

DILKERA SHAUN LOCKYER ARCHITECTS

Words by Tiffany Jade • Photography by Christopher Frederick Jones • Architecture by Shaun Lockyer Architects • Interior Design and Styling by Claire Stevens Interior Design
Build by CGH Constructions • Landscape by Green Care Project • Engineering by Westera Partners



Seven-and-a-half years in the making, Dilkera by Shaun Lockyer Architects has emerged to tell the story of Australian architecture's evolution. Conceived at a time when touching the earth lightly was still very much a favoured approach, Dilkera embraced an emerging preference for solidity, which anchors it to its location on the banks of the Brisbane River with an abiding sense of permanence.



Like any pioneering journey, this one started out with the clients, Mark and Tracy, “questioning almost everything,” recalls Shaun Lockyer, Principal Architect. Mark had stated back in the beginning, “I don’t like timber, and I don’t like concrete, so please don’t show me a timber and concrete house.” After taking his measure, Shaun did indeed take him through a timber and concrete house the studio had completed in Sydney, and “by the client’s own admission, he was stunned silent.” So began a journey that intuitively navigated context, concept and client expectation to realise a residence of overt modernist purity.

Having effectively re-established the way the clients thought about materiality and how a house comes together, Shaun and Project Architect David Langley, in collaboration with the clients, decided to demolish the

house that once occupied the riverside site and rebuild one that would face west onto the river, taking in the immediacy of the waterfront view and the distant city skyline whilst remaining covertly private from its street elevation to find accord with the living pattern of its inhabitants. Shaun Lockyer Architects’s design philosophy, which rests in cultivating spaces that foster living in the subtropics, came into play, unfolding from Shaun’s South African heritage and its similarities with Brisbane’s temperate climate. “Durban is on the same parallel as Brisbane, and there is a subtropical link that is particularly suited to modernist architecture,” he explains of the home’s visual and spatial qualities. “Once we got into the drawings, there was an enormous alignment between the evolution of the idea of concrete coupled with a lovely warm interior, which is predominantly two tones of timber and complementary stone.”



The home is designed to foster subtropical living, referencing both the architect's heritage and Brisbane's climate.



The surrounding landscape filters incoming natural light, emphasising the home's privacy and sustainability initiatives.

Taking its name from the word meaning “edge” or “shore” in the language of the Diyeri people of Cooper Creek in north-eastern South Australia, Dilkera has been shaped by the colourways and textures of its surroundings as well as by modernism’s variant, brutalism. Across three storeys – a basement, the ground floor containing kitchen, living, dining and lounge, and an upper level with five bedrooms, connected to the ground floor via a light-drenched void – Dilkera is a manifestation of the movement’s defining pillars, dovetailed with qualities that echo the tones and characteristics of the ever-present Brisbane River. Its composition is precise, expansive and minimal, eschewing unnecessary ornamentation in favour of resolved form, material expression and intuitive functionality. Rising up in a display of kinship between nature’s engaging imperfection and modernist architecture’s precision, the home’s form concrete, glass, timber and river rock façade are defined by the continuation of qualities in its landscape and by the considered vertical application of the timber screening integrated into the concrete façade primarily in the east elevation.

Inside, an atmosphere of deep comfort and shelter is tangible through the amplification of a spirited dialogue that continues with the outdoors

– shadows slant in through the rhythm of the vertical timber screening, which is continued similarly in the staircase; honed marble floor tiles mimic the sensibility of the river in colour and pattern language; New Guinea rosewood timber joinery stained in black and the graphic dynamism of stone benchtops and splashback mediate effortlessly between the resolved minimalism of the brutalist style and the elemental centurion of the waters that ebb and flow in sustained meditative silence. The river’s presence is coaxed into Dilkera’s embrace, intertwining the home’s innovative design with the ancient story of the land it sits upon.

“There was a beautifully evolved development of the architecture into the interiors and then the art and landscaping,” explains Shaun. Dilkera is characterised by complete occupation of the land, from its interior, its exterior, its landscaping and decor, all of which act as invisible thresholds between each element’s functionality and between the built environment, the river and then beyond to the street. This notion of thresholds has been the project’s north star, absorbing it into the narrative of its site. Glazing is extensive, forever framing outlooks that reconcile each and every design decision, which cumulatively circle back to context.

Other than its physical accommodations, Dilkera is a house for entertaining, a place where grandchildren will race beneath rays of sunlight into soaring volumes where light is filtered through the botanical veil on the home’s periphery then through the woven materiality of pendant lights, which echo the brackish riverbed. Security, privacy and sustainability have been covertly prioritised. The south-western Brisbane sun, ricocheting off the river to reflect onto the ceilings, can be brutal – and yet, seen as a guide rather than a constraint, this elemental quality has been leveraged to inform orientation, materiality and landscape design. “A filigree cascades out of a couple of layers of operable screens on the due west elevation,” explains Shaun of the home’s capacity to tame and control its aspect onto the river, allowing for it to “mediate between full extraversion, view and connection to landscape and then closing off to make the interior comfortable.”

A defining character of Dilkera is its biophilic resonance. The immediacy of the river begins to draw out the watermark veining of the marble in the kitchen, whilst the floor tiles appear as a reflection of a reflection, mirroring the play of dappled, cinematic light cast overhead at certain times of day. The concrete assumes a clay-like tone, softly diffusing light

just as water does and amplifying the richness of the black steel and timber, which retain the sense of this ultimately being a sanctuary from all that it celebrates.

Today, Shaun’s friendship with Mark and Tracy is testament to the journey they have taken together to realise Dilkera. As the residence took shape, the clients’ outlook changed to such an extreme that “they even tried to buy the artwork in our renders,” says Shaun, candidly articulating an essential element of organically developing trust and rapport with a client. A client who is entrusting the fulfillment of their home – the place they will continue to share with those they hold dearest, the people they will make their most impactful memories with – to a studio means that the architects also need to demonstrate deep understanding and open enquiry to reach a point of accord. As Shaun reflects, “this house embodies all the philosophies that we have been building up to for a decade manifested into what we believe is an absolute and true form.”