

# Home studio

How a creative couple made their workers cottage...work

By Judy Friedlander



It wasn't the most conventional brief to the architect:

“Dear Architect, Builder of Cities,  
Spice Merchants of Homes:

Build me a room to read and brood;  
Make me a space to think in majestic solitude...  
“Just erect me a tin shed of modest comfort;  
Where I can feel a happiness without cause  
and shut out the oily businesses of the world.”

“The poem was a little joke between us,” says architect Carol Marra of Marra + Yeh. “It was almost the perfect brief,” she added. “You often get a

laundry list of specifics but the poem provided us with a sense of what was wanted – a sense of isolation, closeness and an ability to see the sun.”

With clients and architects firm friends of many years, their professional relationship was also seasoned with an understanding of likes and dislikes. In-depth instructions on room sizes, paint colour and other specific practicalities seemed redundant.

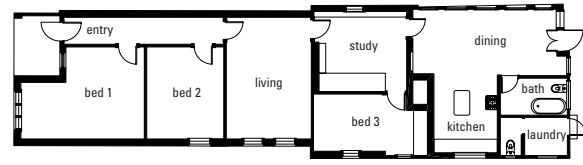
It is apparent on entering this home in Sydney's Marrickville that this is a creative nook. Walls of books, photographic equipment and an eclectic collection of fascinating oddments fill the house.

**With the owners working from home much of the time, priority was given to creating a space where they could work undisturbed but also feel connected to the main living areas.**

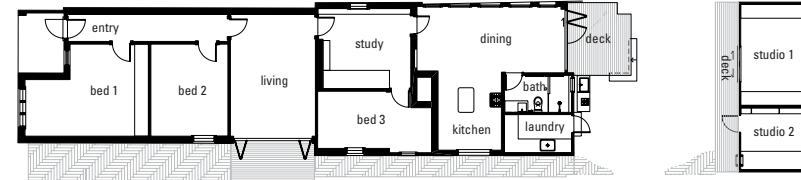
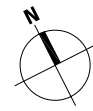
The archetypal “tin shed” at the back of the property was the result, separated by a sound-proof partition to allow the different working styles of each owner. The space inhabited by the writer is more functional and enclosed, mainly by books; the space by the artist imbued with more light and often open to the adjoining courtyard, where noise and visitors are welcome.



“Many of our items have been sourced from demolitions – lightshades, switches, ceiling roses and cloth cord”



Pre-renovation



Post-renovation



“Rather than tearing up the space internally, we focused on re-arranging the way the family used the spaces,” says Marra. “We designed a compact but efficient studio at the rear of the property which is divided to accommodate working areas for each of them.”

“The studio also blocks off the neighbours’ house which had previously overlooked the backyard. Instead, we created a courtyard garden which has become an outdoor room.”

In this quiet street where front doors open to tiny front gardens, the harmonious streetscape

exemplifies compact living in all its glory. Even so, at one stage the owners were not convinced that their old Federation cottage’s footprint would be big enough, as both work from home much of the time.

Pre-shed, the house seemed “long, dark and airless, with two little windows at the very back”. But by cutting out the back wall and a side section of the house and replacing them with bi-fold doors, the two new indoor/outdoor areas have opened up a wealth of opportunities and potential.

With two 20-something children weaving in and out of the house, personal spaces are still



treasured and protected. Bedrooms are away from the “working” back section of the house and a middle room, once, according to the owners, a “dead room, only good for watching TV it was so dark,” invites patronage with its new glass bi-fold doors opening to a timber-lined deck.

There is a fine interplay of communal and personal spaces. The courtyard now houses an “outdoor kitchen” with a built-in wok for “messy cooking”. The existing lemon and curry leaf trees were protected during construction and now regularly provide flavour and sustenance to meals.

The kitchen, the artist’s “power base” in her own words, is more of a family area now, with the kitchen table no longer the work table it used to be. “I don’t have to clear the table of paperwork all the time now,” she says. “But I love the fact I can still see the kitchen from the shed across the courtyard.”

The new house “is a space that is about function, light and elegance”.

**The owners also take pride in the fact that many fittings and house items have been sourced locally, many of them salvaged.**

“Many of our items have been sourced from

demolitions – lightshades, switches, ceiling roses and cloth cord”. Antique mah jong pulley lights in the main bedroom were sourced by the architects and restored.

One challenge, borne from trying to keep existing fittings, proved to be a blessing in disguise. When trying to salvage an old ceiling rose, a whole portion of ceiling collapsed.

“It was just as well,” says Marra, “the wiring was faulty to say the least”.



## Marrickville residence

**Architect** Marra + Yeh Architects  
**Location** Marrickville, Sydney, NSW  
**Project type** Renovation  
**Cost** \$150,000  
**Photography** Katherine Lu



## Sustainable features

### HOT WATER

- Bosch instant gas

### WATER SAVING

- Underground rainwater tank (custom-made); water efficient fittings

### BUILDING MATERIALS

- Plantation timber, polished concrete, recycled bricks

### GLAZING

- 6mm clear glass [thicker glass is obviously tougher, and provides extra acoustic insulation, but for the purposes of thermal insulation there is no practical difference between 6mm glass and 3mm glass]

### PASSIVE HEATING & COOLING

- Concrete floors for thermal mass, increased solar access
- R2.5 Green Insulation batts, Reflecta-Guard R3.0 reflective foil insulation to studio, cross ventilation, sun control

### LIGHTING

- Recycled industrial and antique fittings

### ACTIVE HEATING

- Rinnai gas heater

### PAINTS & FINISHES

- Natural floor oil, low-VOC paints