

Return to Form

Brisbane architecture studio NIELSEN JENKINS began after a long engagement, with the two architects working together on projects for several years before finally launching their firm. Lachlan Nielsen was working for Kevin O'Brien Architects and Morgan Jenkins for Phorm Architecture + Design when Nielsen asked Jenkins to come and work on a 'complex table' for a private job.

The two developed a friendship and later a business built on ideas around the construction and assembly of architecture, both travelling around the world and experiencing alternative ideologies that could be applied to their hometown's quintessential housing typology: the Queenslander.

At the heart of each of the studio's projects is a return to form and the economics of how buildings come together, using Nielsen's building capabilities to drive the materiality. 'We really like to show the materials that a project is built from,' Jenkins says, 'and we select materials that don't require maintenance and are efficient by minimising the use of finishing trades.'

'Queensland has a long history of timber construction, and often the materiality of a work responds to the existing buildings,' Jenkins says. With a palette of brick, timber, tin and concrete, plus beautiful glossy tiles that reflect each project's surrounding ocean or bush, the raw materiality reveals and honours the craft of construction, ensuring the projects are durable and low maintenance — something necessary in the wet Queensland climate. 'What we're

trying to do is to minimise the maintenance on these buildings so the garden can just take over and the building can settle into the landscape. The building should look its worst on the day of handover and keep getting better over time,' he explains.

Landscape is given as much consideration as the built components of a project, and Nielsen and Jenkins have integrated a landscape architect into their team to make the landscape design an integral part of the overall scheme. 'A lot of our clients engage with the gardens, courtyards and external spaces just as much as they do the building,' says Nielsen. 'It's so good to have a landscape architect in our team, to get them out there early and to have the site considered as a whole rather than as separate built and unbuilt elements.'

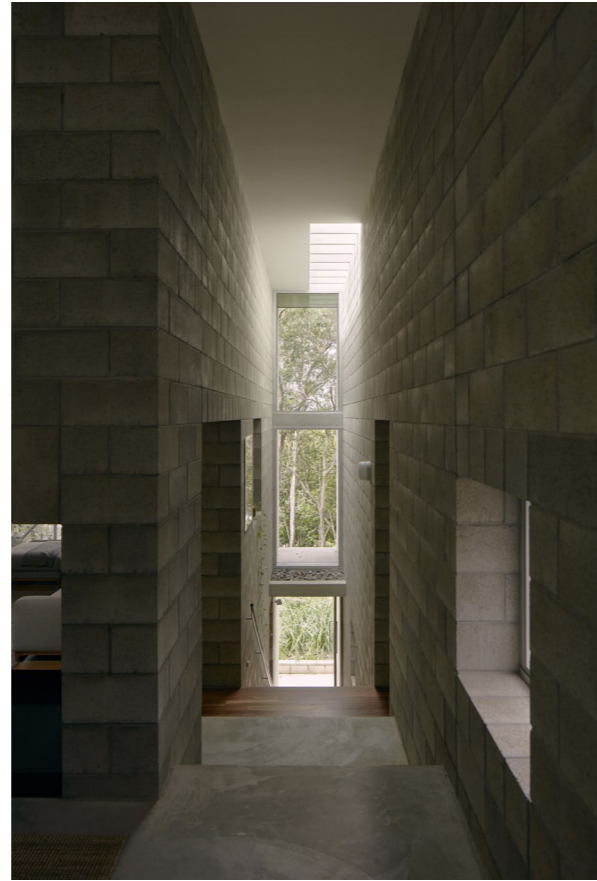
Concrete, timber and bricks juxtapose with the lush foliage that spills into every vista. A case in point is their recent project, Mount Coot-Tha House in Brisbane. Built on a steep bush site, the house had to be designed to conform with the area's severe bushfire regulations, but the picture window views out to the canopy still connect it to the larger site. 'All the rooms relate to lush courtyards immediately adjacent, but they all have high windows that pick up the canopy of the bushland up the hill,' says Nielsen.

With each project grounded in place and unique to the brief, the duo's designs showcase the possibilities of raw materials. The architects reveal the merits of simple, considered forms that return to an honesty of construction and sit as a backdrop to nature's own green thumb.

Text
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The work of Brisbane firm NIELSEN JENKINS is marked by the equal treatment of built design and landscape. At Mount Coot-Tha House, the duo addressed a sloping site and strict bushfire regulations while keeping the house connected to its surroundings
Image by Tom Ross





Facing page, top
 At Mount Coot-Tha House,
 bushfire-safe materials juxtapose
 with foliage, and picture window
 views to the canopy maintain a
 connection with nature
Images by Tom Ross

Facing page, bottom
 Another project saw the team
 renovate and extend a traditional
 Queenslander to create a series
 of indoor and outdoor spaces
 that maintained the owners'
 privacy in the face of new housing
 developments and offered
 new internal connections in a
 previously insular space
Images by Shantanu Starick

This page
 Lachlan Nielsen (left) and Morgan
 Jenkins worked on projects
 together for several years before
 making the decision to launch
 their studio
Image by Shantanu Starick