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Keep it natural

This new-age project home goes back to basics **14**

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FACT FILE

THE BRIEF

To reorganise a 1920s home for modern family living without losing its original character

THE ARCHITECT

John Rose and Renata Prosenik, Tanner Architects

THE BUILDER

A & DR Iles



Getting it together

A higgledy piggledy rabbit warren is reorganised into a footprint of functionality and flow



The Sydney real estate market is full of stories of quick fixes to make houses ready for sale. With an emphasis on style over substance, it is all about ticking the boxes without paying too much attention to functionality. So when buyers picked up this Hunters Hill family home on a 1000sq m block in 2004, it appeared to have it all.

Deep verandas, an in-ground pool, off-street parking and even a granny flat were just what they were looking for to accommodate their growing family.

It was just a shame that nothing worked particularly well.

On a mission

In a nod to the gentle curves of the internal 1920s architecture, the verandas had been filled in with cement Spanish Mission-style arches, the pool paving had no reinforcing underneath and the granny flat appeared to have had a previous life as an overblown cubby house. To top it off, the carport had been positioned in the middle of the front lawn, which made up most of the yard.

Internally, the entrance in the original part of the house had been pushed into the hallway to create a portico and a false wall installed to offer privacy to the bedrooms beyond.

An addition built years earlier included a poky kitchen, dining and living area plus hallways, which added up to five changes of

levels. The overall effect was that of a rabbit warren with no connection between one room and the next.

Modern history

On the recommendation of a colleague, the owners called in Tanner Architects to try to sort the house out.

Over the years, the firm has gained a reputation for maintaining the best of the original features of a home while adapting or adding on to the building in an entirely modern but appropriate way.

"Some things we told them not to do, because working with an old house can be a limitless pit"

Architect John Rose could see the potential of the high ceilings with their original plasterwork and the possibility for a natural progression of spaces.

"We wanted to keep it simple and retain the old features but open up the doorways so that they are higher and you get that flow from room to room," John says.

First order of business was to remove additions that were not working and design spaces that would flow in a logical way.

John says the original floor plan, where the north-facing house sat towards the back of the block, made a lot of sense.

"The arrangement of the house is such

that the private spaces are to the south [at the back] and the public spaces are to the north, which allows the connection of all the spaces," he says.

Changing spaces

The granny flat was removed and the carport relocated to the side of the block to create a lawn that would be easier to enjoy and maintain.

The multi-level addition at the eastern end of the house was scrapped to create a single-level, open-plan kitchen and living area. While there is no mistaking this for a new addition, it takes on the same rhythm as the original house.

The old hallways have been maintained but the original doorways have been extended and glass french doors installed on each room. This has allowed the rooms to be sectioned off when desired, either for acoustic or thermal purposes, while creating large enough openings for a natural flow between spaces.

"The thing is to do it in a way so that when you want to connect you can but when you don't, you can close rooms off," John says.

Flow has been enhanced with an all-white colour scheme for walls and ceilings as well as iron bark floors throughout.

John says the simplified colour scheme allowed the original details to speak for themselves.





Photos: John Fotiadis

A Precision-cut timber decking replaced the old paving on the veranda **B** Architect John Rose and project architect Renata Prosenik **C** The new kitchen enjoys the view of the front yard **D** The living area is an exercise in spaciousness **E** The open-plan kitchen **F** A new roof was required for the house **G** The new addition has the same rhythm as the original house **H** The ceiling in the dining room lends a sense of grandeur **I** The main bathroom



"The vaulted ceiling in the dining room is something you see in a lot of old homes," he says. "When you find a house that has it, you work with it because it has presence." With the old granny flat gone, the attic has been re-interpreted as a home office and guest room as required.

Great outdoors

The old veranda had an overhaul as well. Although the original timber posts were discovered under the concrete arches, they were in such poor condition that they were replaced while the paving was removed in favour of precision-cut timber decking. While the overall footprint did not change significantly, council approval rested on protecting existing trees and ensuring the new carport was not visible over the fence line.

Building relationships

Renata Prosenik was given the task of project managing the building work on behalf of Tanner Architects. She says the success of the job depended on her relationship with the builders, A & DR Illes. "When you are working on an old house, you rely on the builder telling you about the issues and where the problems are," she says. "When there were problems with, say, the roof, we would come here and find it had been reinforced because they could see it needed to be done." Despite the \$1.7 million budget, she says

spending had to be carefully monitored to keep it from getting out of control. "They knew what they had to do with an old building, working within the constraints of the budget," she says. "Some things we told them not to do, because working with an old house can be a limitless pit." The owners attended meetings every two weeks during the process, which were minuted and passed on to all parties to avoid costly mistakes later on. "Things get said but sometimes not everyone understands things the same way," Renata says. "It is great to talk about the look of the building but you need to keep a tight grip on the everyday running of the job." With the 12-month building process completed in 2008, the owners have had plenty of time to become accustomed to their new light-filled home. Now a series of unofficial zones, the house may not have changed much in size but it differs enormously in functionality. Best of all, despite all the mod cons it looks as though it has always been there, a historic house in a 21st-century world. ■

Robyn Willis
 ● MORE INFORMATION
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GET THE LOOK

FEATHER FEATURES
 Update your interior with cushions. The all-white colour scheme has been spiced up with a rug and cushions in green that make a visual link between indoors and out. For similar cushions, try the range at Bholu. These hand-embroidered felt cushions have been made according to fair trade practices and come with a feather insert for extra comfort. They are priced at \$135 each.
 ● MORE INFORMATION
Bholu 9698 0153, bholu.com



BATHING BEAUTY
 The beautiful, freestanding bath in this home conjures up images of endless relaxation. For a similar bath, check out the Centro Duo oval freestanding bath from Kaldewei. Made to take one person at either end, it is built from white steel enamel and comes with a 30-year guarantee. It is priced at \$3180 from Cass Brothers.
 ● MORE INFORMATION
Cass Brothers
 8999 7277, cassbrothers.com.au