design studio and teaches in the Master of Architecture program at the University of Melbourne.

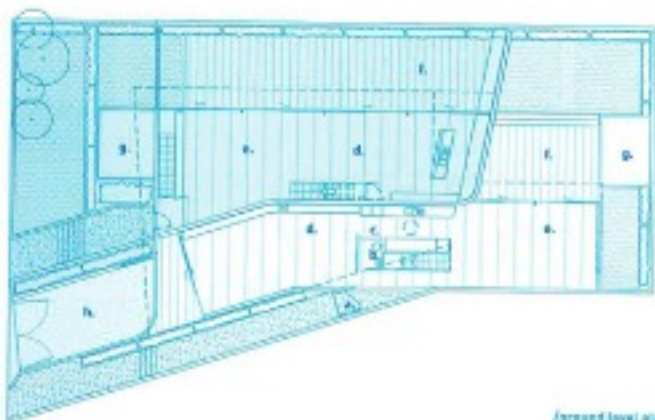
- 004 Private courtyard for the southern unit.
- 005 Six-level unit's ground floor living area.
- 006 First floor circulation for the northern unit.
- 007 Northern unit en suite bathroom.
- 008 Northern unit master bedroom.



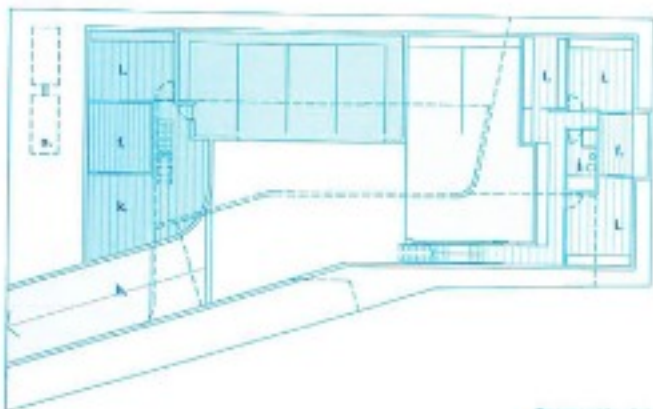
Level 01 plan

Legend

- a. entry
- b. tv
- c. kitchen
- d. dining
- e. living
- f. courtyard
- g. courtyard below
- h. ramp
- i. bedroom
- j. bathroom
- k. study
- l. laundry
- m. master bedroom
- n. dressing
- o. water storage tanks



Ground level plan



Basement level plan



edgecombe terraces

principal architect Greff Design **project team** Michael Lansonoff
engineer Design Project Group **builder** SCS Constructors **landscape architect** Jack Merlo **size** 703sqm **time to complete** 18 months **council** City of Beropondra **walls** DSM Form Block **wall linings** Grey knobkork timber **cladding** BlueScope Steel HW550 weathered steel **roof** LBI Klip-Lok metal deck **paving** concrete **windows and doors** Copral double-glaze aluminium



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