

# Modern marvel

A cutting-edge architect and an owner on a mission brought this Haberfield home into the present, writes **Claire Bingham**. Photos **Katrina Tepper**.

“Not one to shy away from a renovation, James set out to create an open space, minimal in style with lots of light”



B



A

#### TIPS

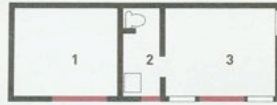
- ✓ Maximise ceiling height with a pitched roof
- ✓ Make a large space more adaptable with sliding doors

## RENOVATE

Having outgrown their cramped weatherboard home in Leichhardt – despite a second-storey extension – James Thompson and his family decided it was time to relocate. It was a double-fronted brick home in Haberfield that finally caught their eye, with its large-scale proportions and the potential that gave. The rest is history.

The house wasn't quite James's cup of tea initially, but the sense of space and potential to modernise was definitely attractive.

"It's a large Federation house, very typical of the area," he says. "These are big suburban homes with 3m-high ceilings. But this particular house had been 'Italianised' in the '70s, rendered with blond textured bricks and decorated with gold embossed paper on the



**ONE LEVEL** 1 Store room 2 Laundry and toilet 3 Workshop 4 Deck 5 Kitchen 6 Lounge room 7 Bathroom 8 Bedroom four 9 Bedroom three 10 Entry 11 Veranda 12 Bedroom two 13 Bedroom one 14 Walk-in robe 15 Ensuite 16 Living area



C



D

**A** Against a neutral backdrop, colour is brought in with contemporary art **B** Sliding doors divide the otherwise open-plan living space **C** The pitched roof extending over the deck **D** The more traditional bedroom with its deep burgundy wall

walls. To be fair, it was a reasonable, no-expense-spared renovation – if you like that kind of thing – but to my mind it was a bloody eyesore.”

Not one to shy away from a renovation, James set out to create an open space, minimal in style with lots of light. “If you go into a traditional Federation home, you need to immediately turn on the lights because it’s so closed in. In those days people wanted to escape the Australian light as much as possible. We wanted to create the opposite, so it was a question of finding an architect who would be able to achieve this and who had experience with the council.”

**A tricky situation**

With only the hallway floorboards and interior doors original to the house, the main challenge was to get the concept through the constraints imposed by the council – tricky considering Haberfield’s heritage listing. The choice they were faced with was to leave the building as it was or renovate it to its original state. “There was little room in between, which I was a bit freaked out by at first,” says James. “The

council’s restrictions and external policing of alterations are very prescriptive to what you can and can’t do. We searched long and hard for an architect who would be able to create what the council terms a ‘modern interpretive’ and that’s why the process took so long.

“In some respects I can appreciate the restrictions. They need to be rigid so they can keep control and avoid the mistakes that have been allowed to happen in the past. But to return the building to its original is a very expensive exercise. Fixing up the front facade alone, there was rendering, new windows, new driveway, fencing – everything had to be replaced so that when you drove down the street it would look like any other home. In some ways I’m happy to do that. Streetscape is an important aspect when you buy these buildings.”

**A pocket to play with**

Taking advantage of the relative freedom permitted around the back and out of sight from passers-by, James and architect Steve Kennedy found a creative pocket to play with. **→26**

# GET THE LOOK



### BAR STOOL

With its chromed steel frame and white seat, this elegant **bar stool** from Koskela Design (**\$440**) is a classic design and adaptable to most kitchen environments, whether the worktop is Corian, timber or colour veneered. Koskela Design, 9280 0999; koskela.com.au

### WOVEN RUGS

When it comes to highly patterned Persian or French Aubesson rugs, they don't necessarily have to be red. Less intrusive to a neutral colour scheme are pale blues and smoky greys. Laura Ashley has a wide selection of **duck-egg blue woven rugs** in floral designs. **POA**. Laura Ashley, 1800 033 453; www.laura-ashley.com.au



### COLOURED PLASTIC STOOLS

Contrasting contemporary pieces of furniture alongside the more traditional – in this case the teak coffee table and African stool – the coloured, plastic **XO BuBu**, **\$95**, by Philippe Starck has a lift-off lid, so it can be used as a stool, planter, ice box or small table. Available from Space Furniture, 9667 8200; spacefurniture.com



Taking ideas he'd collected over the years and from gathering tear sheets from magazines, James had specific ideas of what he wanted Steve to incorporate into the design.

"Steve works in a modern and practical style we thought we could get away with at council," says James. "The two outstanding things we appreciated about his work was his use of space and line and how he maintains the sense of proportion to these houses, which under the circumstances is difficult to do. Basically, he's as cutting edge as you can get in this area."

Having restored the front part of the house to its original Federation glory, it's at the back where the new lounge-kitchen-dining extension spans the entire width and takes full advantage of the high ceilings.

Moving into what James modestly refers to as the shed, the family remained on-site while the work was being carried out. By his own admission it was a "pain in the arse" as the transition period lasted about a year, with the family having to traipse down the garden path to use the bathroom in the main house.

"It was a bit tedious, but we made the shed as cosy as we could," says James.

### Expert advice

An addition of this size posed many technical dilemmas, from how to erect large sliding walls to how to apply architectural glazing in the ceiling and walls.

Following Steve's architectural drawings and council consent, Bauhaus Constructions came in to execute the building works, then James took three months off work to finish off the painting, storage and kitchen.

"Alf Kittel at Bauhaus was responsible for the construction. I can honestly say I was sad to see him go," says James. "We had some fairly complicated things to do and I couldn't ask for a better craftsman or communicator. He has great workmanship and was a pleasure to deal with."

After the creation of a large pitched roof that continues over the outdoor decked area, the result is a seamless indoor-cum-outdoor living area. "With the roof extending over deck, it's like having another room to the house – but just without walls. The kitchen occupies the right-hand side, and at the left is the living area," says James.

"When all the windows and doors are pulled back, it's a bloody big space, and with the triangle inserts of glazing in the ceiling, it is also flooded with light. When we bought the property it was a rental, divided down the middle into one- and two-bedroom apartments. There were lots of tiny little rooms and all of them badly renovated.

"Now it's beautiful. It's very airy and bright and when you pull all the doors and windows back, it opens up the whole of the house." ■



**E** Black-tiled bathroom **F** Bi-fold windows open the kitchen worktop to the outdoors

### MORE INFORMATION

- Bauhaus Constructions 0411 428 147
- Kennedy Associates Architects  
51 Nelson St, Annandale, 9557 6466;  
www.kennedyassociates.com.au

Have you renovated a home? Tell us about it at [home@dailytelegraph.com.au](mailto:home@dailytelegraph.com.au)

