

The fully landscaped rear backyard means the family often spends spare time outdoors.



The family can take advantage of the large leafy site spending a relaxing afternoon on a hammock - just like being on holiday.

## At home among the trees

Taking advantage of a leafy site means this family now spends time relaxing in their outdoor room set high in the trees

Once-ordinary North Shore house in Sydney has been modernised to fit today's family lifestyle, using sleek and elegant design to create streamlined but warm, comfortable spaces.

The building presented to architect Melonie Bayl-Smith of Liquid Architecture was a nondescript interwar double-brick cottage with a tired yellow-and-green colour scheme, on a large site with substantial trees. The house had undergone only minor alterations previously, including the addition of an ugly garage in the front setback area.

While there was a generous-sized deck at the rear, there was limited living amenity due to the sequence of existing spaces and the natural lighting opportunities afforded by the original dwelling.

The large, leafy site was always one of the main drawcards of the property, yet it was totally under-utilised by the original house. The new design, including the fully landscaped rear garden, now brings the family out into the backyard to make the best use of the space.

"The clients wanted to open up the house to the back garden, which was one of the major appeals of the property, bringing the bushland setting into the house. The inspiration for the design was the idea of creating an elevated 'outdoor room' that sat among the trees," said Melonie.

"They wanted to streamline and reconfigure the living spaces to make a more family-friendly, open-plan space with a clear connection between outdoor and indoor spaces.

"The kitchen was an important feature, as the clients wanted a high-end kitchen within easy



The elevated outdoor room sits high among the trees.



BEFORE



Add skylights to flood dark spaces with essential light.



It's an easy walk from the kitchen to the deck - very important when entertaining. Wooden floorboards allow for a seamless transition to the outdoors.

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access of the deck, to enable the cook to interact with guests or family in the indoor and outdoor living areas," she said.

Now, the central feature of the renovation, the new open-plan kitchen and living area opens through bi-fold doors onto the timber deck at the rear of the property, creating expansive bushland views and an excellent indoor/outdoor flow.

The new kitchen and living space was one of the main considerations in the design brief, while another was opening up the house for light and warmth. Given that the house is south-facing, it made sense to make the most of the northern light at the rear. A large skylight is positioned over the deck to ensure some direct sunlight can

penetrate despite the wide, covered deck.

But the ideas for transforming the home didn't stop there. "The owners also wanted a new lower level with a separate guest bedroom and bathroom, internal laundry, storeroom and home entertainment/recreation room," said Melonie.

The existing rear of the dwelling was demolished and the site excavated to allow for this new lower-ground-floor guest and service area, opening into the garden at effective ground level.

Old buildings always provide some unexpected renovating challenges. The main issue on this project was the excavation for the lower ground floor. After demolishing the rear

## Client brief

- \* Open up the house to the back garden — in the form of an elevated outdoor room
- \* Make the living spaces more family-friendly and open-plan
- \* Create a strong connection between indoor and outdoor spaces
- \* Have a new lower level with guest accommodation and recreation areas
- \* Build a high-end kitchen with easy access to the deck



**Below middle:** The existing garage was demolished and replaced with a carport, to allow for a new window to fill the front bedroom with light.  
**Below bottom:** The open-plan kitchen and living area opens through bi-fold doors to the timber deck.



Using an CaesarStone benchtop in Ice Snow adds an extra sense of light to the kitchen.



portion of the house, the builder discovered the footings were made from brick and not concrete or stone, so a lot of structural underpinning was required before work could commence.

Additional renovations involved the entrance and hallway at the front being shifted to the left to create a central walkway through the house with views to the rear deck. Also, the existing lounge at the front of the dwelling was converted into the master bedroom with a new ensuite and walk-in wardrobe.

The existing garage was also demolished and replaced with a carport to allow for a new window to improve light to the front bedroom.

In projects such as this, with its blending of

different design styles and periods, it can often be quite a task to merge these seamlessly, but Melonie addressed this with enthusiasm. "I was very interested in exploring the junction of old and new in the use and articulation of different materials," she said. Hence the mix of materials, including a variety of timbers (such as blackbutt, cedar and stringybark) and Colorbond roofing.

Now, the family has the beautiful outdoor space they craved, all without leaving home. "I love the outdoor room created by the large deck. It's a peaceful, airy space that provides a wonderful enjoyment of the site and the dwelling," said Melonie. **r&e**

**This project was designed by:** STUART WILSON

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**This project was built by:** CONSTRUCTIONS  
Tel: 02 9970 8173  
Licence number: 55629C

**Flooring**  
Kitchen/dining/living: Blackbutt select-grade timber floorboards  
Bedroom: Original timber floorboards retained  
Stair: Blackbutt  
Outdoor: Eco Concepts modular paving to the front path and entry patio

**Walls**  
Kitchen/dining/living/bedroom: Dulux 'Subdue' quarter strength

**Kitchen**  
Benchtop: CaesarStone 'Ice Snow'  
Splashback: Decoglaze colour-backed glass (colour chosen by client after moving in)  
Cabinetry: Satin polyurethane Dulux 'Calf Skin'  
Other: Madinoz handles, Hafele cabinetry fitout

**Sanitary fixtures + bathroom fittings**  
Tapware, showerheads, spouts: Methven  
Sinks, WCs and bath: Client selection  
Shower screens: Frameless glass with stainless-steel fixings

**Lighting**  
Pendant lights installed by client after moving in

**Windows + external doors**  
Semi-commercial anodised aluminium framed windows and doors — all existing windows and doors replaced  
Custom-designed (by architect) blackbutt front door with Axolotl Ozone glass insert, Madinoz pull handle, Chant door snib

**Outdoor**  
Rendered and "matrix" Board walls: Dulux 'Reed Bed'

Fascias/barge boards and other external detail work: Dulux 'Tidal Thicket'  
Gable ends/carport/wall junction: stained cedar boards  
Roof: Colorbond 'Woodland Grey', custom orb and Klip-Lok steel roofing  
Landscaping: by clients and builder  
Deck: Stringybark timber decking boards

10,000-litre steel water tank by Water Harvest  
Stair brackets: Halliday and Baillie