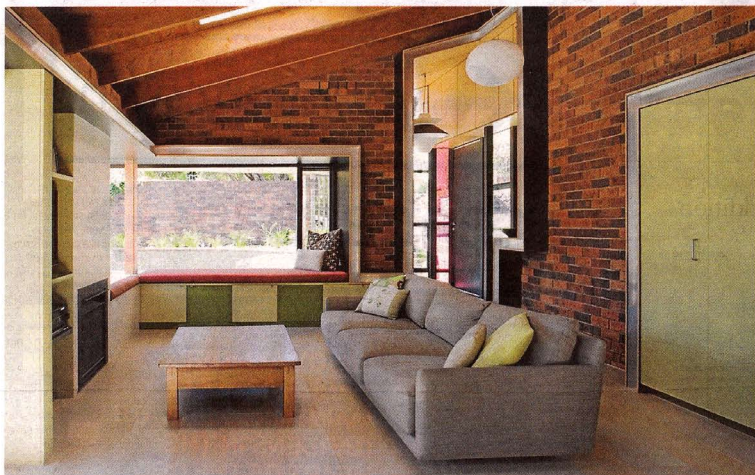


Domain RENOVATION JENNY BROWN



A skylight (left) filled the scar left by the fireplace; the new foyer (above) and pelmet lines (below). PICTURE: BENT ARCHITECTS

Strong line on a house with spirit

Redesigning a 1970s house to suit contemporary needs required a new approach — literally.

MANY things from the '70s are back in fashion so it stands to reason that the housing characteristic of the era should also be worth revisiting. In that most '70s of suburbs, Doncaster, Anthony and Meegan Callinan had a brick house they liked more than any other they inspected, yet they always had a yen to change aspects of it.

"As a copy of a Merchant Builders' house, it was contemporary," Mr Callinan says. "It had expanded with the family over the 15 years we'd lived in it. But we always had a feeling that we could do something more with it."

Specifically, the owners wanted to change the point of entry from a small door under the carport, "a little door tucked away in the darkest corner of the house". They also wanted to make a large living room out of the front lounge and dining rooms that were dominated and divided by a big brick fireplace.

To effect what was essentially a one-room renovation, he contacted the director of Bent Architecture,

Paul Porjazoski, and happened upon a practice that had demonstrated empathy in remodelling Doncaster housing of the same vintage.

As Porjazoski says, "these houses are quite malleable and already quite spatially interesting. They tend to be well oriented and, generally, they respond well to contemporary architecture. You can play off what is already there."

The architect respected the house's personality enough not to want to mess with what he calls its spirit. "The challenge was to come up with an idea that would retain the spirit of the existing house and not obliterate its history," he says.

Obviously, the fireplace had to go. That wasn't difficult as it wasn't structural and the scar on the sloping ceiling was converted into a skylight tucked between the wooden beams. Beyond that alteration, Porjazoski cut into the brick walls to introduce more glazing.

He relied on another very simple design device that varied a whole lot of change to happen in what had



become a five-metre by 10-metre combined living-dining room.

He arrived at the idea of running an expressed pelmet at the 2.4-metre level around the parts of the room where amendment was necessary. "Everything beneath the pelmet was new," he says. The new was further articulated in colours such as muted lime green and

ochre, which are sympathetic to original '70s colour schemes.

In the north-west corner and beneath that defining pelmet line, he created a return window seat that cantilevers over the very '70s kidney-shaped pool. "It allows light in and also better engages with the garden." The new day bed, Mr Callinan says, "is a magnificent place to sit on a winter's day".

In other parts of the room, the pelmet line, which is given a strength of presence by a recessed channel of silvery aluminium and a defining shadow line of charcoal paint, wraps around cupboards, shelving, doorways and alcoves. "A sharp, crisp line in an earthy room", is how the architect sees it.

To resolve the problematic entry point that had formerly been from the garage, Porjazoski created a new structure at the front corner of the house.

It is a modest addition, only a two-metre-long "pop-out" foyer entry. But because this new protrusion is also tall, liberally glazed and uses the same pelmet language to

trace the original roof profile, it has made a tremendous difference to the light quality of the main room and the sense of connection to the street.

By using variously shaped louvred, coloured and fixed window insertions, the architect has made real play of the glazing. "The view is blurred by the glazing bars and by the overlapping of more lines and textures," he says.

"In that way, it mediates between the public and the private space and it allowed us to create something that is both transparent and not transparent."

The amendments are, the architect says, "basically small manipulations in a house of warmth". But that's the way he prefers to tackle renovation projects. "We weren't slaves to the existing building. We chose to work with its strengths."

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