

Relative value

ARCHITECT RENATO D'ETTORRE BUILT 1995

NESTLED INTO a clifftop above the waves at Coogee is a modern-day castle **01**. Nearly 10 years in the making, the concrete, stone and glass structure epitomises what an architect can do with complete freedom and total support **02**.

In this, his first project, architect Renato D'Etторе had the "ultimate" clients: his enthusiastic sister Yolanda and brother-in-law Horace Camuglia. (Camuglia even sold his business and took out his first owner/builder licence to oversee construction.)

Once the plans were completed, it took a year for development approval, and a further four months for building approval. The generous time-frame was the result of legal battles with Randwick Council, and objections from the neighbours to the height of the development and the colour of the bricks **03**. All were overruled.

When he began work on the project D'Etторе was employed by architectural firm Mitchell Giurgola & Thorp, so the project was developed after hours. His clients didn't set a brief: "Because I know them intimately, the brief was simply 'we want a house'."

Excavation began in late 1990 and construction took five years, including litigation. The site was occasionally idle when funds were unavailable, or when they were unable to find the right tradesmen.

The three-level house is set into the natural terracing of the coastline. The ground floor is cut into the cliff and only the top floor can be seen from neighbouring homes.

The textures and finishes were chosen for their natural patinas, and the fact they would age gracefully in the sometimes harsh weather. Floors are polished travertine marble, there is parquet in the family areas and white Carrara marble in the formal spaces **04**. Internal walls and ceilings are polished concrete, division walls are stuccoed and the exterior is concrete, brick and sandstone. "It is all neutral, soft and subtle," D'Etторе says.

