

# BEAUMARIS

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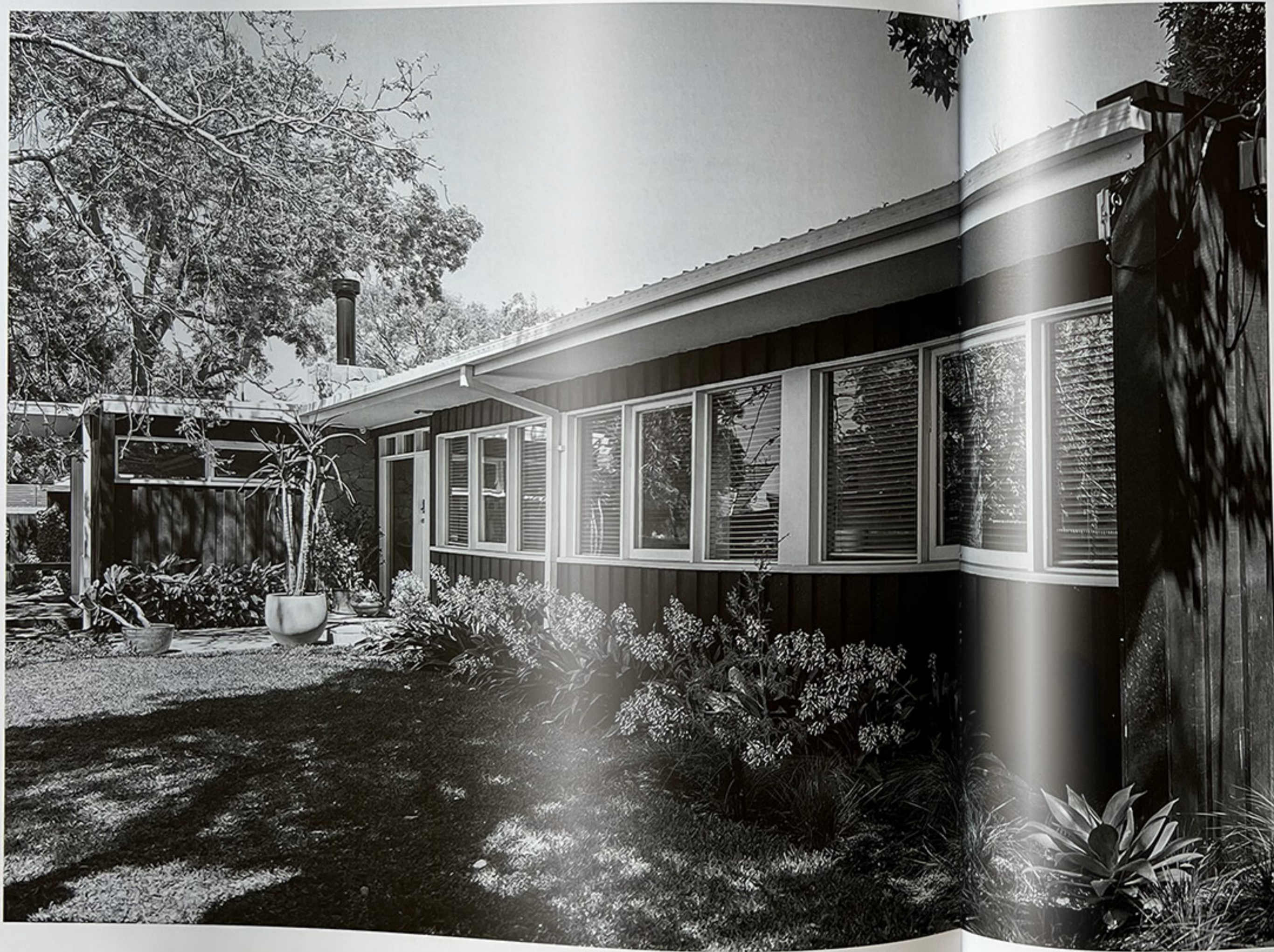
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# MODERN

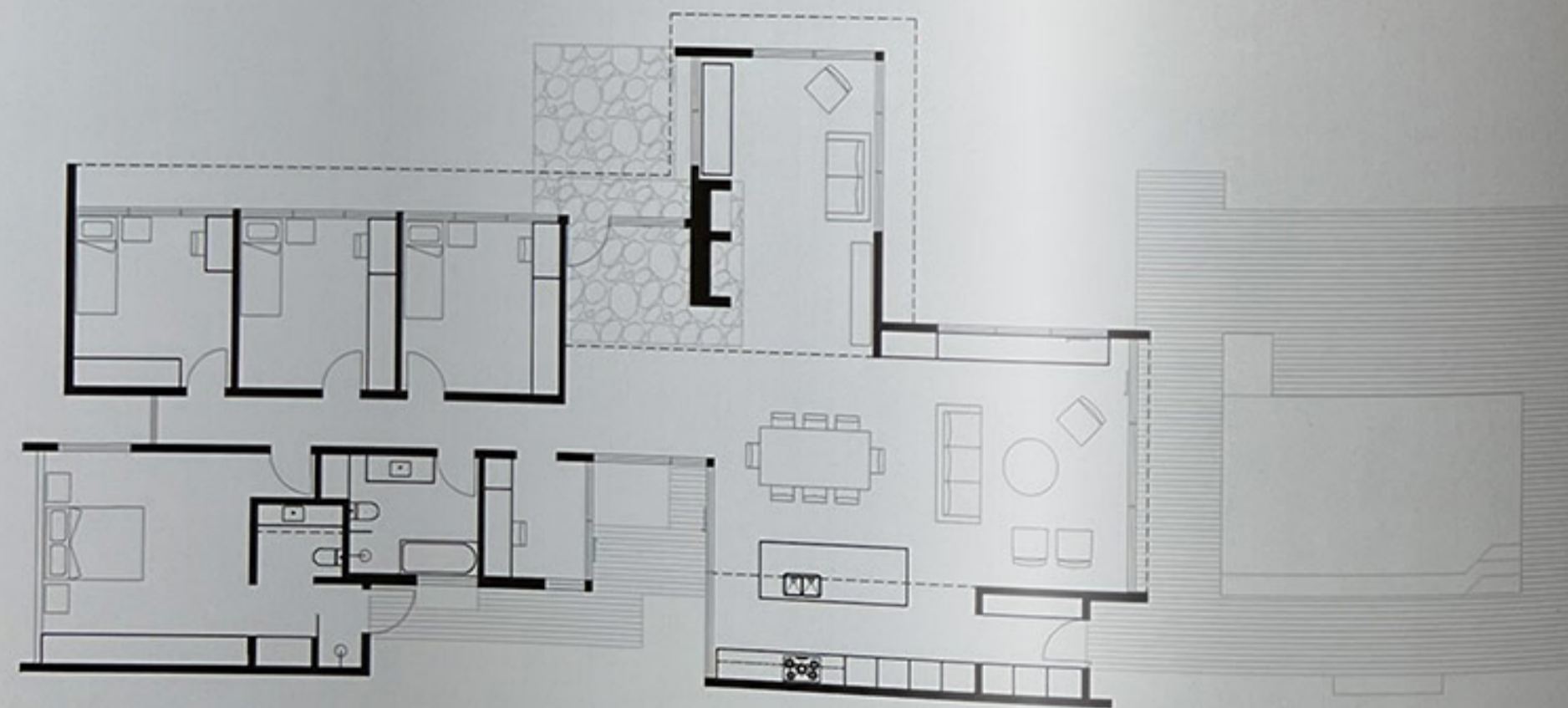
DEARIE  
HOUSE

ARCHITECT:  
KEVIN KNIGHT  
1953

RENOVATIONS:  
MATTHEW GREEN  
2016



THE DEARIE HOUSE WAS DESIGNED BY KEVIN KNIGHT FOR RONALD AND PATRICIA DEARIE IN 1953. IT HAS REMAINED IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM FOR MORE THAN SIX DECADES AND, AS ONE OF THE ORIGINAL HOUSES IN BEAUMARIS, IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF A MODERNIST STYLE HOME FROM THAT PERIOD.



Knight most likely designed the house as a private commission while he was working for a larger architectural firm, before he departed to work in England in 1954. This would explain the modest scale of the house as restrictions were in place after the Second World War on the size of houses and materials available.

The original design was an organic 'pinwheel' type plan, with bedrooms along the north, service areas along the south, a projecting lounge room, and a family meals area. The stone fireplace was at the centre of the home.

Like many similar modernist homes in Beaumaris, this modest timber home on a corner site near the beach could easily have been lost to redevelopment. To prevent that from happening, the original owners were determined only to sell the property to a party committed to its retention.

The owners purchased the property from the Dearie family in 2014 and were passionate about preserving the architectural integrity of the original house, as well as the surrounding mature trees. Their brief to the architect, Matthew Green, for house renovations was to retain as many of the character-defining elements as possible, whilst incorporating an extension suitable for the contemporary needs of a modern family of two adults and three growing children.

The original street-facing facades which incorporated black-painted vertical boards, white-painted window frames and exposed timber roof beams were restored. The surrounding mature trees were also preserved. Inside, the north-facing bedroom windows have retained the original white venetian blinds, so the exterior view is intact—right down to the window coverings!

The house was cleverly enlarged by extending to the southern boundary—the new floor plan retains the essence of the original plan with modifications to the rear undertaken to rectify elements dilapidated after six decades of exposure to harsh southerly winds. Two new single-storey timber 'boxes' sit inconspicuously on the boundary to the rear, interconnected by a central courtyard oasis.

A new kitchen, butler's pantry, second living area and dining space have all been added. The new living spaces have higher ceilings of 3.5 metres with a painted timber lining board detail. The new high ceiling and living areas add scale

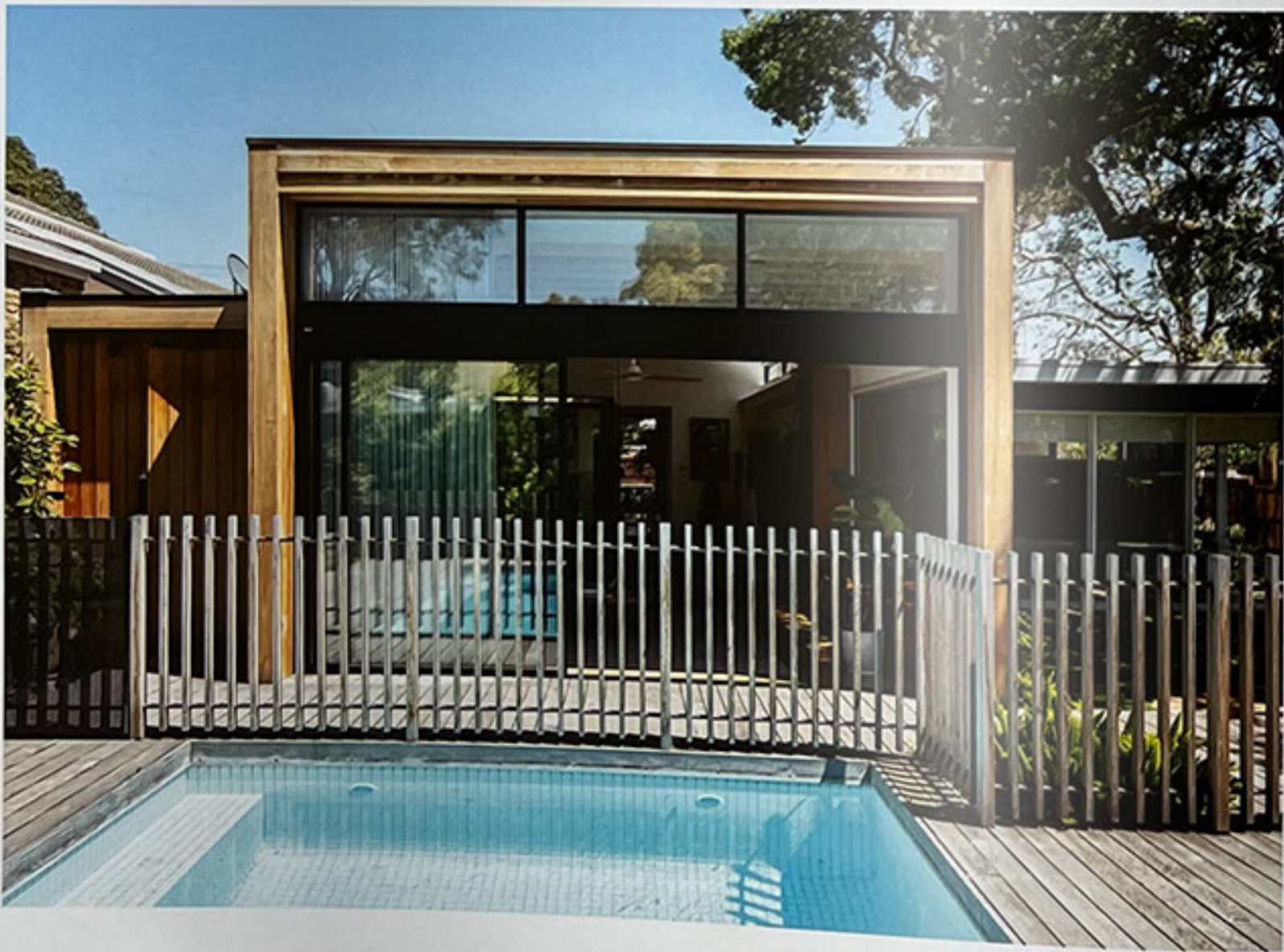
to the once modest spaces. These spaces now connect to the outside through large sliding doors, framing views of a magnificent stringy-bark tree and the new pool and outdoor entertaining area.

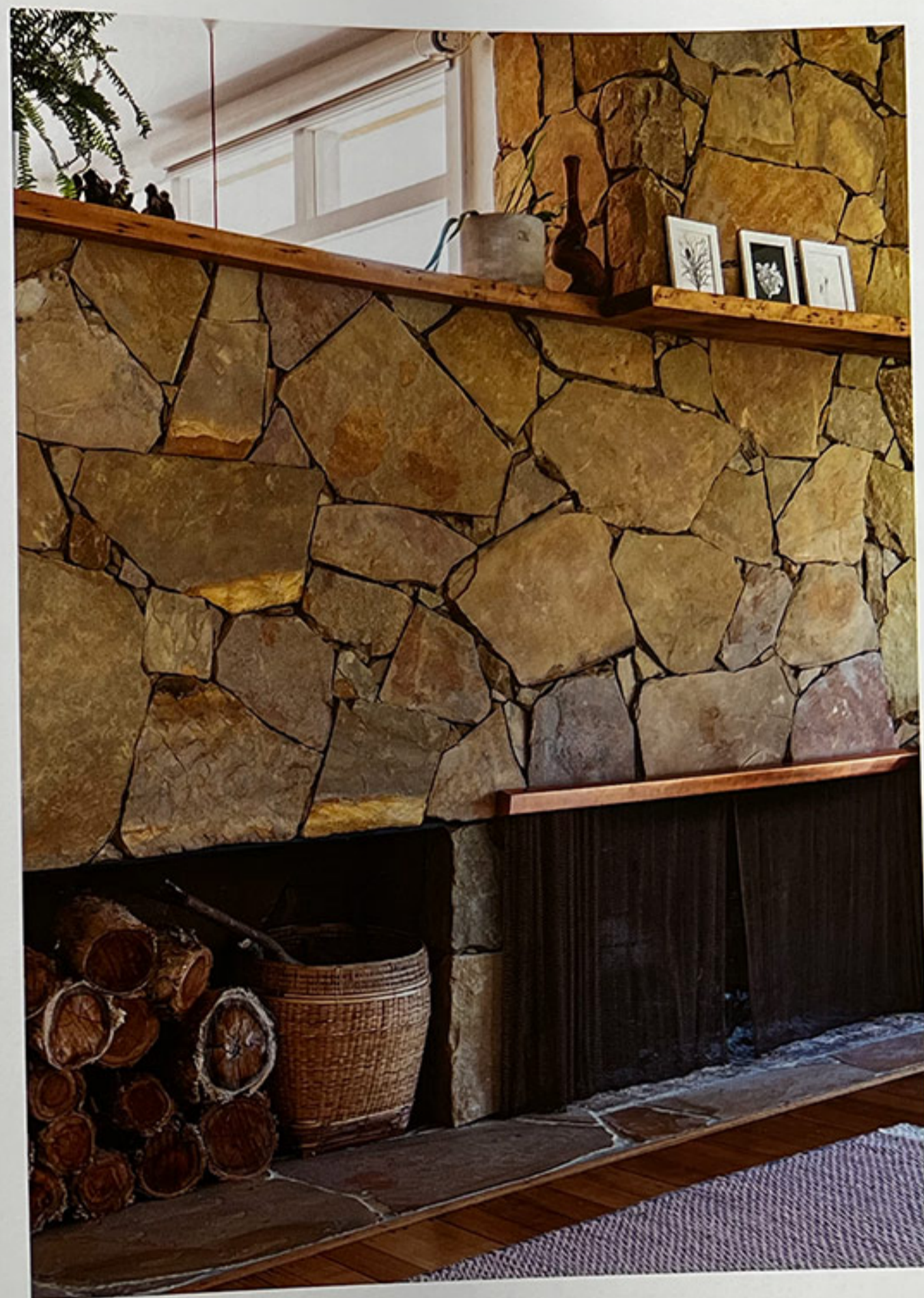
The original hallway and bedrooms were maintained, but on the southern boundary, a master bedroom suite with walk-in-robe and ensuite bathroom have been added within the two new timber boxes with views to the courtyard. A study and a children's bathroom are also included along this southern spine and these spaces also have a view to the courtyard garden. 'The courtyard acts as a central lung and source of daylight within the building's core,' says the architect, 'as well as maximising cross-flow ventilation by capturing cooling sea breezes, meaning the home doesn't require mechanical cooling.'

New floors were laid to unite the new and existing areas, with some of the original floorboards being repurposed as timber panelling in the hallway. The original stone fireplace was in poor condition and could not be saved, so a new stone fireplace has been constructed. Restoration of the retained elements of the existing house was at times painstaking. Upgrading existing walls, floors and roofs to modern energy requirements and providing insulation was challenging. Retention of the existing floor (in the original part of the house) required ongoing protection and restoration throughout the build—a worthwhile exercise given its preservation provides a significant layer of history in the final outcome.

The owners engaged landscape designer, Kate Seddon, to sensitively redesign the garden and external fences. Mature trees have been retained and enhanced with new indigenous coastal planting.

Like so many of the houses featured in this book, The Dearie house, with its updated floor plan, restoration and garden design, is now a character-filled family home and a lovely reminder of the early days of Beaumaris when families built cosy, modest homes from stone and timber, with natural gardens. This character, combined with the new additions, continues to explore and respond to universal modernist themes that are as relevant now as they were mid-last century: truth to materials, simplicity and clarity of form, visual expression of structure and above all, the delight of natural daylight, shadow play and reflection.





Born in Melbourne on 8 November 1922, Kevin Francis Knight was one of twin sons of a Hawthorn retailer. Desiring to enter the architectural profession from a tender age, Knight achieved early fame in 1938 when, aged only fifteen, he won a prize in a magazine competition for the design of a cast iron gate. Commencing formal studies at Swinburne Technical College, he secured a scholarship to transfer thence to Melbourne Technical College. There, he caught the attention of Harry Winbush, head of architecture, who offered the teenager employment in his private practice, then known as Lord & Winbush. Following what was then the usual pattern, Knight completed his studies at the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier. Enrolling there in 1940, he undertook only two years before enlisting with the Australian Army in June 1942. Attached to the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, Knight remained in the army until as late as 1947, discharged with the rank of Lieutenant. In 1945, while still on service, Knight entered the so-called Post-War Homes competition sponsored by *The Sun* newspaper. Resuming civilian life, he obtained work as a draftsman in the office of Martin & Tribe. By the time that he became registered as an architect in May 1950, he had joined the then newly-established partnership of Mussen & Mackay, architects and civil engineers.

During 1953, Knight became engaged to Miss Maire Grace Watson of Coburg. At the time, they announced that both intended to travel overseas and would now do so after their wedding. Married in April 1954, they duly embarked upon an extended honeymoon to Great Britain, where Knight worked in the office of Tripe & Wakeham, an esteemed pre-war London firm

that had recently employed a fellow Australian, Sydney architect Russell Jack. After two years abroad, the Knights returned to Australia in May 1956, whereupon he commented favourably on the development of local modernism in his absence, sagely observing that 'Australia is developing its own distinctive architecture'. Knight himself was also doing so, having completed one architectural project under his own name: a simple but striking modernist house in Beaumaris, commissioned by the Dearie family prior to his departure for London.

Upon his return to Melbourne, Knight accepted the position of partner in the evergreen partnership of Oakley & Parkes; one of the firm's co-founders, Percy Oakley, having died while Knight was overseas. Knight, who fostered a fondness for the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, went on to design a series of buildings in which a Wrightian influence could be readily discerned: the City of Brighton Municipal Offices (1961), James Hardie & Company's headquarters (1962) and the new IOOF premises (1963). During the firm's thriving post-WWII incarnation as Oakley & Parkes & Partners, Knight remained the youngest of its four partners: over a decade junior to Renee McCormick (1903–95) and Rodney Gillam (1909–2002), and three decades to the firm's venerable surviving co-founder Stanley Parkes (1894–1986). McCormick and Gillam duly retired in the 1970s and, when an octogenarian Parkes finally stood down in 1983, Knight took sole charge of the practice. In retirement, he remained the indefatigable and obliging curator of the vast Oakley & Parkes archive, generously gifting it to the State Library of Victoria just before his death in 2015.

## KEVIN KNIGHT

