

The Little Big home

Eliminating wasted space to get the most out of a small property required some creative solutions, reports **Denise Ryan**.

ANGUS and Olivia Cameron knew they had to do something dramatic to convert their pretty 1920s weatherboard cottage into a house big enough for their growing family.

The problem was how to create more space in their small East Hawthorn period house without diminishing the size of the backyard.

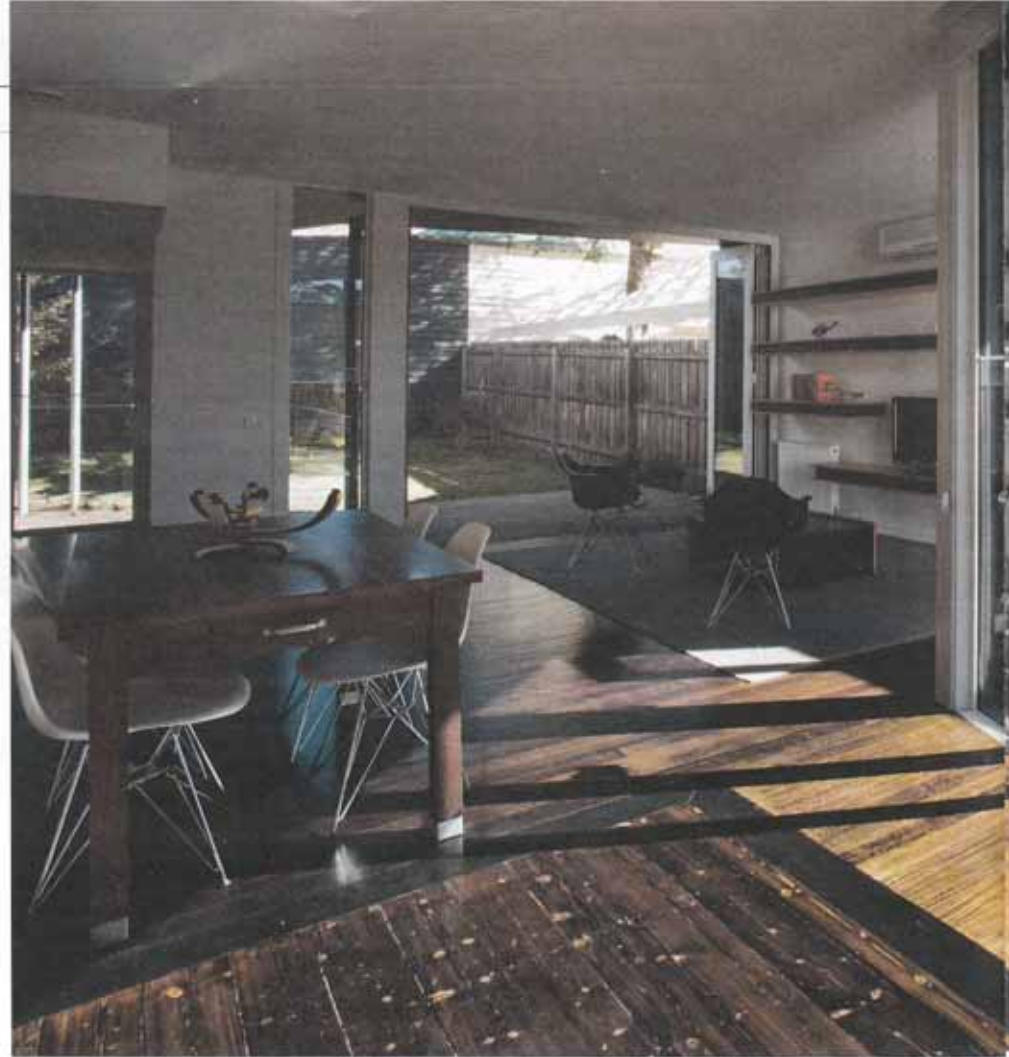
Their \$350,000 renovation has achieved that goal. The Camerons — who recently had their third child — will not need to move again. Bent Architecture has made such good use of a small block, achieving all of the requirements on the couple's checklist.

"On a 300-square-metre block we wanted four bedrooms and two bathrooms, but without losing backyard space," says

Mr Cameron. "It had to have off-street car spots but not be over-crowded by an over-bearing second storey. It was also important to keep the old heritage part of the house. That was a big ask."

Architect Paul Porjazoski of Bent Architecture came up with several different plans. The result is a blend of these ideas. The original house had two front rooms, and a living room that was embedded in the middle of the house and disconnected from both the front and back spaces. The kitchen led to a lean-to, added in the 1950s. The front driveway at the side led to a laundry and utility area.

"The house was very introverted," says Mr Porjazoski. "The living room had one window looking at a side fence, which is common to houses of that age where the



window position was determined by how the house looked from the outside, not from what it did to the inside.

"The lean-to occupied about 35 per cent of the floor area of the house. Its head-height clearance was barely at door height. The kitchen was tiny and it led to a rabbit warren that wasn't working."

The architects turned the former living room into a kitchen and converted the side utility area into a living room with large floor-to-ceiling bifold doors leading to decks along the southern and northern edges of the space.

This gave the new living space a northern orientation and allows the parents to supervise the children when

they play in their new outdoor area, created from what was an under-utilised but sunny driveway. With a south-facing rear garden, this was a welcome addition.

Upstairs is the main bedroom and another bedroom, separated by a shared bathroom. The windows of these rooms are positioned to give views of a Japanese maple, which the couple planted when they first moved in. There is also a view of a strip of city skyline, plus skylights along the staircase landing.

Mr Porjazoski says the second storey does not over-hang or shade the rear garden. It rakes or scallops away on one side to meet local council setback rules, and on the other to encourage sunlight.



ESTIMATE OF COSTS

Demolition	\$9800
Additions (including carpentry)	\$211,000
Electrical works	\$9400
Stair	\$5000
Doors and windows	\$29,000
Tiling	\$9800
Joinery	\$45,000
Painting	\$14,300
Plumbing	\$11,700
Fixtures and fittings	\$5000
Total	\$350,000



Above: Weatherboard and zinalume used in the exterior complement the original building at the front. Left and far left: Floor-to-ceiling bifold doors open up the new section to the north and south timber decks.

PICTURES: BRENDAN FINN, FOLDED BIRD

The extension is clad in lightweight, white weatherboards and corrugated sheet roofing.

Mr Cameron says the block now feels twice as large. "You can look through bifold doors to the street and to the back, which makes it feel open. We have used every square metre of what is a small block," he says.

The couple like the way the living area now connects to the street. "It is a double dead-end street and is full of families. It's like a country town in the city," he says.

Unlike some renovators, who can become overwhelmed by the many choices in finishes, the couple decided to give the architects a fairly free hand.

"They had a good idea of our taste and personalities and presented us with several colour palettes. We left them to micro-manage it as we didn't want to spend our weekends looking at tiles and taps," Mr Cameron says. "We are busy, and this left us with the head space to deal with the important decisions."

The Camerons deferred to the architects' expertise. "At the end of the day they have the time and a far better knowledge of the market than we do. We just figured they are professionals, while we are weekend amateurs."

Mr Porjazoski says new interpretations of old surfaces were critical to the success of the project.

"The new area is an interesting, quirky form. It is not traditional in that it is wrapped in weatherboards and wrought-iron zinalume. Weatherboards are not used in contemporary buildings that much — they are seen as part of kit homes — but they work well for old homes."

The kitchen is also a fresh take on the conventional. The pressed-metal ceilings have been retained and an oven and cooktop have been fitted into the existing period fireplace, with its pretty period tiles on the alcove. The kitchen cupboards are in Navlam, a pre-finished timber veneer made from renewable, fast-growing European poplar wood.

Finishes were chosen to fit with the rest of the house rather than to follow fashion. Mr Porjazoski says some owners get carried away and spend too much of their budget on internal fittings, only to find they cannot afford to complete the landscaping or buy window coverings.

"It happens all the time," he says. "We try to make sure the client really understands the budget needed so that they don't have to hang sheets as curtains for a while."

CONTACT

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