



The Bellevue Hill house posed an epic excavation problem.

# REACHING FOR THE SKY

## A builder with his sights set on glory

Elvis Mardini has always had self-confidence, maybe a little too much at first. He took some knocks early in his career but he's come a long way in 20 years, and last year he turned in magnificent work to win 2010 Master Builder of the Year. At 40, Mardini's future looks assured.

Elvis Mardini had barely turned 40 when he won the 2010 Master Builder of the Year award. He may be the youngest builder ever to do so – in fact, he just missed out on being eligible for Young Builder of the Year too.

To many in the industry who were present at the Darling Harbour Awards Night he burst on the scene as an unknown.

But to the few who knew him, it wasn't a question of "Elvis who?" It was more like "what took you so long!"

### MOST CHALLENGING JOB

Mardini's ambition is the kind that shows itself in deeds rather than words. But if you get him started on the passion that rules his life 16 hours a day, 6 days a week, he has plenty to say.

"It's been my dream to be Master Builder of the Year ever since I was 21. It's all I wanted to do. And to pull it off at a young age – considering that the Young Builder of the Year has to be under 40 and I just missed out by three months. I could

have won both. And we didn't even enter our best house. We'd built an even better house, an amazing house, but the owner didn't want us to enter it. So to win without your best entry – I think you've got to be doing all right. Now we really believe we're the best builder in the country."

Master Builder caught up with him one perfect autumn morning in Bellevue Hill on the site of his

### AT A GLANCE

- **Site:** Bellevue Hill
- **Architects/designers:** Collins and Turner (cliff section); Donald Campbell (house renovation)
- **Builder:** Mardini Constructions "We've taken out 3000 tonnes of rock, which was then perfectly cut and reused to clad the building."

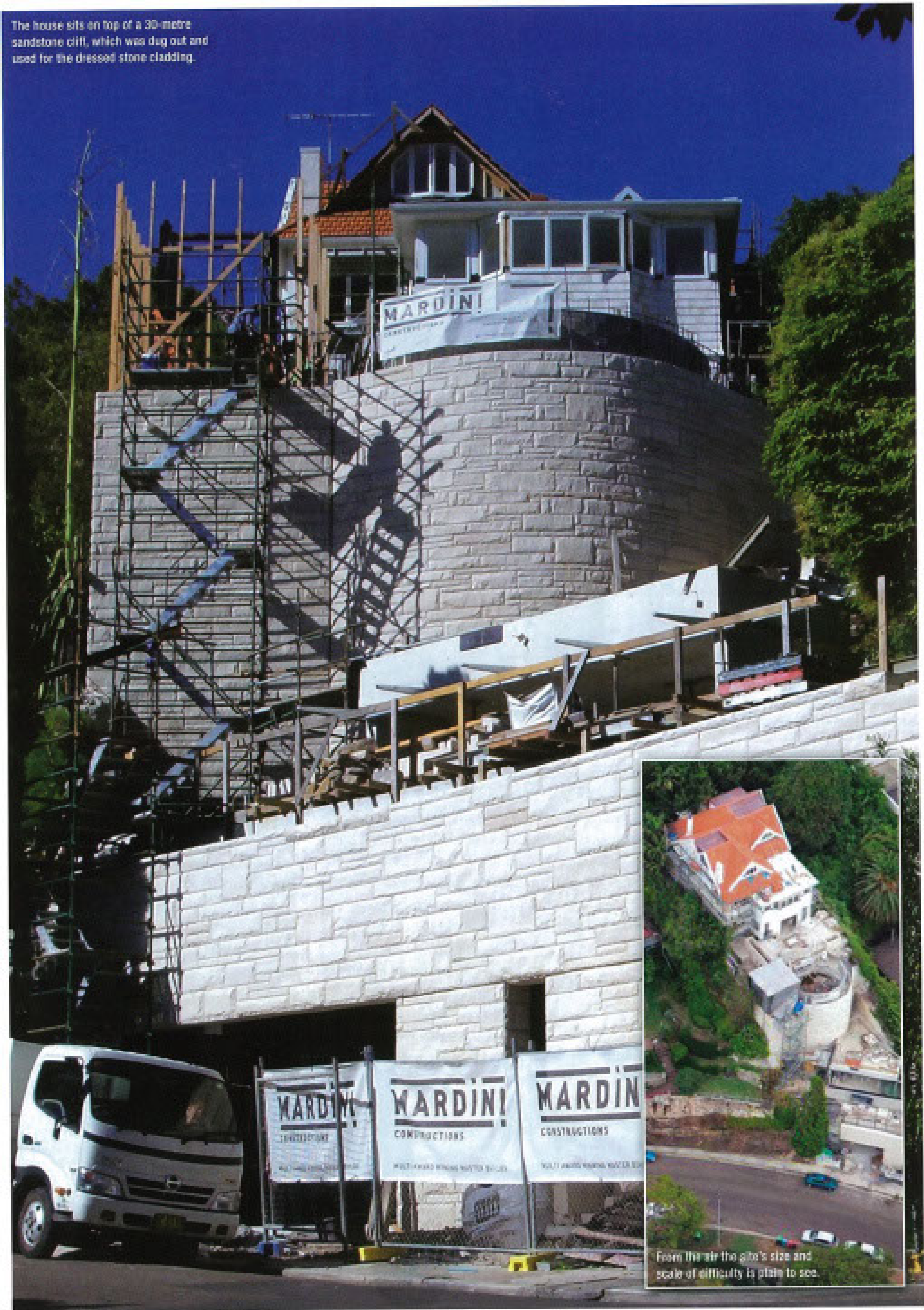
latest project. Mardini Constructions has its name on a breathtaking sandstone development that seems to rival the glittering perfection of Rose Bay stretching out in the near distance.

In Mardini's opinion, the house is one of the most challenging jobs in the country. The site is solid sandstone, a cliff that rises 30 metres from street level to the original house perched on top. The architect's plan called not only for a renovation and enlargement of the house but a development of the cliff itself.

"It's a funny story how it happened," Mardini says with a laugh. "The client couldn't find a builder to build this house but architect Huw Turner heard about it at a party and expressed interest. I think he said, 'I know a guy with a few loose screws in his head who I think could do this.' Meaning me.

"When I went up there with him, it's 30 metres up a mountain. I realised how unfit I was. I said to him, 'Mate, if we have a heart attack who the hell's going to take us down there to the

The house sits on top of a 30-metre sandstone cliff, which was dug out and used for the dressed stone cladding.



From the air the job's size and scale of difficulty is plain to see.