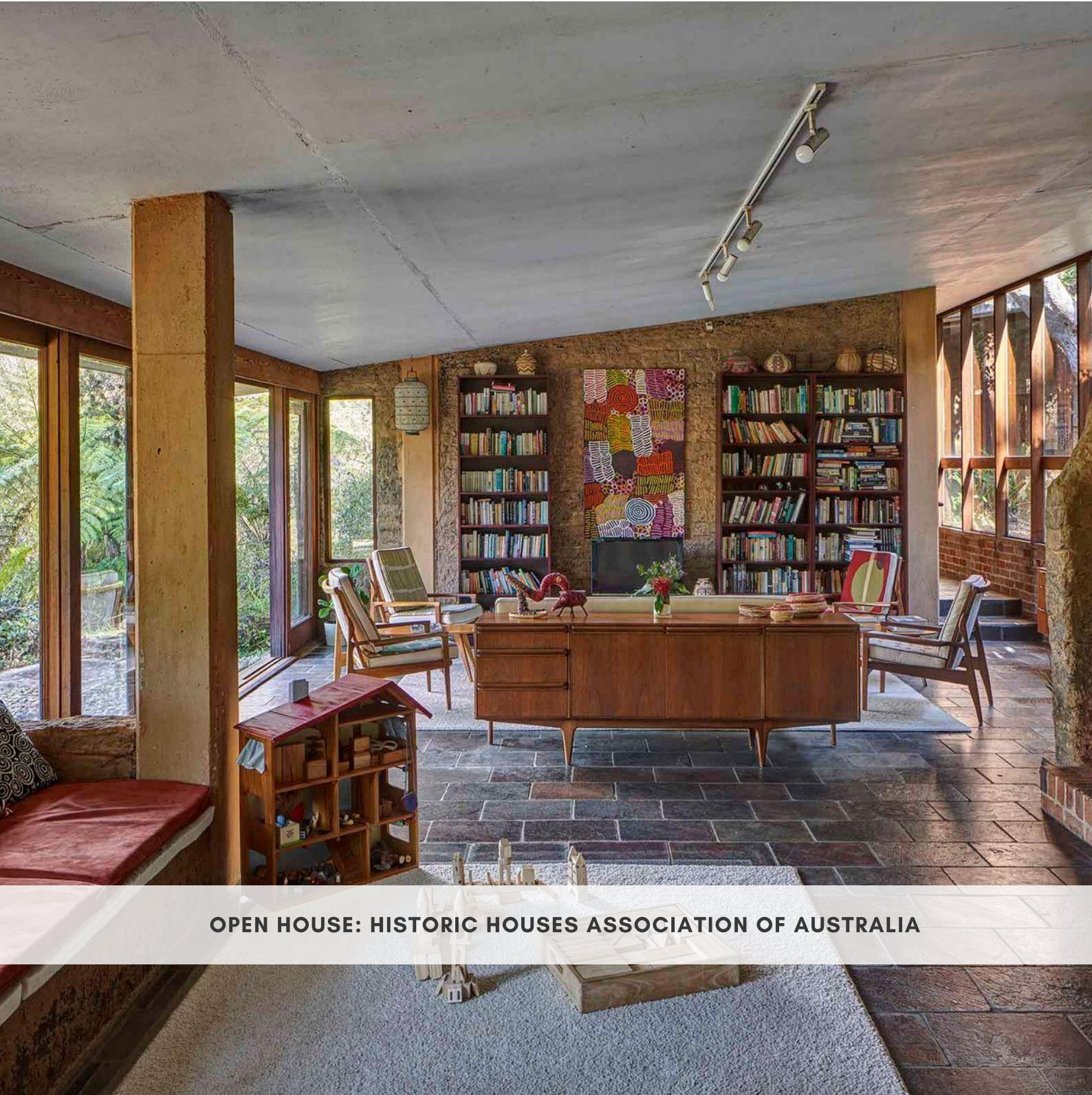


# morton house



OPEN HOUSE: HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

# morton house

Morton House, on the edge of the Blue Mountains National Park is a home specifically designed to harmoniously blend with its native bushland setting. This beautifully engineered house creates the feeling of being nestled into the landscape itself.

Built c1979, this freestanding house has strong connections to the organic principles employed by the influential architect Walter Burley Griffin, who famously designed Canberra and Castlecrag, also the NSW towns of Leeton and Griffith - he espoused that one should honour the Australian bush and live with empathy to a pristine environment. The original owners, the Mortons, were inspired by their early connections to Castlecrag and Walter Burley Griffin himself, to build a house that does not intrude on the natural environment. They built around special trees and mass planted native trees and bushes to attract local bird-life. Few houses can claim to have had lyrebirds nesting on the roof. The house has been described as simply, "putting four walls around a beautiful place." This simplifies the complexity of the build but describes the outcome perfectly. The green roof structure surrounds a central atrium that draws light throughout the house and provides further connection to landscape and sky from all principal rooms. Externally, the concrete structure is infilled with clay bricks and internally, the dividing walls are also made from the 8,000 clay bricks that were handmade onsite. The use of the bricks inside and out give the house a wonderful consistency of material palette, colour and texture. From street level the expansive native rooftop garden conceals the true size of the home beneath.



Entry to the house is via a wide, orchid lined, sandstone path leading to both the grand wooden front door and the informal entry into the heart of the house - the 'living' kitchen. Shrubbery cascades around the roofline giving the impression of a leafy waterfall splashing towards the rockshelf on which the building is sculpted to, in turn the external earthy tones seem to give the effect of the entire structure melding into its bushland surrounds.

The level changes in the house act as a constant reminder that the house is working with the landscape flowing to a stunning rock platform, which can only be described as the most beautiful natural terrace one could ever imagine or wish for.

As the house is orientated directly to the North, it is a sunny home - drenched in the rays of the sun nearly all day. Windows and doors slide open to the landscape, coupled with high ceilings that make the spaces light and airy. Banks of skylights in the rear of the building provide abundant light and the glass atrium at its core, aid further natural illumination throughout. Conversely, the house is cool even on the hottest days of summer.

Set on approximately 3.13 ha (7.5 acres) of classified wildlife refuge Morton House truly espouses the ethos of organic architecture.

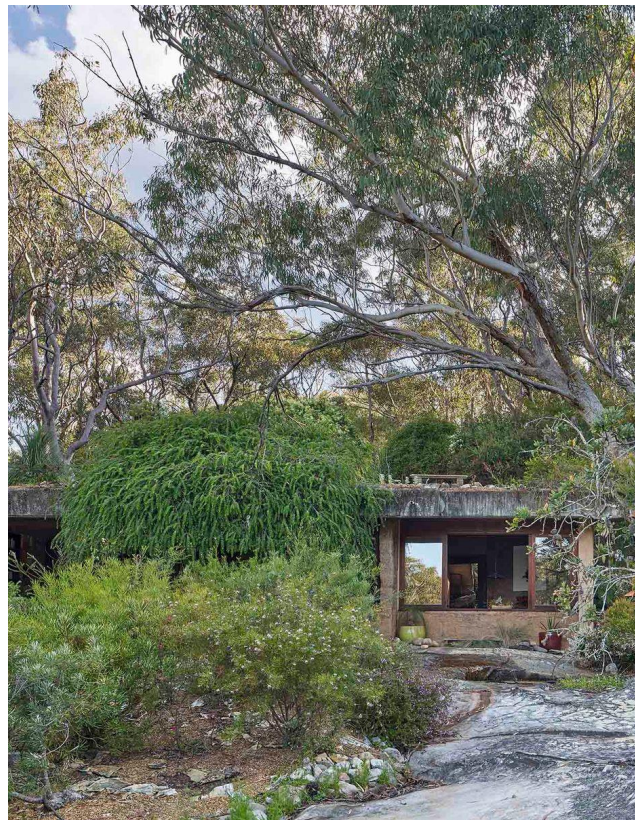
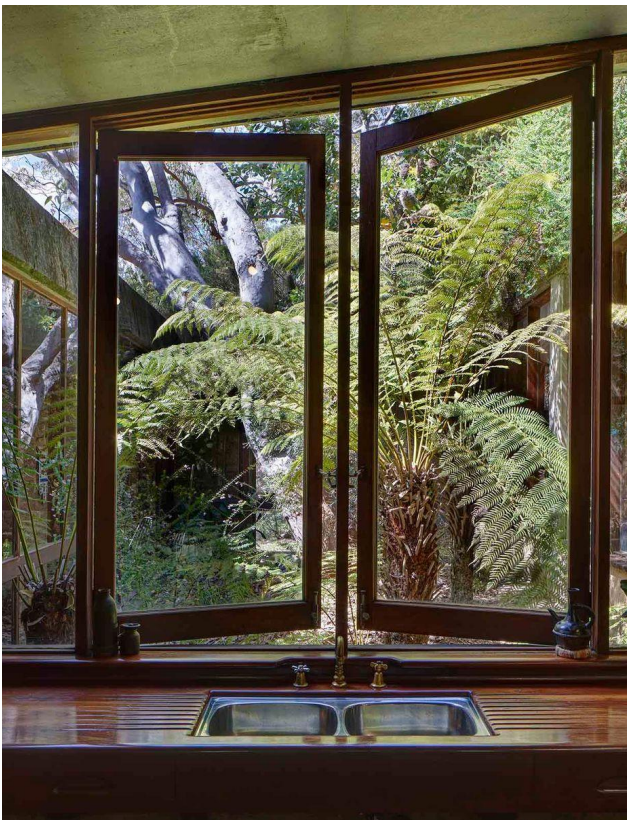
"The good building is not one that hurts the landscape, but one which makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built." - Frank Lloyd Wright

All photographs: Michael Nicholson

Text: Modern House



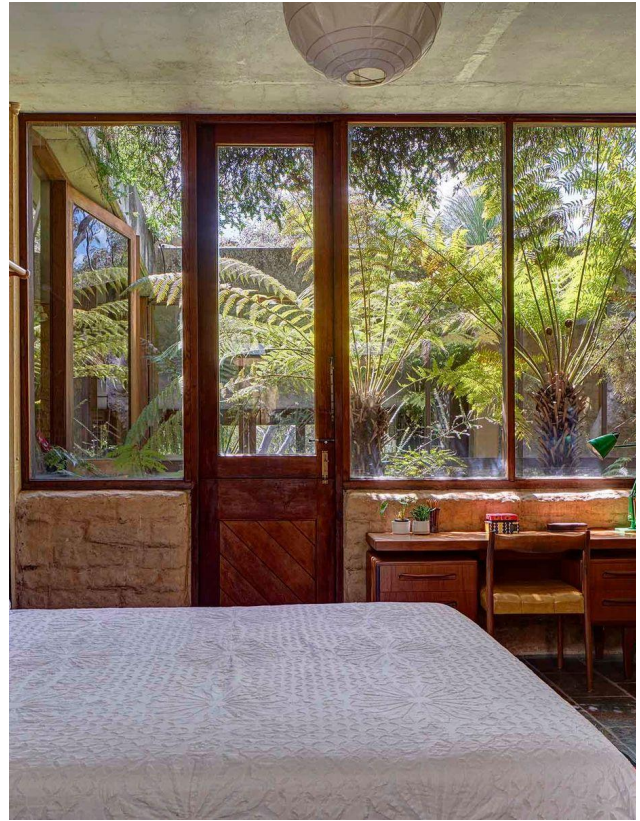
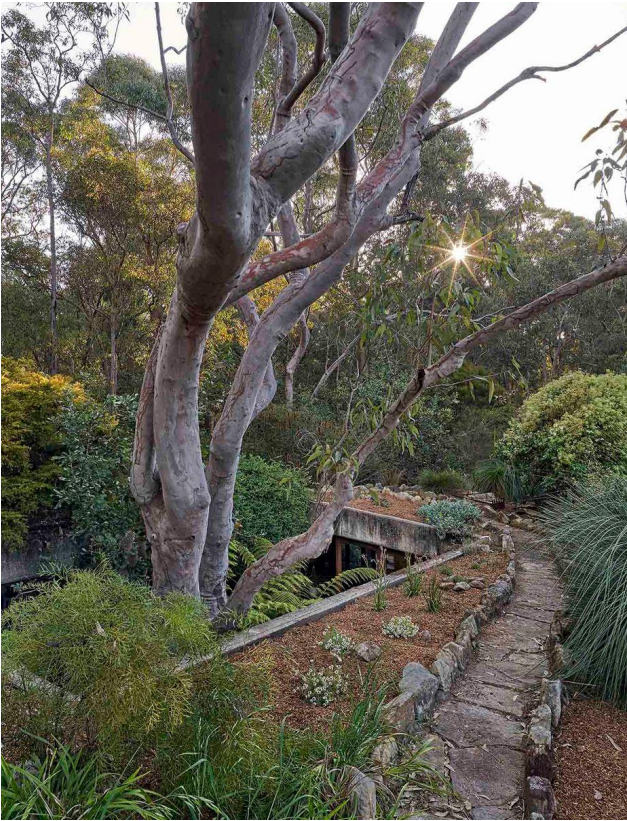
# morton garden



## **Deirdre and Ivor Morton writing in the Australian Native Plant Association Newsletter Feb 2013**

When we first bought this 7.5 acre block as land a little over thirty years ago the bush was in a mixed condition. There were good stands of native trees and shrubs, tree ferns and understorey, with some encroachment of non-natives. Deidre decided that she wanted to have only Australian native plants on the land.

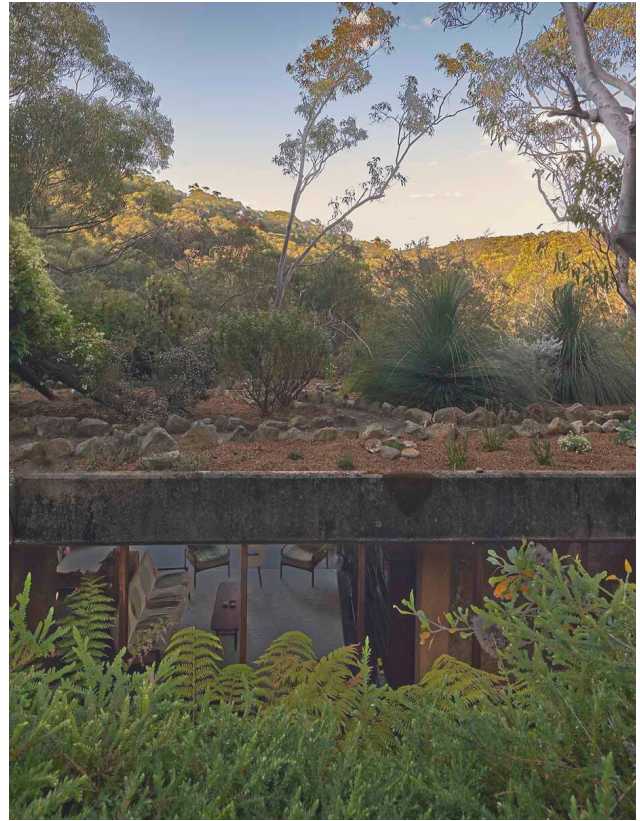
Our initial plans to build a small house soon evaporated and we tested the mix of modern day engineering with old fashioned adobe (mud brick) construction. When our living space had been constructed we had a nearly flat area of over 300 square metres of bare concrete roof. This was a challenge!



Basically our plan was dictated by what needed to be done next. Our original plan was to have a house that felt like a cave in the Australian bush with a native garden on the concrete roof. We were very mindful to keep the lovely bush that surrounds us. The initial inspiration was a very large rock outcrop (with a cave underneath). The block is north facing so, of course, the house took advantage of this. We built around a beautiful *Angophora costata* to make a green room in the middle of the house, allowing the sun to enter our boys' rooms at the back of the house. The roof is in concrete, heavily engineered with a perimeter beam to retain soil for the garden. Next came waterproofing, then soil.

I started propagating and planting our own 'grand design', which included the obligatory cost blowout, so I could not afford many plants. It was a lot of fun sorting out what worked and what did not.

When it was photographed for Diana Snape's book *The Australian Garden* it had mainly groundcover plants and flannel flowers that have since wandered off into the bush, but are still a joy close to the house. We have planted many native trees in our grounds and lined the road with casuarinas. Our property is a dedicated wildlife preserve. The most successful plantings on the roof have been: *Acacia howittii*, *Ammobium alatum*, *Banksia serrata* (prostrate form), *Banksia 'Coastal Cushion'*,



Banksia 'Birthday Candles', Bulbine bulbosa, Clematis aristata (over the fence to stop the Swamp Wallby eating the garden each night), Callistemon 'Rocky Rambler', Callistemon 'Little John', Casuarina 'Cousin It', Craspedia glauca, Epacris longifolia, Grevillea 'Lady O', Grevillea 'Semperflorens', Grevillea 'Scarlet Sprite', Isopogon anethifolius, Isopogon latifolius, Isopogon anemonifolius, Lambertia formosa, Leptospermum 'Pink Cascade', Leptospermum 'Mesmer Eyes', Lomandra longifolia (and others), Hakea constablei (endemic), Hakea sericea, Helichrysum scorpioides, Helichrysum 'Dargans', Helichrysum elatum, Macrozamia (seeds collected south coast NSW), Microstrobos fitzgeraldii (endemic), Microtis (appears annually), Melaleuca hypericifolia 'Ulladulla Beacon', Viola hederacea (too many), Pandorea pandorana, Persoonia pinifolia, Persoonia linearis, Persoonia chamaepitys (endemic), Poa australis, Tetratheca and various species of Xanthorrhoea.

The house and gardens have been mentioned in many publications: a three-quarter page article in Sydney Morning Herald, Real Estate Section, 1985; Cheryl Maddocks has twice used roof garden photos in articles in Sydney Morning Herald; Diana Snape's *The Australian Garden*; Timber Living Magazine, #7, 10 page article and photos; featured in *Burke's Backyard*; awarded winner of Blue Mountains's Garden Award, for 'Citywide Most Creative Garden'; garden is regularly visited by Richmond TAFE students; featured in local EcoHomes visits organised by a local architect.

# Floor Plan

