

01 The old vegie patch was reinstated and tripled in size to the north, with a series of elevated timber crates that complement the Kids Pod.

Kids POD by Mihaly Slocombe

• MORNINGTON PENINSULA, VIC •

This flexible and layered addition to an existing home uses the cubbyhouse typology to cater to the owner's growing number of grandchildren.

Words by Brett Seakins
Photography by Emma Cross





02 A pair of red, highly theatrical motorized curtains converts the free-form space into bedrooms.

03 The space captures northern light and provides an area for kids to spread out or perch on the plywood seating for some quiet reading.



For architects, the opportunity to revisit a much loved project is a rare gift indeed. The chance for a practice to revisit its very first project, possibly its raison d'être, is then surely the holy grail of commissions. Mihaly Slocombe Architects was asked to do just that, invited by appreciative clients back to the idyllic vineyard-laden coastal hills of Merricks in Victoria to envisage the next phase of its Hill House.

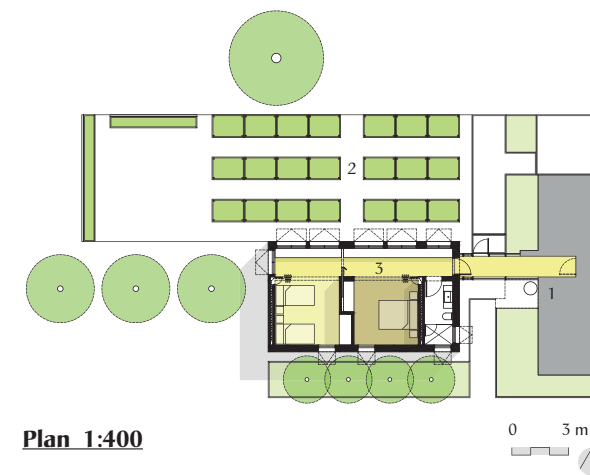
The original project was designed by Warwick Mihaly and his partner Erica Slocombe while they were completing their architectural studies and is a highly accomplished piece of architecture. However, Warwick is quick to point out that the design represents thinking particular to its time. The practice that Warwick and Erica have since formed is a more mature, experienced entity that, like any good practice, has been continually refining and evolving its approach. This, Warwick notes, goes some way to explaining the obvious differences between the projects, differences that initially surprised the clients, who had expected a "mini Hill House."

The brief for the Kids Pod was a simple one: the clients required additional accommodation for an expanding retinue of grandchildren. On the surface, the response by Mihaly Slocombe Architects was equally simple – a box containing two new bedrooms and a bathroom. Scratch that surface and the thinly veiled

complexities of the layered space, deft manipulation of light and the creative resolution of micro private and public realms within this small addition are quickly appreciated.

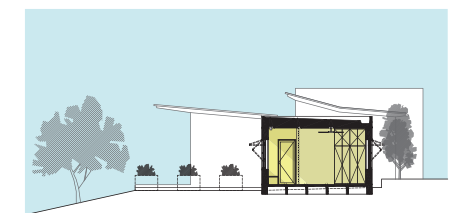
These veiled complexities are surely the difference between the new appendage and its host. Where the existing house was, in Warwick's words, "an exercise in section," assembling materials and pointing the house at the stunning views over the client's vineyards, the new Kids Pod has been conceived by the architects as a self-contained, introspective entity that is less a celebration of the landscape and more a silent landscape folly. Early in the design, the architects looked to the cubbyhouse for inspiration; in it they found a typology that was robust, playful and theatrical and like any good cubby, was an obvious counterpoint to the house proper, encouraging in the children who come to use this space a certain freedom and sense of ownership.

The siting and the general planning of the Kids Pod displaced an existing vegetable patch and underused lawn to the west of the house. The vegie patch was reinstated and tripled in size at the north, with a series of elevated, ergonomic, raised timber crates that look somewhat like the Kids Pod's own little brood. Connected to the existing house by a narrow glazed walkway, the new spaces consist of one bathroom and two bedrooms, lined meticulously in plywood



Plan 1:400

- 1 Existing house
- 2 Vegetable garden
- 3 Kids Pod



Section 1:400



04 The Kids Pod is connected to the main house via a glazed bridge, making it a deliberate annex.

05 All spaces in the Kids Pod are lined meticulously in plywood, including the bathroom.


06 At night, light glows through the CNC-routed perforations in the bespoke shutters.

and linked by a fantastic segment of un-programmed space that captures the northern light and provides an area for kids to spread out or perch on the simple, robust plywood seating for some quiet reading. At the flick of a switch, a pair of red, highly theatrical motorized curtains, concealed behind integrated plywood doors, quietly convert this free-form space into recognizable bedrooms. An oversized acoustic cavity sliding door has also been provided to create additional privacy between the rooms when needed.

Warwick, thankful for supportive clients that allowed the firm room to experiment, points to the NASA-esque panel of switches and big red industrial emergency buttons mounted between the bedrooms, something the architects have dubbed “the launch panel.” These buttons operate an entire wall of custom external timber shutters that lift vertically to reveal the surrounding garden view while also forming shade canopies to their respective windows. Every element of these highly bespoke shutters was an experiment, from the CNC-routed perforations that allow a beautiful dappled light to filter into the spaces (the design an abstraction of the client’s favourite Pinot Noir vines), through to the hidden industrial

winches, reconfigured on site by talented tradespeople and installed with every manner of bespoke safety fail-safes.

Externally, the simple box is actually a subtle and layered continuation of the cubbyhouse rhetoric. Critical to this was the singular application of the timber cladding, separated from the existing home by the glazed bridge, which the architects treated as “elemental, almost non-designed,” serving to heighten the sense of transition into the new space, a deliberate annex to the main house. Adding to this, the silvertop ash cladding tells its own cubbyhouse story, abstracting the cubby’s familiar environment with the bottom third composed of vertical boards, abstracted tree trunks, the folding perforated cladding a representation of tree canopies all topped off with a horizontal layer reflecting the long horizons the project enjoys.

The evolution of the practice’s design response, from the site-inspired Hill House to the typological abstraction and spatial complexities of the new Kids Pod, leave us hoping the story hasn’t quite ended, and that in another ten years, we are allowed to witness the next chapter of this fantastic property and its maturing architects. 

Architect

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Practice profile

A small architecture practice that focuses on residential projects. The practice was formed in 2010 by Warwick Mihaly and Erica Slocombe.

Project team

Warwick Mihaly, Erica Slocombe, Jake Taylor

Builder

Elyte Focus

Consultants

Structural engineer:
ZS Consulting

Quantity surveyor:
Cost Planner

Landscaping:
Exclusive Landscapes

CNC routing: Ausfab Plastics

Products

Roofing: Lysaght Spandek in Colorbond ‘Woodland Grey’; Kingspan Air-cell Insulbreak sarking; Tontine Insulation R4.5 bulk insulation

External walls: CNC-routed shiplapped silvertop ash timber from Radial Timber Sales, in Cutek CD50 oil finish
Internal walls: Plywood from Austral Plywoods in water-based WattyL Estapol Xtra Clear finish

Windows: Architectural Window Systems ThermalHeart aluminium frames in black powdercoat; Viridian ThermoTech double glazing with EnergyTech low-e film; Zepel Fabrics Bronco II composite fabric curtain

Doors: Plywood from Austral Plywoods in water-based WattyL Estapol Xtra Clear; Madinoz door handles

Flooring: Husqvarna Hiperfloor polished concrete flooring
Lighting: Masson for Light Mondo Blok LED downlights; Light Source Dimondflex LED strip light

Bathroom: Rogerseller Catalano Premium 60 basin, Gas Wall Tap Assembly tap set and Waterose Spin Round shower head; Ideal Standard Tonic toilet and Milli Glance bathroom accessories, all

from Reece; National Tiles unglazed black stacked mosaic tile sheet

Heating and cooling: Nobo E Series Slimline Radiant Panel Heater; Hunter Pacific Revolution ceiling fan

External: Spotted gum decking; recycled apple crates for planter boxes

Other: Custom steel frames, repurposed factory winches, limit switches and control plates to external shutters

Floor area

52 acres site
320 m² original house floor
59 m² new floor

Time schedule

Design, documentation:
11 months

Construction:
9 months