

One of a Pair

Architecture - by Stephen Crafti



The owners of this semi-detached home on Richmond Hill, in Melbourne, were waiting for the opportunity to scale down from their suburban home and move closer to the city.

When architect James Staughton, director of Workshop Architecture, first inspected their family home in Glen Iris, he realised that scaling down would need considerable consideration. "Our clients previously ran an art gallery. I was quite overwhelmed by the amount of art, books and other items that would need to be accommodated with the move," says Staughton.



The Richmond Hill home, originally built at the turn of the 20th century, is a hybrid between Victorian and Edwardian. One of the house's redeeming features is the dramatic

45-degree-angle pitched roof. "Being in a heritage precinct meant we had to conceal any new work from the street," says Staughton, who was mindful of having to create a second level to both provide the necessary accommodation for his clients and also benefit from city views the 'hill' is renowned for.



The façade of the Richmond Hill home had also been altered in the 1950s, with a rudimentary sunroom added. "At the end of the day, there was really only the front room that was worth saving," says Staughton, recalling the basic additions to the rear. And while there was some original fretwork and a decorative archway in the corridor, many of the rooms had been altered during the 1970s (pine kitchen and archways linking several rooms).



Workshop Architecture looked at a number of different solutions in creating the space that was required. "We looked at the house of (19th century architect) Sir John Soane in London which is on a considerably larger scale. But his home (now the Sir John Soane's Museum) is an example of how people can live with a lot of personal effects while still enjoying the spaces," says Staughton.



So, apart from the front room and new sun porch, the rest of the house is almost new. While appearing single-level from the street, the pitched tiled roof conceals a two-storey home. At ground level, apart from the original room which is used as a spare bedroom, there is an open plan kitchen, dining and living area, orientated to the northern back garden. Taking his cue from Sir John Soanes, Staughton created a number of pathways

through the spaces that are suggested rather than delineated in a physical manner. There are two clearly defined pathways, for example, one leading directly to the rear garden via a singular doorway. The other meanders around the living areas to the staircase. "There's no need to walk directly through the living areas unless you intend to use them," says Staughton.



The second level, reached via an angular staircase (including a Seraphic sand-blasted balustrade) includes a study area at the lower level together with the main bedroom, ensuite and generous storage area nestled below the original roofline. And separating the study from the main bedroom is an outdoor courtyard benefitting from views of the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the city skyline. "One of the challenges with this design was not only maximising storage, but also ensuring views of the city," says Staughton, who was restricted on one side with a 1930s apartment block and the second story addition of neighbours on the other. "When you're living this close to the city, it would be a shame not to take advantage of these views," he adds.



The extension, clad in black anodised aluminium, appears sculptural. Having the V-shaped design not only creates sun protection, but also a built-in window seat at ground level. "The form also addresses the issue of privacy," says Staughton, who was mindful of not impinging on neighbours. And while the Richmond Hill house clearly isn't the Sir John Soane house, it shows how even though with a tendency for clutter, one can live in a clean and contemporary space. However, like the Soane house, there is a respect for the past. The original chimney that pierces the storage area adjacent to the main bedroom is surrounded by white walls and floor. "It's like a relic from the past, but it's slowly disappearing with the owners' things," adds Staughton.

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