

CASE STUDY

The Rochford, Erskineville



Urbane and elegant
The project demonstrates contextual but contemporary architectural design for urban infill. Brett Boardman Photography.

A composed and refined mid-rise apartment building with excellent amenity in an urban renewal precinct

QUICK FACTS

APARTMENT BUILDING TYPE: Courtyard (U-shape)	PROJECT TEAM: ARCHITECTURE Studio Johnston
LOCATION: Erskineville, NSW, Urban	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE JILA (DA), Taylor Brammer Landscape Architects
COUNTRY: Gadigal	TOWN PLANNER ABC Planning
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: City of Sydney	STRUCTURAL ENGINEER Mance Arraj
ZONING: B4 Mixed Use	FIRE ENGINEERING Scientific Fire Services
APPLICABLE CONTROL: 2015 Apartment Design Guide (ADG)	HYDRAULIC ENGINEER Scott Collis Consulting
PROCUREMENT: Builder/developer with architectural services throughout	MECHANICAL ENGINEER Airwin Air Conditioning
PROJECT DATA: Site area 3,285 m ² Floor space ratio 1.75:1 76 apartments (9 x studio, 20 x 1B, 38 x 2B, 8 x 3B) 5–6 storeys 60 car parking spaces 83 bicycle parking spaces (75 residential, 8 visitor)	ACOUSTIC ENGINEER Acoustic Logic Consultancy
SITE DENSITY: 231 dwellings/ha	SUSTAINABILITY Efficient Living
YEAR: Completed 2017	TRAFFIC ENGINEER Transport & Traffic Planning
	ACCESS Accessible Building Solutions
	BUILDING CODE / CERTIFIER Vic Lilli & Partners
	BUILDER Uno Constructions
	AWARDS: 2018 AIA NSW, Aaron Bolot Award for Residential Architecture – Multiple Housing 2018 MBA NSW, Excellence in Housing – Home Units \$401K–\$500K



The brief was to create high-quality market apartments for owner-occupiers as a compelling alternative to a terrace or semi in the same area. The result offers an excellent benchmark that could be emulated in many other urban contexts.

Generous rooftop communal open space sits within the height plane setback to the rear lane and provides shared amenity: edible gardens, decks and outdoor dining

A 6-storey volume defines the north-east corner – elsewhere the top level is set back creating a lower street wall

Ground floor apartments have direct street access, creating activity and interest at footpath level

The courtyard typology defines the block and maximises public and private amenity in a dense urban setting

Generously sized balconies within the building envelope are treated like outdoor rooms, providing greater amenity to the interiors

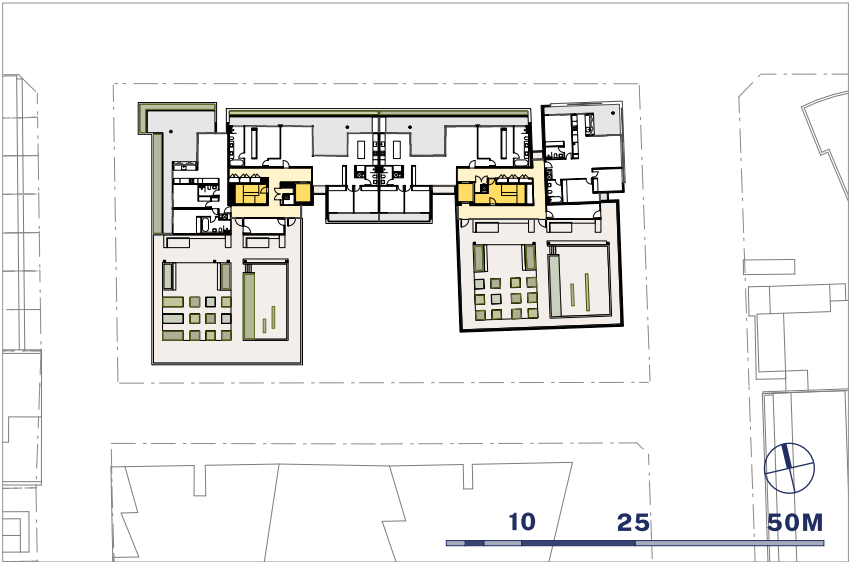
Sliding screens on the facade provide animation; projecting planter boxes and inset balconies create areas of deep shade giving contrast

Minimal use of applied finishes in favour of robust materials like brick and off-form concrete ensures longevity

3-m landscaped setbacks on the street boundaries provide a buffer zone for privacy to ground floor apartments, and enough width to integrate universal access

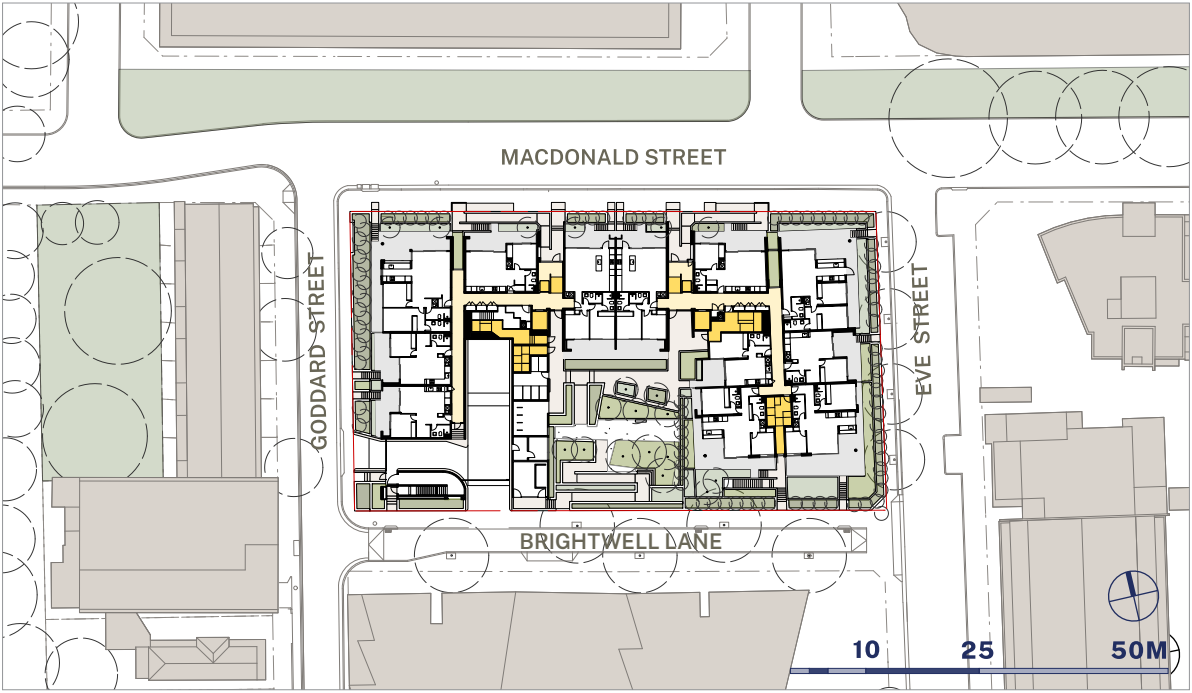


Generous rooftop communal space
Each core has a communal space on the roof for the apartments associated with the core, contributing to building a community. Image: Brett Boardman Photography.



Level 5 plan (with communal roof terraces)
Part of each rooftop is covered for all-weather use. Decks, BBQs, dining tables and shared edible gardens take advantage of solar access and outlook.

Ground floor plan
Image: Studio Johnston, MAKO Architecture.



The Rochford is located within a former light-industrial area known as the Ashmore Neighbourhood that was master planned by City of Sydney and subject to the provisions of a precinct-specific development control plan.

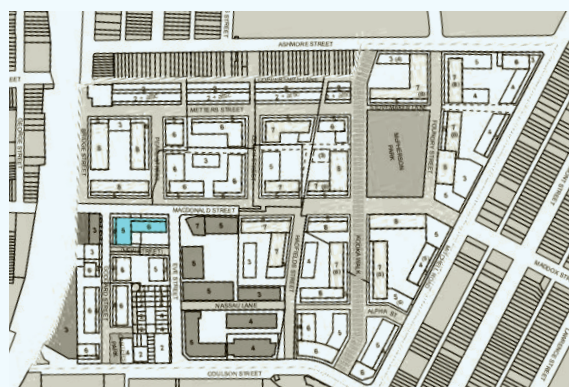
The planning controls required the amalgamation of 5 lots and the insertion of a new service lane to the south, creating a new street block. MacDonald Street to the north was widened by 1.2 m, and 3-m landscaped setbacks were imposed on all street frontages to reinforce the desired public realm landscape character within the precinct.

Customising the master plan

The architects determined a better outcome than the master plan L-shaped envelope was a U-shaped courtyard block. This more fully defined the block edges, and created a central communal courtyard. It also ‘stretched’ the perimeter of the building outwards, resulting in a thinner building section with relatively more frontage that could be allocated to each apartment — improving amenity.

The project embodies many of the characteristic benefits of the courtyard-apartment building type including definition and passive surveillance of the public realm, activation of the street edge by multiple building entries and consolidated and usable communal open space.

Building heights respond directly to the street widths to deliver well-proportioned and human-scaled street sections. The project is generally 6 storeys addressing the main street to the north,



A new urban precinct
The master plan showed an L-shaped building.
Image: City of Sydney Sydney Development Control Plan.



Mediating the levels

The 3-m landscaped setback to all street edges allows universal access, private entries and planting for privacy to be incorporated. Image: Brett Boardman Photography.

with the top level set back to form a 5-storey street wall. On the return streets and to the rear, the street wall is 4 storeys with Level 5 set back, and containing the communal roof terraces, allowing lift access to be achieved within the height plane. The north-east corner is emphasised by expression of the full 6-storey street wall, acknowledging the localised openness of the intersection and providing some nuance to the elevational composition.

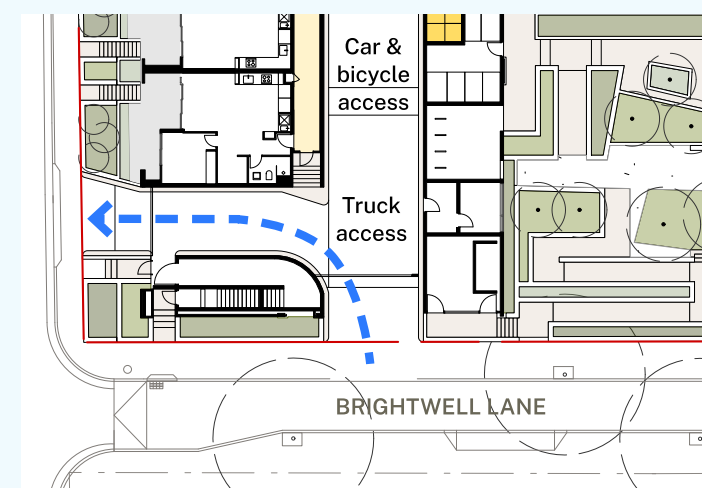
Addressing the street in a flood-prone area

The planning provisions required a 3-m landscaped setback at all street frontages to reinforce the desired public realm landscape character within the precinct. The response is a tiered landscaped solution that successfully mediates between the street and the raised level of the ground floor apartments. A turf verge at footpath level broadens the space of the footpath. A low planter box steps up to provide planting space for shrubs and hedges against private open space fences while also offering an informal seat to passersby. Planting is also provided within the apartment courtyards to add another layer of landscape screening and increase visual privacy.

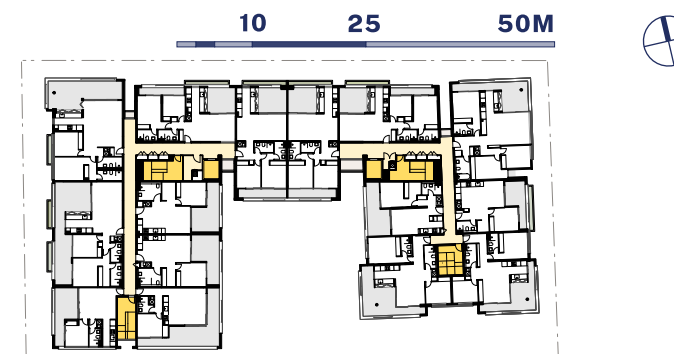
The outcome is a soft and verdant streetscape interface which protects the amenity of the apartments and contributes to the quality of the public realm. Ground floor apartments are provided with individual gates to the footpath edge to maximise street frontage activity.

Servicing from the rear

The rear lane is appropriately used for basement driveway access, services and waste collection which relieves the primary street frontages of these elements. Due to local flood conditions the driveway must rise before it descends which would make garbage truck access cumbersome. This issue is cleverly resolved by incorporating a ‘drive-through’ waste collection arrangement across the rear corner at street level, avoiding the truck needing to turn around on site, and significantly reducing the amount of excavation that would otherwise have been required for access to the basement.

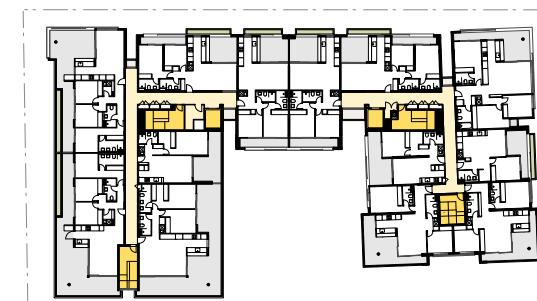


Garbage truck drive-through (not to scale)
A through-route at ground level avoids taking the trucks into the basement.

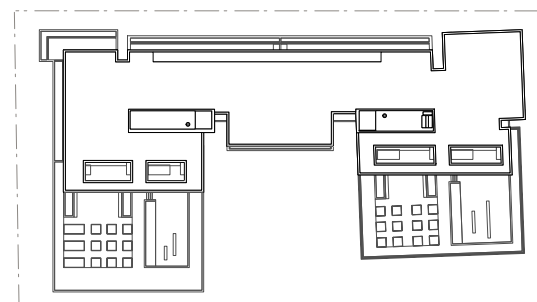


Typical floor plan (Levels 2–3)

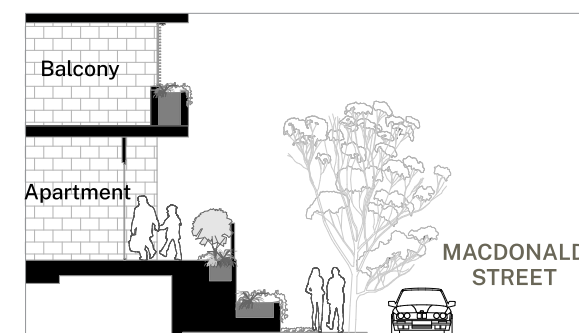
The U-shaped plan better defines the street edges and courtyard than an L-shape.



Level 4 plan

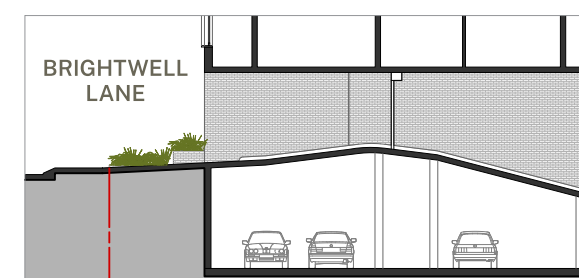


Roof plan



Entry section

Habitable spaces on the ground floor are lifted above surrounding flood-prone streets to prevent water ingress. This presents challenges for universal access.



Driveway section

The basement parking entry is humped for flood-proofing.



An outdoor room
Part of the balcony is brought into the building envelope to create an outdoor room, connected to the kitchen. Image: Ben Hosking.

Shared amenity
The roof decks are dedicated to communal space, with shared vegetable gardens and recreational areas. Image: Brett Boardman Photography.



Privacy with outlook
Solid balustrades and careful planning provide visual privacy. Image: Brett Boardman Photography.

Indoor-outdoor living
Timber decks visually extend internal timber flooring. Image: Brett Boardman Photography.

Home for the long term

The brief required that the unit size and mix respond to changing demographic profiles, with potentially greater numbers of inner-city owner-occupiers choosing to purchase an apartment as their long-term residence. Accordingly, the units include features such as separate galley kitchens, living rooms that are turned wide to the facade, and larger balconies which might be more commonly found in lower-density housing forms. A neutral interiors palette and practical built-in joinery allows residents to personalise their spaces.

Typical apartment plans
The scale bar and north point apply to all plans.

Sydney's temperate lifestyle

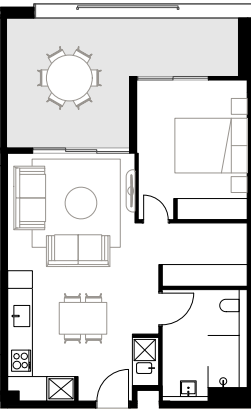
Acknowledging the importance of indoor-outdoor living in Sydney, a number of the 2 and 3 bedroom apartments include oversized, square-shape balconies connected to kitchens located on the external glazing line.

'Ample communal courtyard and rooftop open spaces provide shared amenity, complementing generous private open space and reflecting the Sydney indoor-outdoor lifestyle.'

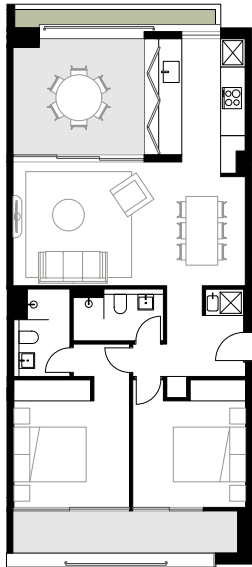
Detailing for amenity

A level of solidity to the courtyard elevations, deep balconies and adequate building separation provides for good visual privacy across the communal courtyard. The number of units directly opposing each other is minimised by differing apartment orientations and the offer of alternative outlooks. Tall narrow planting provides a green wall to the lane. The building has 2 lift cores, each with its own street address on the primary frontage, and each accessing a roof terrace. Corridors have windows immediately adjacent to the lift and at the end of corridors so that all parts of every corridor have a connection to the outside. Where corridors extend to the facade, they are expressed as a 'slot' in the external massing that assists to break up the overall built form.

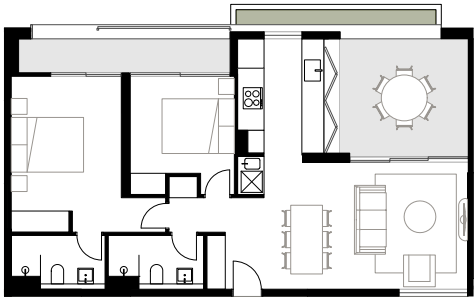
'In many ways it's designed from the inside out, from the point of view of privacy and light.'
— Conrad Johnston



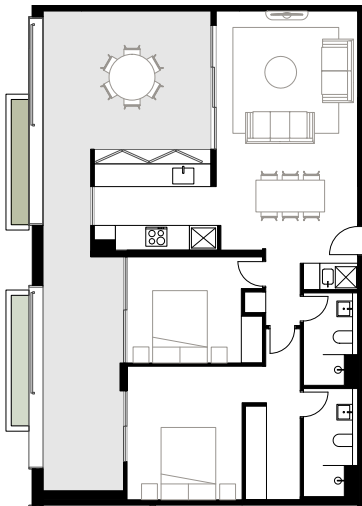
1 bedroom
50 m² + 18 m² private open space



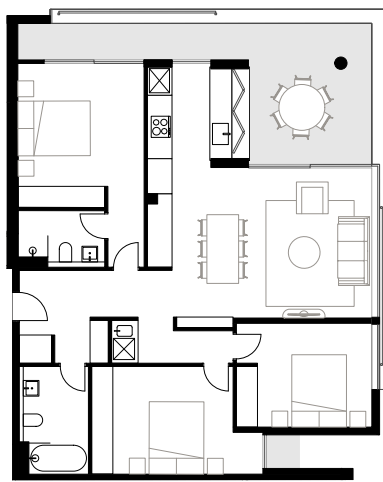
2 bedroom cross-through
75 m² + 14 m² private open space



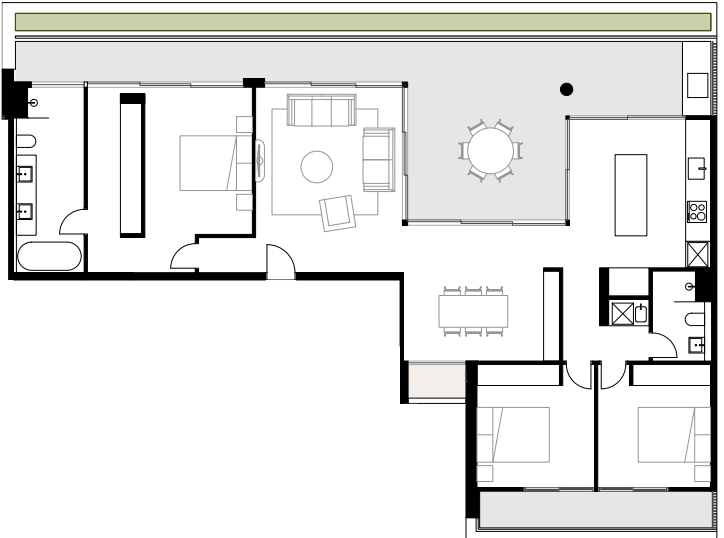
2 bedroom
75 m² + 14 m² private open space



2 bedroom
75 m² + 40 m² private open space



3 bedroom
99 m² + 20 m² private open space



3 bedroom
111 m² + 56 m² private open space



LINE OF SIGHT TO THE APARTMENT DESIGN GUIDE (ADG)

ADG 3D COMMUNAL AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OBJECTIVE 3D-1:

An adequate area of communal open space is provided to enhance residential amenity and to provide opportunities for landscaping

OBJECTIVE 3D-2:

Communal open space is designed to allow for a range of activities, respond to site conditions and be attractive and inviting

Communal roof terraces — one for each of the cores — have covered dining spaces, shared productive gardens and decks for yoga and relaxation. They capture winter sunshine and provide shade for summer.

The common courtyard at ground level provides green outlook for the apartments and a verdant soft contrast to the rectilinear built fabric, as well as increased privacy for lower-level apartments.



ADG 4D APARTMENT SIZE AND LAYOUT OBJECTIVE 4D-1:

The layout of rooms within an apartment is functional, well organised and provides a high standard of amenity

OBJECTIVE 4D-3:

Apartment layouts are designed to accommodate a variety of household activities and needs

Apartments within The Rochford are typically larger than the ADG minimum, and include ample built-in storage. With a highly articulated glazing line and inset balconies, and many living rooms with their longer side to the facade, interiors generally have high levels of daylight and external access. All of this contributes to apartments which are likely to suit long-term occupation, and which offer a compelling alternative to a semi or terrace in the same area.

ADG 4E PRIVATE OPEN SPACE AND BALCONIES OBJECTIVE 4E-1:

Apartments provide appropriately sized private open space and balconies to enhance residential amenity

OBJECTIVE 4E-2:

Primary private open space and balconies are appropriately located to enhance liveability for residents

Each apartment incorporates generous private open space, in many apartments expressed as an 'outdoor room' that is connected to the kitchen through a benchtop bi-fold window. Internal timber flooring seamlessly transitions to external timber decking for continuity of surface and space. Planter boxes to balcony edges create a soft green foreground to the external outlook beyond.



ADG 3G PEDESTRIAN ACCESS AND ENTRIES OBJECTIVE 3G-2:

Access, entries and pathways are accessible and easy to identify

ADG 4L GROUND FLOOR APARTMENTS OBJECTIVE 4L-1

Street frontage activity is maximised where ground floor apartments are located

The treatment of the street interface, including the landscaped threshold and elevated ground floor level, is particularly noteworthy in The Rochford, providing an excellent sectional relationship between the building and the street. The integration of individual street entries to ground floor apartments, as well as universal access to the ground floor lobbies raised to avoid flood impact, is facilitated by the 3-m landscape setback from the street frontages.

ADG 4M FACADES OBJECTIVE 4M-1:

Building facades provide visual interest along the street while respecting the character of the local area

OBJECTIVE 4M-2:

Building functions are expressed by the facade

Building heights respond directly to the street widths to deliver human-scaled street sections. The facade composition is diagrammatically clear with well-articulated building elements. Materials are tactile and selected for longevity, and reference the historical context of the site, taking cues from the nearby masonry railway viaduct.

A high degree of quality control is evident, with thoughtful integration of services like hydrants and substations. With exposed concrete soffits and extensive 'unfinished' natural materials like face brick and metalwork, the successful integration of hydraulic and electrical services is particularly adept.

The windows and balconies are formed into long horizontal strips, framed by face brickwork referencing local heritage, and punctuated by a rhythm of bold precast concrete planter boxes that provide sculpture and shadow. The corners of the building are similar in form but are differentiated by lightweight exterior cladding and balconies that are more open due to portions of glass balustrading. Operable sliding sunscreens above the balustrades provide additional animation.

The north-east corner of the building expresses the full building height without setbacks, acknowledging the intersection.



Privacy with outlook

Solid balustrades provide privacy to the 'outdoor rooms', while planting creates a soft green foreground to the outlook. All images this page: Brett Boardman Photography.



This case study is not intended to suggest that the development described or similar will be approved in part or whole in another case. Key information regarding the intent of these case studies can be found on the Department of Planning and Environment website.