



SUBURBAN ALIEN

Andrew Lister's Point Chevalier House is a castle designed to keep neighbours out.

Review David Neustein Photography Becky Nunes







03

THIS IS NOT the New Zealand you see in postcards. The Point Chevalier House is hemmed in on all sides by gabled roof, brick veneer and white weatherboard suburbia. The only 'view' is of boxes and other junk piled up in a neighbouring backyard. A picturesque vista is tantalisingly close: harbour shoreline fringes the street. Through a dark tangle of native pohutkawa trees a glimpse of silvery sea. But on the other side of the road, the bland landscape of flagpoles, paved driveways and garages is our scene. The Point Chevalier House is right in the thick of it, down a long driveway and blocked out of the postcard panorama by the bulk of adjoining dwellings. It sits on borrowed land; subdivided from a streetfront property's backyard. The house should be overwhelmed by the monotony of its setting. Instead, it fights back with windowless, striated black timber walls which tilt out defiantly.

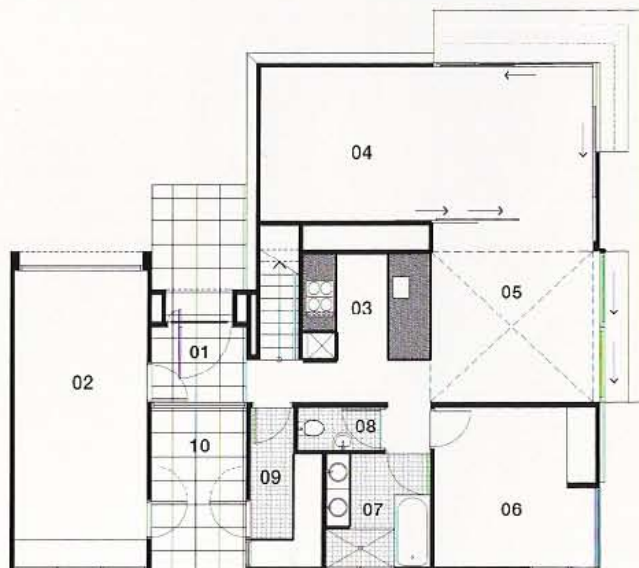
Over the past few years, Andrew Lister's trademark, texturally rich, sculptural boxes have garnered awards and enlisted a strong local following. He is at the forefront of a group of talented young Auckland architects that include Nicholas Stevens, Gary Lawson, Daniel Marshall, Jeff Fearon and Timothy Hay.

Architects like to make an entrance. Lister arrives outside the Point Chevalier house on his Lambretta scooter, wearing giant black fly-eyed Gucci sunglasses and a Maori greenstone pendant. He hasn't been to inspect the house since its occupants moved in, and is interested in how the clients have inhabited the house.

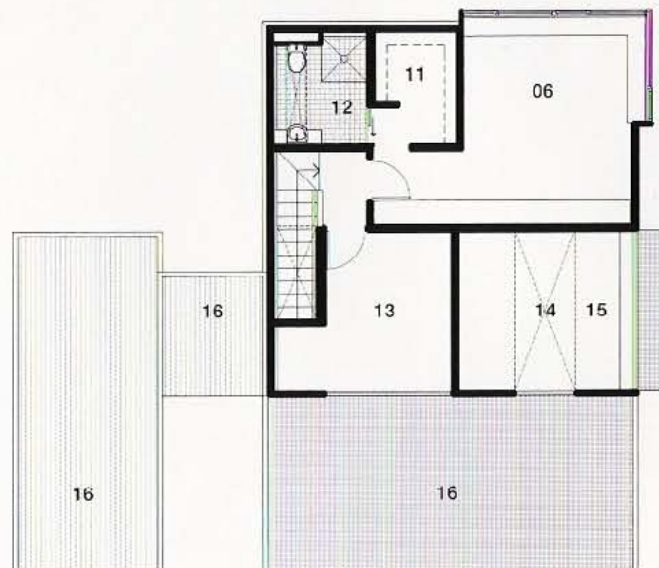
Essentially the house is two volumes, a double-storey cube with a single-storey annex attached. On approach, you see the southern and western façades of the cube. Walls tilt outwards from the centre line on a four-degree zag. The other façades, northern and eastern, unseen, are more conventionally vertical. The low annex is concealed to the east. The roof also tilts at four degrees, so at the south-western upper extremity of the cube walls and roof meet on a perpendicular. Where leaning façade meets straight, as it does on the western side, an elegant skirt of protruding timber overlaps at ankle height. Below the extruded aluminium-framed slot window of the main bedroom upstairs, a band of evenly sized horizontal boards clash with the vertical pin stripe of the façade. The mix of apparently randomly-cut vertical timbers (Lister supplied the builder with precise directions) and uniform horizontal, or diagonal walls with straight, creates a rich pattern of materials reminiscent of New Zealand-born artist Rosalie Gascoigne's assemblages. The house's black wrapping reinterprets the unadorned weatherboard cladding of the traditional *bach*. It is a cold shower for romantic notions of New Zealand Gothic.

Internally, the uneasy cube results in small discrepancies between wall planes, and sets the tone for a tight jigsaw of rooms. Incisions from skylights further alter spatial dimensions. The drama of these incisions is left to speak for itself: wall and ceiling surfaces are simply painted white. >>

- 01 Entry
- 02 Garage
- 03 Kitchen
- 04 Living
- 05 Dining
- 06 Bedroom
- 07 Bathroom
- 08 WC
- 09 Laundry
- 10 Service yard
- 11 Changing room
- 12 Ensuite
- 13 Office
- 14 Void
- 15 Skylight
- 16 Roof



Ground-Floor Plan



First-Floor Plan





- 01 Giant white pivot entrance door
- 02 Architect's trademark texturally rich sculptural boxes
- 03 The building's core, the double-height dining room
- 04 Vertical pin-stripe façade
- 05 All openings are in the rear façade
- 06 View to skylights above dining
- 07 Skylight overexposes narrow stair
- 08 Bathroom mirrors maximise space

Project name Point Chevalier House
Architects Andrew Lister Architect
Principal architect Andrew Lister
Engineer Law Sue Consultants
Builder Damian Ross-Murphy
Cabinetmaker Colin Rotherham Interiors
Budget NZ\$250,000 (AU\$236,000)
Time to complete Nine months
Council Auckland City Council
External materials Hardies Titan board paint finish to single-storey volume; cedar timber plywood and battens stain finish to two-storey volume; anodised aluminium commercial window and door joinery
Interior materials Painted Gib board; cut and polished concrete slab; SCE honed basalt floor tiles; Artedomus ceramic mosaic tiles; stained Meranti plywood cabinetry; Aesthetics lighting

>> We enter through a giant, white pivot door. It must be newly installed: Lister smiles with surprise as it gently swings open. A tight corridor runs off a small foyer, attenuating the arrival sequence. In the dining room an almost double-height ceiling stages a play with sunlight. Two skylights – one above full-height glass doors, with a protruding fin (or sill) which shades the room; the other a neat cut in the roof plane – create a shifting sundial with diagonal blades of light. Two large chandeliers hang in this space, casting additional shadows. Adjacent to the dining room, the kitchen is a clever box of tricks: a mirrored splashback doubles space while ingenious sliding and rotating panels within veneered cabinetry increase storage capacity. Adjacent to the kitchen, the main bathroom is a serene space. Sunk into the floor, the bath is trimmed in white tiles. Smokey light drifts through twin panels of translucent glass louvres.

The narrow stair shaft is dramatically over-exposed to daylight as sunlight burns in from a large skylight, and the black terrazzo stair disappears up into the white haze. Upstairs, the rooms are straightforward. A spare room is barely enlivened by a small window overlooking a neighbour's scrapyard. In the main bedroom, louvres set into the window slot obscure any trace of the surrounds. With these rooms, Lister ruled out openings to the tall dining space below. The dining room's lofty ceiling therefore does not become an inhabited void, but is experienced as a surprisingly large volume at the core of a modest block. The rooms above are introverted, modest.

It is a common architectural convention to draw a house of four walls as a continuous, unwrapped elevation. This is how the Point Chevalier House appears from the garden. Lister has placed all openings in the rear façade. The main activities of the house, exhibited behind glass, are compressed into this view. I did not have the opportunity to see the house at night, but I imagine a cinematic display of silhouettes as its occupants go about their evening rituals.

Getting this bold house approved was not without obstacles. A week before plans went in, council decided a flood path ran through the site. Then the building's height had to be reduced by 1.2m. The house's juttied form was perhaps a consequence of this council-enforced squashing. The angled walls make the house appear as if it were buckling under some great downward force.

Lister likes to describe his house as an "alien". Black, jagged and blinkered, the Point Chevalier House reacts aggressively to its suburban surrounds, and recalls a scene in Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey; a stone monolith found amid howling monkeys. [m](#)

This house received an NZIA Resene Auckland Local Award for Architecture, 2004

