

HOME & AWAY

Design trends

JENNY BROWN



More than the sum of its parts

Good things come in small packages – including this cleverly designed house in Forestville.

in SYDNEY

This nimbly extended house in bushy Forestville is playing tricks with the eye and the camera. It photographs big and has a whole lot going on in the material and spatial front. Yet, says architect Carol Marra, of Marra and Yeh, at only 180 square metres, "it's about 30 per cent smaller than the average Australian home".

Because of the restricted budget, she says, "it was important for us to work within a restricted footprint but (still) create spaces that do not feel small. There is plenty of storage, big volumes as well as small ones, and space that flows from one area to the next and then outward to the tree-tops and sky.

"It is a house that invites habitation in different ways, depending on weather, the season and the occasion."

It started out as "poorly laid-out and uninspired", a '50s brick bungalow that ignored its garden and the magnificent stand of eucalypts on the eastern boundary. And given the almost wish-list idealism of the brief to make it energy-efficient, seasonally and spatially adaptable and experientially rich for the different generations that inhabit it, Marra and Yeh have worked a small miracle.

Whichever way you look at it, there is pleasing visual interest. Yet Marra explains it away as practical – the spotted gum-clad boxy extensions with two, almost austere components "were basic geometric shapes; two cubes, one (the kitchen/



Proportion: Plenty of glass and lights make the living space appear bigger. Photo: Brett Boardman

living) twice as big as the other (the master bedroom)".

The ribbed internal ceiling of the main living room rises to six metres and takes its shape from a need to

stash solar panels on the roof. The variation of windows, Marra confesses, "are whimsical", and set to deliver varied outlooks.

The materials "are really robust

and natural. Each piece is a slightly different colour and texture as a way to resolve the desire for a rich living environment." As an undersized Aussie house, it lacks nothing.



Old and new: A wall of weatherboards separates the original and the modern extension. Photo: Christine Francis

in MELBOURNE

When architect Nic Owen sorted out the discordance and wasted space that had arrived on the back of a Yarraville Victorian weatherboard in the form of a 1970s addition, he did something very honest and interesting. At the point where the original double-fronted building finishes and the new glassy, L-shaped and suggestively modernist kitchen/living/dining addition begins, he put up a wall of horizontal weatherboards.

It's an old timey exterior material brought inside as a feature. "Simple," he says. "It's the back of the old house. But it gives you that slight ambivalence of 'is it in or is it out?'"

He did resurrect some of the poorly

used spaces under the old roof as a new laundry and main bathroom yet chose not to restore the lowered ceilings, rather to reinforce them and reclaim "a great attic. We only wanted to spend money where it mattered."

So the main spend went on the addition with its dual roof profile that internally sees ceiling heights change between 2.7 metres and four metres. In the ply-lined dining pod projecting into the backyard, the low ceiling makes the area intimate: "A defined space that is still part of an open-plan room."

Playing on the idea of weatherboard again, Owen clad the unglazed exterior walls with horizontal timbers in two

different batten widths and painted them charcoal. "So they react with shadows and become a bit sculptural."

The artful, bespoke strategy was also extended into creating some original joinery insertions that are one of his design signatures "and really just architecture on a small scale."

To frame the client's art and objects collection, he created bench lines, cupboards and open shelving that wanders and "wraps and folds".

"We like to wrap things because there's something nice about an item that starts at the floor, works up a wall and folds over into a ceiling. We love playing with timber," he says.

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