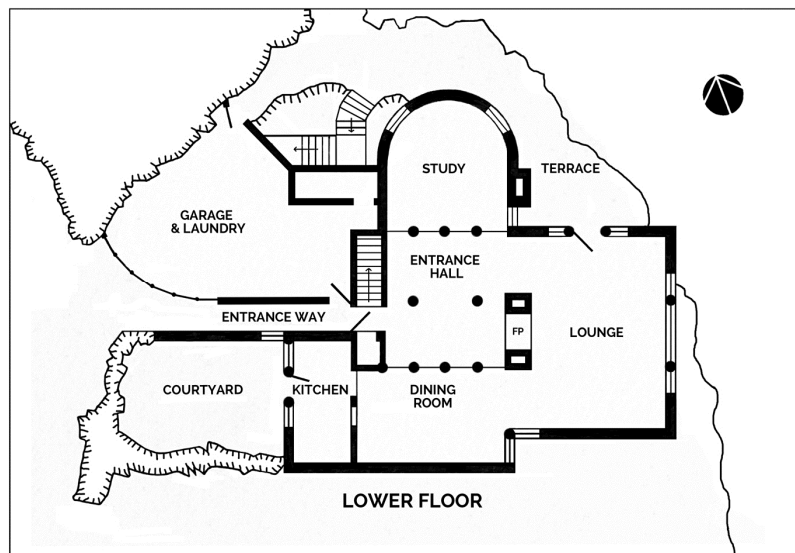




ROOM DETAILS AND FEATURES

Introductory Note: The [Architecture & Design](#) section of this website provides a general overview of the house's interior living and external recreation areas but, short of visiting the house, it is only possible to fully appreciate the full extent of Griffin's creativity through a room-by-room description. For those requiring specific information, below are eighteen quite detailed accounts of the house's 13 internal rooms, its garage/laundry utility room and four exterior leisure areas. They are arranged in the order that visitors being shown around the house would generally experience. The website contains photographs of most of the features discussed. Reproduced here for easy reference are the [.pdf Lower Floor Plan](#) and [.pdf Upper Floor Plan](#).

LOWER FLOOR



Entrance way. The progression from The Citadel along the entrance way tunnel of the house and then passing through the front door and entrance hall to the lounge has been described as “one of the magical experiences of Griffin’s Castlecrag”. [1] The tunnel at street level is narrow and low-ceilinged, with its subdued illumination enhanced slightly by light shining through 13 diamond-shaped amber glass panels in the front door. The claustrophobic effect is relieved by 25 tall, thin, mirrored, amber glass panels. Intriguingly, these have small protruding green squares top and bottom. Off to the right is a small courtyard, sunk into the sandstone – a secluded place and one of the four outdoor sitting areas, each providing shelter under differing wind and sun directions. To the left is the large built-in garage and laundry.

Entrance Hall. Here Griffin devoted an unusual amount of space and effort to amplify the intriguing atmosphere which was established in the entrance way. Its low ceiling continues into this room where it has two recessed hexagonal amber glass lights. Eight tree trunk-like pillars and two sets of four double amber glass doors define the area. Light filters through these doors and three vertical amber glass wall panels but there is a glimpse of brightness and the awaiting view through the unusual arched “window” cut through the central chimney mass. The pillars which dominate the room are in fact reinforced concrete sewerage pipes,

an Australian invention of one of Griffin's Melbourne clients, Walter Reginald Hume. In all there are 30 of these used in the house, both structurally and decoratively. Griffin used four layers of paints, glazes and pigments to get the effect he wanted on the entrance hall's set of pillars; those in other rooms generally have less complex finishes. When the doors on both sides of the room are opened a huge contiguous space is created embodying this room and the lounge, dining room and study. This provides an entertainment area of some 112 sq. metres (1200 sq ft), almost the entire lower level of the house.

Lounge. This room is dominated by a huge fireplace of finely-finished sandstone, its face measuring 2.8 by 2.2 metres (9 ft x 7 ft). Visitors have been known to enjoy its warmth for some time before the curiosity of its design dawns on them: there appears to be no chimney to carry away smoke because the fireplace has a large arched void in its centre. In fact, smoke is drawn sideways through flues which rise on both sides of the arch before joining higher in the mass of the fireplace. Its sandstone blocks are all hand-carved and it is estimated that each shoulder block in the arch would have taken a stonemason about a week to fashion.

The wall opposite the fireplace is dominated by its large "picture window" with its excellent bushland and harbour views; this is flanked both sides by casement windows as is the glass door to the outside terrace, so the lounge has ample natural light. At night its atmosphere is enhanced by the concealed bulkhead lighting on either side of the fireplace.

Dining Room. The most intriguing features of this room were the twin fish pools in the ceiling through which light once filtered into the room. These delighted Fishwick but presumably algae growth, decaying leaves and fish droppings must have de-romanticised the effect because in the 1930s they were replaced by skylights. It is noticeable that the care taken elsewhere on the shaping and finishing of the house's exposed sandstone blocks had not reached the same level in the lower floor rooms. Block sizes are uneven, many have large faults and cracks in-filled with mortar and the stonemasons' chisel marks carry evidence of their greatly varying skill levels. A letter from Fishwick to James Weirick discloses that he and Griffin decided that the walls, which were planned to be rendered, should be tuck-pointed instead, allowing the intriguing stonework and the skills of the craftsmen to be exposed. [2]

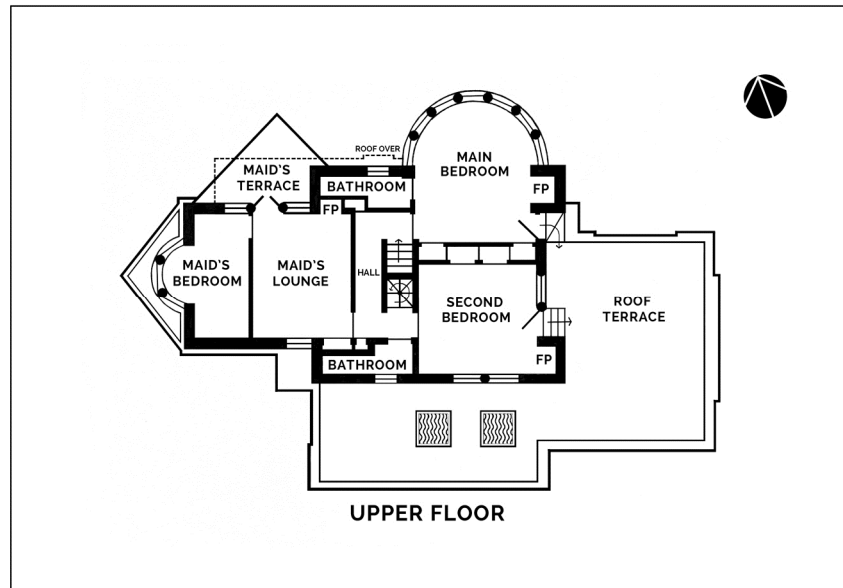
Kitchen. Griffin's attitude to kitchens is legendary. He told a client, who had protested that the proposed kitchen was too small, that transcontinental railway travellers in America were all fed from one tiny galley, so the kitchen he designed would be quite adequate. Because of its poor condition it had to be stripped and rebuilt in the late 1970s. However, the basic design of the cabinets and bulkheads has been retained and almost all the brass knobs are original. It is notable that the kitchen opens to the courtyard which faces the road - reversing the almost universal practice of having the main entertaining rooms at the front of the house and the utility rooms at the back.

Study. Being sunk into solid rock, this room is snug in winter and cool in summer. However, the room did not exist on the original plan. Presumably Griffin and Fishwick saw the wisdom of excavating the underlying rock to create an extra room rather than wasting the space below the main bedroom. This created a very early example of a "split level" living area. Indeed, most of room's walls have solid rock behind their lower sections causing

dampness problems. This was solved by completely tanking the floor and lower wall surfaces with a modern epoxy barrier.

With the walls being thick and in many places backed by solid rock, Griffin was forced to position the two main windows on the room's curved section. His resulting highly unusual window design is one of the most distinguishing symbols of the house.

UPPER FLOOR



Main Bedroom. Here Griffin swung seven double casement windows between pillars to create a very unusual semi-circular room with 180 degree bushland views over Griffin's Buttress and Tower Reserves. The room is north facing, so the array of windows allows sun penetration all day. These are not identical in width; the three most northerly are progressively slightly wider to capture light and wider views. The fireplace is the simplest of the four in the house and the unusual colours of its sandstone blocks - muted shades of cream, brown, orange and purple - probably inspired the finish on the window pillars. The hearth tiles in this and the other two upstairs fireplaces are made of glass. Stairs lead out to the large roof terrace with its extensive views of Middle Harbour and beyond.

Main Bathroom. This is a very early example of an en-suite bathroom in a private house. The room includes some of Griffin's most idiosyncratic design ideas with its sunken, end-on bath, which needed no shower curtain, and its small protruding bay housing the hand basin and windows which could be opened to keep the mirror from misting-up. The toilet cisterns for this and the 2nd bathroom were originally mounted on the roof and were flushed using a chain coming through a pipe (which, of course, allowed leakage during rain). The room's green floor-to-ceiling ceramic tiles are original. Those which had been broken over the years fortunately were able to be replaced by identical tiles discovered in the fish pools. The room originally had cork tiles and these have been replaced. There is also a built-in storage cupboard with very narrow shelves intended for small personal items such as cosmetics and toiletries.

Upper Hall. The ceiling of the staircase leading to the upper hall has an amber glass skylight with an unusual wooden frame incorporating diamond shaped decorations - a common Griffin motif. Light from a clear glass skylight above this finally reaches the entrance hall through three amber glass panels on the wall of the staircase. Small moulded-concrete spiral stairs lead to a planned garden on the house's highest roof which was never developed. The small cupboard under these stairs has the only remaining example in the house of pin-hinged doors, commonly used by Griffin.

Second Bedroom. The fireplace in the corner of this large room is its most distinctive feature. It is oriented at 45 degrees to the room's walls and capped by a jutting moulded concrete cube. This is decorated by an unusual row of coloured ceramic tiles with a South American Indian motif, unlike any others used in Griffin's houses. Despite being carefully examined by many respected Griffin scholars, the source and significance of these tiles remain a mystery. They possibly foreshadow his later use of Mayan Indian design elements in some of his incinerators. The moulded concrete mantle with its surrounding sandstone blocks form a simple, striking composition and make an interesting contrast to the equivalent fireplace in the maid's lounge. Steps lead up to the roof terrace.

Second Bathroom. Equal in size to its en-suite equivalent off the main bedroom, this bathroom is similar in layout with an end-on bath, but here it is not sunken. The toilet, basin and other fittings were scaled down relative to those in the main bathroom, as befits children and the maid. Its floor-to-ceiling yellow ceramic wall tiles are original however when the room's water pipes needed replacement many were broken. As with the other bathroom, fortunately they were able to be replaced by identical tiles discovered behind a cupboard during the kitchen renovation.

The room's toilet cistern was also mounted above the ceiling wholly encased in a very large accessible chamber within one of the house's prominent sandstone sections rising above the uppermost roof level and visible in the [.pdf Griffin's Elevations of House](#). This chamber also provided access to other water, gas and venting pipes.

Maid's Lounge. This room's most unusual and distinctive feature is its moulded concrete fireplace. Here its design concept was shaped by planes intersecting a cube. This amply, demonstrates Griffin's ability to produce a dramatic and elegant effect with a simple, low-cost design. It is a large room in which the maid could have privacy, with such comforts as a wash basin concealed behind the wardrobe's mirrored door, her own small terrace and a separate entry stairway and door. This was one of the few rooms in the house which had central lighting. The current hanging light fitting is a reproduction of one which Griffin designed for an earlier house; no record of the design of the original exists.

Maid's Bedroom. This is small in area, but Griffin designed for it a semi-circular nook under a cantilevered slab to produce a room which feels much larger than it actually is. The slab conceals indirect lighting. Its exterior section forms the semi-circular protrusion above the elevated garden. The room's four windows provide it with pleasant views over Griffin's natural bushland "island" in the loop of The Citadel and the neighbouring property's garden.

Garage and Laundry. Despite the fact that the house is positioned as tightly as possible into the narrowest part of its wedge-shaped block, Griffin managed to provide it with a very large, multi-purpose utility area, functioning effectively as a garage, laundry and workshop. It is some nine metres west to east and seven metres north to south (30 ft x 22 ft). The car entrance is wholly integrated within the house, a most unusual feature for its time, and yet it

is barely visible at street level when approaching the house. Griffin achieved this by positioning the room behind a high, jutting section of the natural stone. It has a set of six articulated sliding glass doors which hang from a curved rail, allowing for a very wide entrance. When open, the garage doors are concealed along its southern wall.

Because this utility area was mostly formed by cutting deeply into the block's platform, two of its walls are of sandstone. One of these has been partially waterproofed and rendered to prevent seepage, but in many places the natural beauty of the local stone remains visible.

EXTERIOR LEISURE AREAS

Courtyard. This area off the kitchen is completely surrounded by stone: a front wall, a natural outcrop and two of the house's walls. One of the walls rises to the full height of the house - some 5.5 metres (18 ft) - and provides welcome shade from the northern sun in summer. Originally the excavation creating the courtyard was just a few metres from the kitchen door but to increase its usable area it was later extended almost to the street.

Terrace. Originally curved and narrow, this area off the lounge has been extended to provide a large elevated sitting area and fringing garden with bushland and harbour views.

Roof Terrace. Formed from the ceiling slab of the lounge, this area is accessible from the main and second bedrooms and provides wonderful uninterrupted views of Middle Harbour and beyond to the Pacific Ocean.

Maid's Terrace. Accessed either through double doors in the maid's lounge or by sandstone steps from the garden, this small area faces north and is shaded by a large overhanging section of the roof slab. Being sheltered from most winds, it is a delightful winter sun-trap.

Footnotes:

1. *Walter Burley Griffin - A Re-View* James Weirick 1988. p11

2 . Letters from Thomas Fishwick to James Weirick 1972. Courtesy of James Weirick.