

# No faux form in this beachside haven

Building and landscape materials show respect for the natural surroundings, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

Those building by the sea, particularly along Sydney's northern beaches, are often tempted to create a version of the Hamptons, the renowned group of towns, villages and hamlets on the eastern end of Long Island in New York state.

However, architect Richard Cole never entertained the idea of producing faux architecture when he and client Provent built the Newport Apartments.

Both were also keen to offer something different to generic units. "Our audience was primarily for empty-nesters living nearby or in neighbouring townships who wanted spacious apartments that could accommodate their needs as they got older, including access for wheelchairs," says Cole, pointing out the wide passages and easy access.

Located on a prominent corner in Newport, a triangular-shaped site fronting Foamcrest Avenue on one side and Seaview Avenue on the other, Cole was fortunate to work with a sloping site (a three-metre fall).

"We were faced with quite a busy roundabout at the site's apex

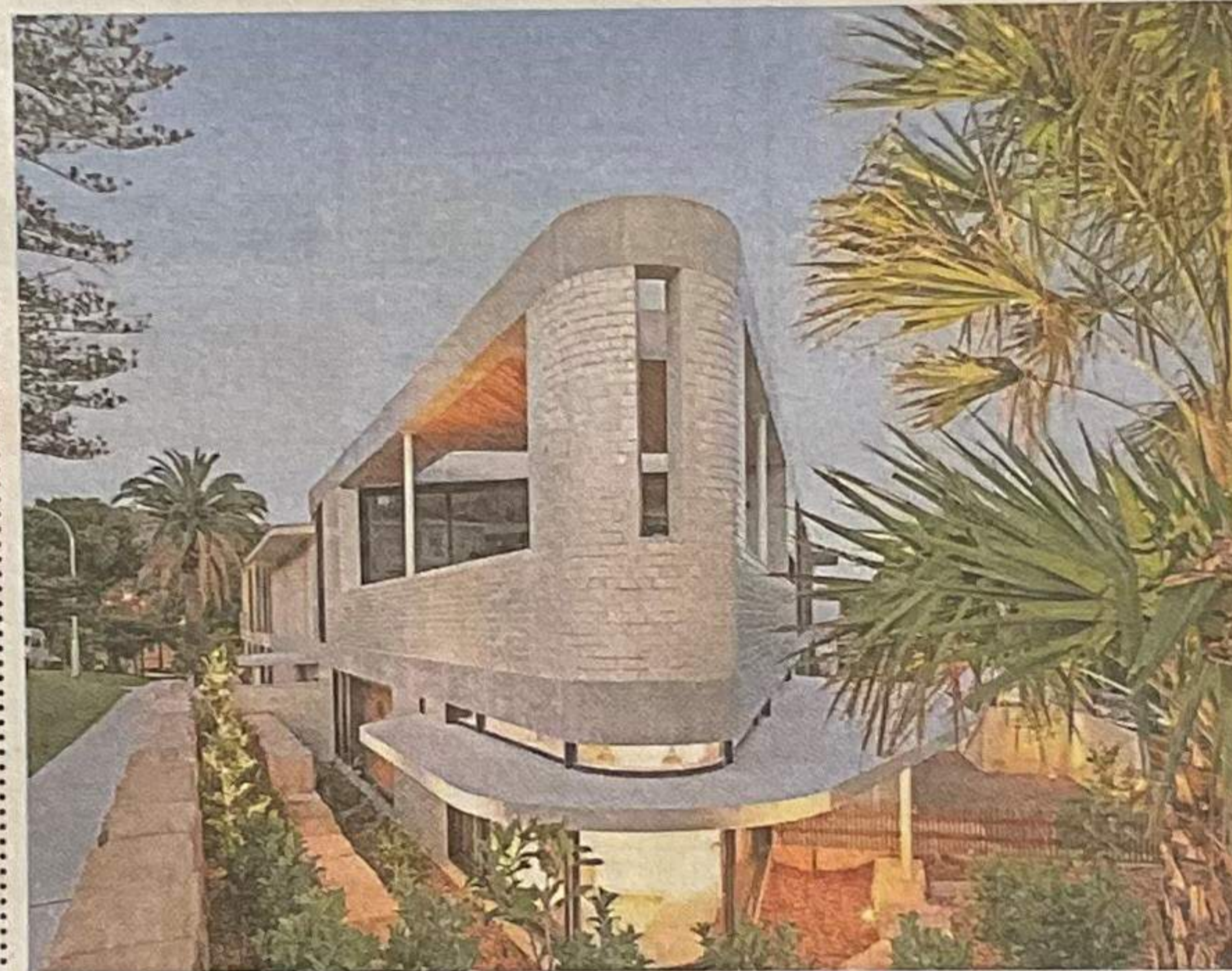
so having this gradient allowed us to create almost a bunker at that end," says Cole.

With its construction in sandstone (a common material in the area), concrete and glazed bricks, changing from a pale green on the exterior to a darker green called wasabi in the undercroft areas, there's a sense of looking inside a seashell.

"I was conscious of using materials that would stand up to the coastal elements, particularly the salt air that can erode certain finishes," says Cole, who used the irregular-shaped site to create exciting spaces both inside and outside this development.

One of the apartments on the first floor features a dramatic timber-lined soffit, with a curved rhomboid-shaped open skylight at its core to allow northern light to penetrate. The other six apartments have also been designed to take advantage of the light, with glimpses of the Pacific Ocean from some on the first level.

The entry point for Foamcrest is as considered. As it is irregular in shape and open to the sky, there's a sense of walking into a shell or



The Newport apartments are constructed in sandstone, concrete and glazed bricks. Photo: Simon Wood

cavity that offers protection from passing traffic.

Species endemic to the area (Cole worked with landscape architect Trish Dobson), such as cabbage trees, have been planted, and the sea breeze can be felt at every turn.

External aluminium blades on all west-facing windows can also be manipulated by hand to monitor light and privacy.

As Cole's brief was for more generous accommodation, the

seven apartments, four at ground level and three above, vary in size from 160 to 200 square metres.

All with three bedrooms, or alternatively two bedrooms and a study, these are simple but beautifully crafted with timber-lined ceilings and floors.

Rather than overcomplicate the interiors, the open-plan kitchen, dining and living areas are pared back, with a predominantly neutral all-white palette. "It's important for people to create

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their own spaces and express their personalities rather than being overly prescriptive with a design," says Cole.

"If you're going to include a triangular-shaped kitchen (as seen in a couple of apartments), you need to ensure they're both generous and also functional," he adds.

Ramps and a lift from the basement car parking allow residents to move seamlessly around their apartments, while the stairs in the entry forecourt are also available for neighbours to catch up.

These apartments are low slung and anchored to the terrain. They sit comfortably among surrounding homes and could easily be read as two large dwellings rather than apartments.

"It was important to allow this development to fit into the streetscape," says Cole, who sees the triangular-shaped Flat Iron building in New York as responding to its unusual plot.

"But obviously this isn't New York. It's clearly Newport!"