

Rationalising a century of alterations and forging a coherent design language for this heritage cottage

LAYERS *of* INTRIGUE

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effected a vibrant, contemporary family home.



These pages, from left A steel-and-glass box provides a counterpoint to the original c1880s sandstone cottage and contains living, dining and kitchen areas. Tallowwood decking leads to the outdoor entertaining and pool. &Tradition 'Patch HW2' dining table and Fredericia 'Søborg' leather chairs from Cult. On table, 'Sambor' vase by Henry Dean and platter by Rina Menardi from Ondene. Rakumba 'Highline' pendant light from Design Nation. 'Ribbon' outdoor sofa, 'Scissor' outdoor dining table and Emu outdoor chairs, all from Robert Plumb. Coco Flip 'Sequence' side table in Headland Red from Cult. Contemporary style in the living room with a Zanotta 'Shiki' leather sofa, Coco Flip 'Sequence' side table in Black and Nanimarquina rug, all from Cult. Giorgetti 'Kendama' wall lamp from Space. Artwork by Kate Dorrough.



These pages, clockwise from left The kitchen has American oak veneer cabinetry by Pittwater Joinery in Dulux 'Black Felt' with a Corian benchtop in Deep Titanium and splashback in sandblasted acrylic and fluted glass. 'Lola' table lamp from Ke-Zu. Stratera Oak flooring from Woodos. Fredericia 'Spine' stools from Cult. Franke 'Eos Neo' mixer from Winning Appliances. Open stairs with treads in Stratera Oak from Woodos, a glass balustrade from Magic Glass and feature wall and handrail in Bronze Brown Florentine by Axolotl. Orange sculpture by Korban/Flaubert. 'Moon' vase by Kim Woochang from Fineworks Paddington. The shower/powder room is encased in sandstone with amenities wall in microcement in Black on Black by Venetian Plaster Gallery. Maps 'White Matte' floor tiles from Onsite. Catalano 'Green Lux 40' basin in Matte Black from Rogerseller with Astra Walker 'Assemble' basin set in Matte Black. 'Beta' stool by Dimitri Vargas. The 'Ta-da!' hot-pink neon sign from Neon Signs Australia is a custom piece designed by the owners with Bijl project architect Andrew Lee.

On the surface the brief for the renovation of this 1880s sandstone house on a battleaxe block on Sydney's lower north shore might have seemed overwhelming. With a longtime series of additions and alterations the major task was to unify the different ages and layers of the house, removing unwanted elements and streamlining materiality, as well as provide flexible, robust spaces for a blended family that includes young and adult children, and elderly parents, and create a better connection with the pool and outdoor areas.

For Melonie Bayl-Smith, director of Bijl Architecture, who was engaged for the project, there were several hurdles, including navigating council approvals, the state of the original sandstone, site access and the relationship to neighbouring dwellings. The result is a triumph, a home Melonie describes as "relaxed, calm and reflective – a harmonious composition of contemporary architecture and heritage building fabric, where texture, light and space form a warm backdrop to everyday life".

Owners Sascha and Steve had lived in the home for a few months before contacting Melonie, an acquaintance and subsequent friend

who had bonded with Sascha over a shared love of art and architecture. The heritage property had good bones but was tired and lacked any worthy decorative detail. In addition their family required a different configuration of spaces to achieve a 'good fit'.

Over the years – starting from the 1920s – the house had undergone several poorly executed additions in a variety of materials which needed to be consolidated with "clean lines and a sophisticated materials palette", says Melonie. "The aim was to make the house more liveable by improving the overall spatial qualities with consideration for natural lighting and ventilation, orientation, passive heating and cooling," she continues.

There was also the desire to bring about a unifying architectural language. "We adopted a minimalist, industrial aesthetic using expressed black steelwork as an 'outline' for the rear living spaces, the fenestration and the interior detailing including the stair." She says the project was all about layers and framing – "acknowledging, rethinking and extending the layers created by additions and alterations made to the original stone cottage over time. We worked to connect and create clarity between these layers." »



« “We framed views, using lines and framing devices to control what is seen and not seen when moving in and around the house. This changes the perception of the size and shape of the property so, for example, the foliage in the park behind feels as if it is on the site rather than outside it.”

Heritage requirements meant that the existing materials of sandstone and timber had to be retained though much refurbishment of the stone was needed. Other structures such as the 1920s brick entry building and 1930s skillion-roofed east wing were ‘lightly touched’. The form of the barrel-vaulted two-storey structure by architect David Scobie was also retained. Brass and other patinaed materials completed the palette, enhanced by the soft, rounded and warm textures of furniture, carpets and accessories.

A brilliant flourish was the use of glass – in the entry foyer where a glass front door complemented rather than replaced the existing timber door (a heritage requirement), allowing light to flood in. A new open-riser cantilevered stair lit up by skylights and a glass floor above was also an inspired choice, bringing an expansive sense of space to the hall and first floor. “This is a pivot point,” says Melonie, “and highlights the spectacular bronzed artwork by Marcus Piper in collaboration with Axolotl that the owners commissioned.”

Throughout, the floor plan has been refined. Previously enclosed rooms on the ground and first floor have been opened up, providing flexibility plus increased light and visual connection. The framed »



This page, from top The first-floor hallway has a built-in bench seat in leather and storage cabinetry by Pittwater Joinery in American oak veneer. Display shelves in steel and glass by Jaytec. Ceramics by Lia Klugman. Idris Murphy artwork. The first-floor hallway leads to the rumpus room and has a toughened glass floor from Magic Glass. Feature wall and handrail in Bronze Brown Florentine by Axolotl. ‘Neo’ sofa in Preston Velvet in Moss from King. Bonaldo ‘Alfie’ lounge chair from Fanuli. Stool by Dimitri Vargas. Freifrau coffee table and Muuto ‘Pebble’ rug from Top3. The entry foyer with its new front doorway in fluted glass and black steel. **Opposite page, from top** Fritz Hansen ‘Series 7’ desk chairs, Nau ‘Bilgola’ daybed, and Serge Mouille table lamp in the airy study. Items on desk include, from left, sculpture by Korban/Flaubert, White Grid artwork by Terri Brooks from Studio Gallery, and natural ceramic vessels from Spence & Lyda. Bowl on Daniel Boddam marble side table from Ventifact Studio. Rakumba ‘Highline’ pendant light from Design Nation. Artwork by Idris Murphy. The brick structure was added in the 1920s as the formal entrance to the cottage. The original timber door is left open, with a new glass door in the entry foyer behind acting as the front door, allowing light to penetrate inside.



This page The master bedroom has an &Tradition 'Little Petra' armchair and ottoman and 'HM Tripod' floor lamp, all from Cult. Bremworth 'Galet' carpet from Mokett by Stevie. Escea fireplace. Curtains from Simple Studio. Artwork by Sally McDonald. On shelf, from left, sculpture by Caroline Duffy from Curatorial+Co, painting by Cassie Hansen and sculpture by Mandy Francis from Studio Gallery. Ceramic bowl on mantel by Lia Klugman. **Opposite page, clockwise from top left** Headboard in the main bedroom is in American oak veneer battens by Pittwater Joinery with a feature panel in Bronze Brown Florentine by Axolotl. Society Limonta bed linen and throw from Ondene. Rakumba 'Indre AI' pendant light from Design Nation. Nau 'Nest' bedside table from Cult. Vase from Robert Plumb. Ensuite bathroom through doorway has a Falper 'Ciotola' basin and Fantini 'Milano' mixer from Rogerseller on a custom vanity by Pittwater Joinery. The walk-in robe has an Expormim 'Frames' chair from Ke-Zu. Painting by Chloe Caday, sculpture on mantel by Mandy Francis from Studio Gallery and ceramic shell bowl on window ledge by Kristiina Engelin from Curatorial+Co. The original sandstone has been refurbished and the property enhanced by new landscaping by Melissa Wilson Landscape Architect.



« glass box that holds the dining, living and kitchen space riffs off the original multipane glazing and allows a better connection with the study, drawing in significant light and ventilation thanks to the increased ceiling height.

While the initial brief was architectural, over time this expanded to include the interior design and furniture, lighting, art and objets. Sascha and Steve have a remarkable art collection and works by Robert Malherbe, Idris Murphy, Christo and Jeanne-Claude stand out against the sandstone walls. At every turn there is a wonderful intersection of old and new – in the master bedroom, a traditional marble hearth is juxtaposed against contemporary fluted joinery in American oak painted in Dulux 'Black Felt' and syncing with the adjoining ensuite and its wall of black 'Kit Kat' tiles. Elsewhere the old sandstone walls are a charming backdrop to designs by &Tradition, Fredericia and Fritz Hansen among others.

For the family there are numerous areas to gather and socialise, to read, work and play, from the family TV and lounge, the first-floor sitting room, the library and study, to the pool and surrounding outdoor area designed by Melissa Wilson Landscape Architects.

Says Sascha, "We were so lucky with our team – an architect who understood the project and its potential and a builder who was more like a craftsman. We now have a beautifully refined family home that sits on its spot like a lantern in the evening. It continues to surprise and delight us." bijlarchitecture.com.au; stuartwilsonconstructions.com; melissawilson.com.au



SPEED READ

» Melonie Bayl-Smith, director of Bijl Architecture, was engaged to work on this c1880s sandstone cottage on Sydney's lower north shore that is home to a blended family. » The dwelling had undergone many alterations and additions over the years in a variety of disparate materials. Melonie sought to rationalise these layers and reframe the house in a consistent architectural language. » Black steelwork was used to shape the rear living spaces, adding a slightly industrial aesthetic, and a glass front door and cantilevered stair under skylights brought light and design artistry to the interior. » The owners' remarkable collection of art has been complemented with design pieces by European icons, setting the tone for a refined, contemporary lifestyle.

This page, from top Velux skylights illuminate the top-floor bathroom tiled in Allegra 'Kit Kat' tiles and Maps 'White Matte' floor tiles from Onsite. Meisterstück Centro Duo bathtub from Rogerseller. Custom vanity by Pittwater Joinery in American oak veneer with Caesarstone 'Fresh Concrete' benchtop. Vintage vase from Secondi Oggetti. Glass side table by Henry Dean from Ondene. Falper 'Ciotola' basin and Fantini 'Milano' mixer from Rogerseller. Brass towel rail from Pittwater Joinery. The master bedroom walk-in robe has an &Tradition 'Fly Easy' chair from Cult. Bocci mini pendant lights from Space. Artwork by Stanislas Piechaczek from Studio Gallery. **Opposite page** Custom headboard in American oak battens with feature panel by Axolotl. Nau 'Nest' bedside table from Cult. Rakumba 'Indre A1' pendant light from Design Nation. Patsy Mudgedell artwork. 'Akari' lamp from Fineworks Paddington. Sculpture from Spence & Lyda.



1 Nau 'Lincoln' modular sofa, POA, from Cult. 2 LZF 'Lola' table lamp by Ray Power with black marble base, \$5237/large, from Ke-Zu. 3 Runaway #4 sculpture in stainless steel and gloss paint, \$8800, from Korban/Flaubert. 4 Nau 'Rev' stool, \$550, from Cult. 5 White Black Construction artwork by Terri Brooks, \$1500, from Studio Gallery.