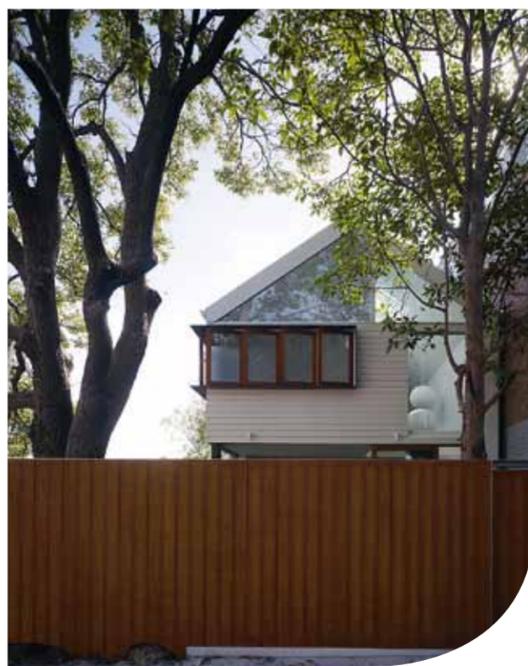


turning the CORNER

AFTER A FOUR-YEAR GESTATION, IT TOOK JUST EIGHT MONTHS FOR THIS SINGLE-BEDROOM COTTAGE TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO A SPACIOUS FAMILY HOME

WRITER *Kerryn Ramsey* ARCHITECT *Christopher Polly Architect*
PHOTOGRAPHER *Brett Boardman*



ABOVE: Situated in the suburban inner west of Sydney, the house makes the most of its leafy surrounds and limited space.
RIGHT: The downstairs living area, which opens out to the courtyard, is a stunning example of the way Christopher Polly maximised the light and space of the dwelling.





Bigger certainly wasn't better when it came to the refurbishment of a one-bedroom residence in Sydney's inner west. Architect Christopher Polly embraced this philosophy when he redesigned the two-storey Federation cottage. Removing a line of unsightly 1980s lean-to structures at the rear of the property was an easy decision for Polly, but it took some real daring when he managed to add extra rooms while still reducing the dwelling's ground-floor footprint.

Now a three-bedroom, two-bathroom home with two living spaces, the freestanding house in inner-city Rozelle has an internal size of just 161sqm. While it may look modest, it fit the bill for the owners – a couple with a toddler – who now appreciate the abundance of light, space and privacy.

A master of originality, Polly was determined to redefine the traditional way of living in a compact space. A perfect example is the main bedroom on the first floor which “has the idea of a tree house with the connection to the landscape,” Polly says. Here, walls of glass and western red cedar pivot windows provide views of tree canopies and the surrounding district. “It's quite a rarity in the inner west,” notes Polly.

Since the plates wrapped around two elevations, the windows needed to meet at a corner without any structure. As Polly recalls:

“At one point in the scheme, sliding windows were used upstairs to mirror the large sliding doors on the ground floor. Then I decided that the upstairs should have a different language to counterpoint the sliding configuration of the downstairs.”

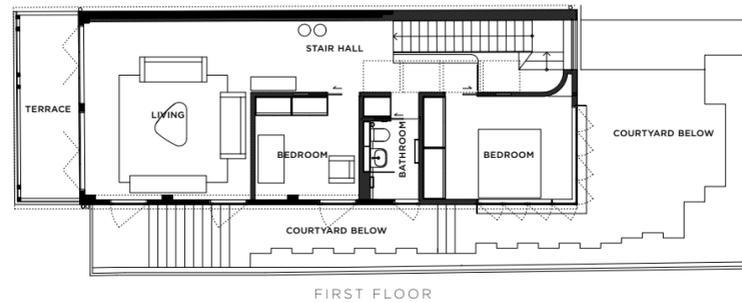
The chance to refine and tweak was never an issue for Polly as the project took four years from the get-go. The lag was due to the owners' work commitments, as well as extended time getting the development application through council.

While the initial stages were a drawn-out process, the construction took only eight months. “It was a good time frame for a complex scope,” says Polly, who was determined to work with the existing form despite the poor quality of the original. “I plucked out the things I thought had substance or integrity,” he recalls.

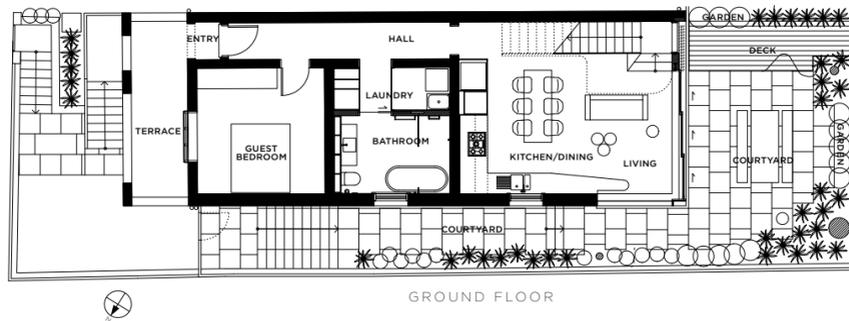
The back half of the house, for instance, had original blackbutt floors, so it became the guiding material for the new timber overlay, and it meant the interior floorboards downstairs were repurposed as exterior decking boards. Authentic weatherboard cladding was re-used on the first floor, and sandstone from the original build was re-used as part of the landscaping at the front.

The house itself is located on a rock shelf, and excavation was required for plumbing, stormwater and sewerage. “In the scheme

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: By retaining the footprint of the original structure, a generous area remains outside for the courtyard; The master bedroom is nestled among the tree canopy, giving it a ‘tree house’ feel; Soft corners are a repeated sight throughout the house, right down to the shower screen; A set of shelves is integrated into the architecture.



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

of things, that was quite a negligible problem; there were no real surprises with the house itself," says Polly.

The eight-month build involved virtual demolition of the interior. The only elements retained were the forms of the internal sandstone walls, the hallway at the front, and the front bedroom, which was later converted into a guest room.

Beyond the front hallway, the new space became an open-plan kitchen, dining and living area. To provide a natural connection to the outdoor zone, sliding stacking doors were installed, and the area that was once dotted with slap-dash lean-tos was transformed into an inviting paved courtyard.

In the interior, a hushed colour palette – in white and a mix of timber tones – gives a gentle nod to modernist Scandinavian aesthetics, topped off by the first floor's raked ceilings, with exposed beams retained in the front portion.

The link between both floors, however, takes on an almost futuristic feel with the 'floating' timber stairway. As the architect notes, the sculptural element owes a lot to the long time frame involved. Originally planned as a finely framed steel stair, it went through a few incarnations, according to Polly.

"We built the frame of the stair in laminated timber," says Polly who managed to achieve a slim profile with timber handrails attached to the glass balustrade. Directly above the stair, a void was carved out to enable an expansive connection between the two floors. That volumetric expansion has enabled the modest space to feel much larger.

While the interior embraces subtle Scandinavian overtones, the home's most significant elements – natural light, honest materials and historic references – has given the dwelling a real Australian sensibility. **M**

Architect statement

The project simply and directly extrapolates existing archetypal formal qualities, with extension of key existing materials to retain some memory of its previous incarnation – providing a significantly expanded series of connected interior volumes within a sustainably modest footprint that harnesses access to sunlight, ventilation and views of tree canopies, sky and district beyond.

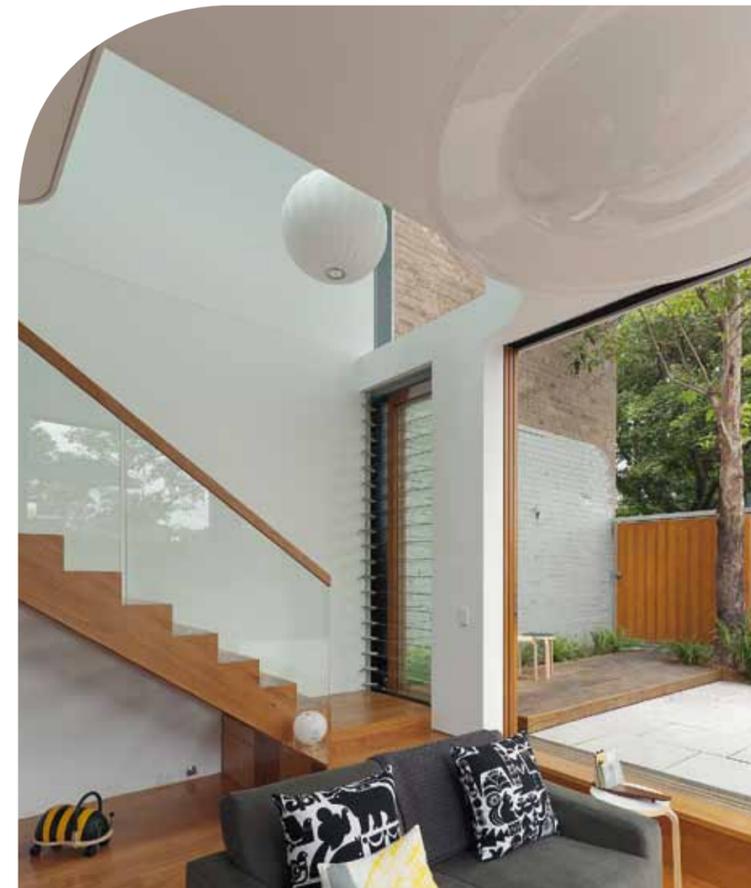
An inserted ground floor open living volume is generated by extension of existing envelope lines and internal ceiling and floor levels to an averaged plan footprint of former lean-tos, followed by a rear first floor addition that extrudes the gable-ended pitched roof form over the new ground floor. Fine steel plate elements contrast age-old weatherboard cladding and large expanses of fixed glass, and western red cedar sliding doors and pivoting windows offer varying degrees of openness and enclosure.

The retention of the cathedral volume within the new first-floor room arrangement and extrapolation of the first-floor raked ceiling-to-wall datum serves to scribe the alignment of all element heights wrapped around this volume, delicately bridged to raked ceiling lines by lightweight translucent polycarbonate – with an open stair and large carved void that vertically expands the relationship between two previously unrelated floors.

CHRISTOPHER POLLY



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: The view from the living area onto the courtyard; The floating timber stair; A large void above the stair gives a vast, airy feel to what is a rather modest space; A sculpture of a bird looks out from the benchtop that joins the kitchen and living areas.



PROJECT DETAILS

ARCHITECT: Christopher Polly Architect
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Simpson Design Associates
LANDSCAPE CONSULTANT: Christopher Polly Architect with Carmichael Studios
INTERIOR DESIGNER: Christopher Polly Architect
CERTIFIER: Paul Aramini Consulting
HYDRAULIC CONSULTANT: Shore to Flow
SURVEYOR: Juneke & Juneke
BUILDER: Paul King
DESIGN AND DOCUMENTATION: 22 months
CONSTRUCTION: 8 months
FLOOR AREA: 161m²
BATHROOM: White gloss wall tiles from Surface Gallery, white glazed ceramic hexagonal mosaic floor tiles from Bisanna, grey matte porcelain floor and wall tiles from Academy Tiles, chrome Hansgrohe Raindance Air shower, Kaldewei Vaio Duo bath, Scala bath and basin mixers from Reece, Active wall-hung toilets from Ideal Standard.
FLOORING: Blackbutt T&G strip flooring with Feast Watson tung oil finish, Pine T&G strip flooring with Feast Watson charcoal walnut stain and tung oil finish
JOINERY: MDF and HMR MDF polyurethane fronts and fixed panels
KITCHEN: Caesarstone Ice Snow bench, chrome Cucina Goose Neck mixer from Newform, integrated refrigerator from Fisher and Paykel, oven and cooktop from Ilve
LIGHTING: Neutra pendants from Kartell, Nelson Ball Bubble lamps from Modernica, Wedgie uplights from Tovo, Rovasi recessed downlights from Light2, Slimlite concealed strip lights from Sylvania, pagoda and in-ground exterior lights from Lumascape
STAIR: LVL stringers, Recycled Blackbutt treads, fascia, handrails and stair landing base by Coastal Stairs