



Norfolk

Travis Walton

Norfolk is an artful combination of brutalist architecture and layered interiors that, together, boldly reinterprets the Australian beach house vernacular on the Victorian coastline.

Words
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Perched on a grassy knoll in Sorrento on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, Norfolk is a home of unexpected encounters. A century-old Norfolk pine keeps watch outside the residence, while inside, a tactile-led aesthetic from interior decorator Simone Haag and rugged materials offset a minimalist, brutalist expression by Travis Walton Architecture, challenging the idea of what an Australian coastal home can be.

The brief called for a property that captured views of the bay, Melbourne's skyline and the nearby golf course. Approaching Norfolk from the street, a 'castle wall' made from off-form concrete signals the first of many unexpected moments and elements to come. "We did this to create an anti-architecture, a hidden idea of what architecture can be," says the practice's director, Travis Walton.

Once inside, a distinct reverse-living layout relies on an elevated, podium-like structure. "This created undercroft space, which meant we were challenged with an unconventional entry for the arrival experience," says Walton. This response, a sculptural concrete staircase, leads to the centre of the main living space with panoramic vistas of the sprawling green hills of Sorrento Golf Course and across to the waters of Bass Strait.

"This was another key reason to draw the entry into the centre of the building rather than just the front, as that would only capture one view," says Walton. "Instead, one arrives with a sensational panoramic aspect.

Initially, the concept of the sculptural concrete stair was considered complex and too labour intensive but through meticulous detailing and rigorous prototypes by the builder, Bear Agushi, we were quickly convinced we could achieve the desired result."

Norfolk is intrinsically connected to its surroundings, an observation point within a serene environment. Floor-to-ceiling glazing and thoughtful landscaping by Nathan Burkett Landscape Architecture effortlessly capture the laid-back feel and rugged coastal nature of Sorrento. Burkett's approach appears somewhat unstructured; it celebrates the established terrain and the protected tree species of the existing landscape, with the thought-out addition of an established olive tree, a negative-edge swimming pool and an unfussy alfresco dining area.

Norfolk's robust materials also echo and withstand the weathered beauty of this part of the Victorian coastline. "The client wanted to be able to entertain in a home that feels luxurious but not overly precious," says Walton. Concrete and timber dominate throughout, imbuing an earthy and tonal feel. While most surfaces are a single-finish concrete render, "a lot of the walls are expressed as the actual timber cladding, which plays on the different textures across different materiality to provide a sense of layering." An external-grade silver travertine paving is used for flooring, offering an established aesthetic against an otherwise minimalist brutalist palette.





A sculptural concrete staircase is the defining feature of the arrival experience, leading to Norfolk's main living space and its spectacular Bass Strait views.

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The dramatic kitchen embodies Norfolk's design ethos where raw textures and rare finds meld to create depth and interest.

Joinery and finishes are reductive, dominated by aged metal, blackened steel and dark stones to create a raw, unfussy feel. This palette is particularly evident in the kitchen, where patinaed brass – designed to be scratched and marked with the passage of time – is complemented by an acid-etched green marble bench and leathery black benchtops to create an enticing space that feels opulent yet practical.

Vintage and modern elements are grounded in a 'less-is-more' approach with the interior decor. While tones are dominated by beige, camel and cream, “we didn't want it to be a regular beach house,” says Haag. “Rather than overdecorating, we aimed to have bold, singular pieces that are interesting.”

In the living zone, a curved Snow sofa by Note Design Studio for La Chance via Living Edge is the centrepiece, complemented by overlaid shaggy and striped rugs. The additional lounge area – dubbed the ‘cosy room’ – features a custom sofa and an upholstered Chirimoyo chair from Mexico, teamed with pre-loved table lamps and a yarn rug.

“This look slightly resonates with what you may see in a 1960s beach house, but is a much sexier version,” says Haag. Artworks are also carefully chosen, favouring sculptural and functional works, such as custom metal chairs from local maker Scotty Bemelen. “Art doesn't always have to be a canvas.”

It's almost impossible not to stop and get lost in Norfolk's raw textures and rare finds. “It feels like you're in your own villa, but the scale and lighting of the space is more of an elevated residential experience,” says Walton.

“It's a house that reveals itself slowly; all the colours are muted so it is very tonal and calm, and light dances around the space and becomes an artwork, just like how the materials become an artwork,” says Haag.







The landscape design by Nathan Burkett Landscape Architecture reflects the laid-back feel and rugged coastal nature of Sorrento.

“Often when you go to a house that is new and contemporary, you get a sense that it’s cold or manufactured, but I think it’s the opposite here, and the play on light has a lot to do with it,” adds Walton.

For Walton, Norfolk is an ode to perseverance. “No-one wanted this site as everyone said it couldn’t get sea views,” he says. “We didn’t set out to create this anti-architecture, reverse-architecture house – we arrived here through the design process and we’re really happy with the result.”

A welcome departure from the expected beach house, Travis Walton and Simone Haag courageously subvert the conventional style through balancing brutalist architecture with carefully realised interiors. Once the initial surprise passes, Norfolk reveals its true essence: a harmonious cohesion of opposites – raw yet elegant, bold yet calm, rugged yet charming. The result is an immersive beachside sanctuary that makes perfect sense.

Architecture and interior design

Travis Walton Architecture

Build and development Bear Agushi

Furniture, art and objects Simone Haag

Landscape design Nathan Burkett

Landscape Architecture