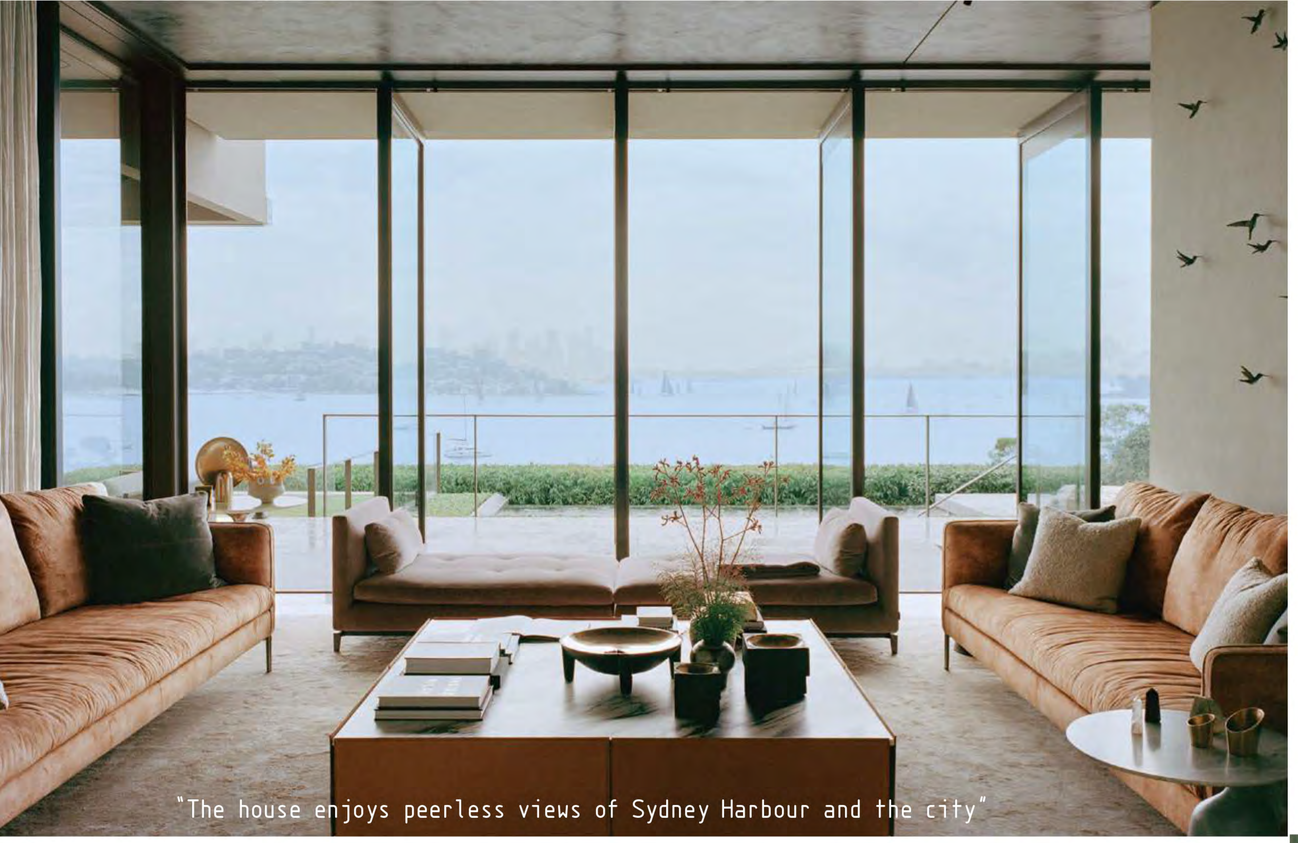
Translucent onyx rain screens temper Sydney's intense sunshine, casting a golden glow over the interiors of a harborside residence by Fearon Hay and Penny Hay

jewel box

text: ***peter webster***
photography: ***rory gardiner/living inside***



"The house enjoys peerless views of Sydney Harbour and the city"

__Previous spread:__ In Sydney, rain screens of translucent onyx clad three sides of a ground-up three-level harborside residence by Fearon Hay with interiors by Penny Hay.

__Opposite top:__ Pairs of Vincent van Duysen's Paul sofas and Rodolfo Dordoni's Andersen daybeds join a custom cocktail table in the formal sitting room. __Opposite bottom:__ The 10,800-square-foot structure nestles among the mature trees and established plantings of the site's previous house.

__Top, from left:__ Overlooked by a Peter Stichbury oil on canvas, a custom oak grand piano sits next to the social kitchen. Its customized Piero Lissoni island is faced in Ceppo di Grē, a natural stone that also composes most interior and exterior flooring on the garden level. __Bottom:__ The house is bifurcated by a sequestered courtyard flanked by generous circulation spaces, here furnished with Room Studio's Triple bench in reclaimed oak.

Living in Sydney means waking most mornings to a harbor city bathed in brilliant sunshine under cloudless blue skies. As glorious as the daylight is, it can also be intense and unrelenting—a natural phenomenon to be savored and managed, both a gift and a challenge. A recent project by New Zealand architects Fearon Hay—a 10,800-square-foot, three-level residence on Sydney Harbour's Rose Bay—balances these needs with virtuosic ease, celebrating the outdoor lifestyle while offering sheltered relief from harsher environmental realities.

"The brief was to replace an existing house on a sloped site crowded by neighbors," says firm director Jeff Fearon, who along with codirector Tim Hay, led the project. "We retained a lot of established trees and heavy vegetation, especially around the perimeter, so that the new house sits in a mature garden." That effort provides privacy from adjoining properties while creating a lushly planted, gently descending pathway from the street to the dwelling, which nestles discreetly amidst the greenery as if it has always been there.

Comprising two stories above an expansive basement, the substantial post-tensioned concrete and steel-beam structure pairs a reassuring sense of solidity with a disarming feeling of lightness. This effect is largely due to a series of rain screens that sheathe three sides of the house. "Early on, we thought about how to make the skin robust but with a delicacy to it," Hay explains. A solution suggested itself on-site when a sample of stone cladding, held up to the tree-dappled light, turned translucent, giving the material a subtle, layered, yet dynamic quality the architects knew they could use. Hence the gridded screens, thin panels of onyx mounted in frames of blackened stainless steel, that cover the back and sides of the building, transforming the fiercest sunlight into a warm, soft glow illuminating the interior.

The clients, a couple in the hospitality industry with adolescent children, needed a flexible residence that functioned as an intimate family home but could also accommodate large, diverse gatherings of 100 people or more. "The process of understanding the extent of those variations of occupation were quite critical in the planning," Hay acknowledges. On the ground floor, where most of the living and entertaining takes place, Fearon Hay