

INNOVATION  
JENNY BROWN

# Sharp shift

A redesign has turned a rabbit warren into an open space for a professional couple.

As a 1970s spec builder's two-bedroom brick villa, the neat little East Malvern house was all right. It was sound, serviceable and on a sizeable block that tilted the backyard into the sunshine.

As a house of contemporary open living for a young professional couple, however, it was all wrong. The rooms were small, the floor plan was convoluted and access to the outdoors was via the laundry.

"It didn't have great orientation," says architect Paul Porjazoski. "It didn't get great daylight and, because it was a rabbit warren, it felt smaller than it was."

The outlook also ignored several stately eucalypts in neighbouring gardens. From inside the house, he says, "you got no sense of where the garden was".

Designing a substantial extension with new kitchen-dining and living rooms "to open it up to the sun and the site", and reorganising and reappointing the old spaces for use as a study (the former living room) and a discreet main bedroom suite was "a fun project" for Porjazoski.

"On a reasonably sized block there is a lot more flexibility and a bit more breathing space than doing a terraced house. And it's amazing how big a shift you can make in the way you can live in a house."

To make that big shift, Porjazoski made two critical design moves, "cutting" a hole into the centre of the house "to insert a north-facing courtyard deck," and splitting up the floor plate into three levels that respond to the site".

Over those three stratifications



**Substantial extension: The new kitchen-dining and living rooms open the house up to the sun and the site. The courtyard and living-room decks are open to the north-west and the windows make the outdoors feel part of the indoors.** Photos: Brendan Finn



**'The intention was for the house to be robust without being aggressive, to have a spatial richness and yet to be casual.'**  
Paul Porjazoski

that have the old entry, bedroom and study on the top level, the new dining room on the second, and the sitting room on the lowest, the house descends the slope by 1.6 metres in a progression that feels entirely natural.

While the floor plates now define different spatial functions, the uniform timber of the feature-grade recycled blackbutt, and many other timbered features tie it all together effortlessly and lend a natural "warmth and tactility to the interiors that also picks up the colours in the old bricks".

The courtyard and living-room decks are open to north-west, and the multiplicity of windows as strong vertical and horizontal introductions are not only organised in a manner that gives distinct rhythm to different rooms, they become the stand-out structural features and allow through-views across the indoor rooms to the outdoor landscaping that will one day be lush with trees, shrubs, grasses and climbing deciduous greenery that will screen the glazing.

"Transparency was critical because the house had been so dark before," Porjazoski says.

There is a wealth of deft architectural detail in this build, but it's not in your face or self-conscious. It's there in the deep recessions of the window frames that resolve into deep window boxes. It's there in the boxy, armour-panel ply-veneered cupboard structures that define the transition zone into the kitchen and that with deep, overhead bulkheads, recess the entry into the powder room and private side of the house.

It's there in the way ceiling heights expand and contract and how the window placements seize extra light and sky, especially through the long,

high bands of horizontal clerestory glazing, another of the tricks that for Porjazoski "makes the outdoors feel part of the indoors".

"The intention," he says, "was for the house to be robust without being aggressive, to have a spatial richness and yet to be casual, because houses are for living in, not for looking at."

The new layout is streamlined, sensible and clear for easy occupation, but throughout are details that make it interesting: touches of rough-sawn cypress as batted panels, more bulkheads and boxy platforms that run from indoors to outdoors and vice versa. When the bi-fold doors to the decks are open, "it does feel like an outdoor space that is protected. Each space has an inherent character, but they're all now connected to the garden."

## CONTACTS

**Bent Architecture**  
bentarchitecture.com.au  
**Builder Poles-A-Part Design and Construction**  
poles-a-part.com.au