

To those who doubt that anything good can happen in the suburbs, architect David Saunders responds with

this extension to a Californian bungalow. What's more, it's robust enough to take any amount of tricycle traffic!

# TOUGH ENOUGH



**DAVID SAUNDERS, AN ARCHITECT** in his early thirties who heads up Melbourne firm S2 Design, owns thirty coffee machines. Display cabinets at the S2 office are full of curiosities: one contains a collection of teeth, and on the shelf above is a deer's foot and antlers. During my visit, Saunders placed in my hand a lump of ancient Roman concrete, around two thousand years old. He's an engaging bloke and has been designing some equally intriguing projects in this city.

One of these is the Caulfield House, an endearing renovation and extension to a seventy-year-old Californian bungalow in suburban Melbourne. The extension, an open-planned space with a taller-than-usual ceiling, is filled with light – two out of the three new walls are entirely glass. It is as if the old house has been surgically cut and opened out to the sun and garden. Walking through the entry to the extension is a transition from closed to open, dark to light. The front door opens onto a view down the corridor straight to the garden through new sliding glass doors. The old timber floor and the new concrete floor are continuous: the new floor runs smoothly all the way outside to a lawn. Saunders envisioned the client's children riding their tricycles from the living room to the backyard without obstruction.

In a classic Modernist style, as expressed virtually unchanged since the 1950s in Australia, the addition contrasts with the existing Californian bungalow at the front. Its open, relaxed feel minimizes the division between inside and outside. The Californian bungalow is an articulated container, one that visibly sheds water (off the pitched roof) and one that emphasizes the structure (exaggerated columns and elaborated decorative timber framing). In contrast, the Modernist box doesn't indicate whether it sheds water; instead, the low-pitched metal deck roof is concealed, presenting to the observer the clean lines of a perfect rectangular slab. A single column, unlike the paired, tapered columns of the Californian bungalow, appears more as a formal, sculptural element than a building material. It is made from reclaimed ironbark from Sydney's Walsh Bay Wharf. Because the Californian bungalow style involves elaborating structure and the contemporary extension involves minimising visible detail, there is an interesting relationship and transition between the two. From the street you see nothing of the extension. Likewise, standing in the backyard, there is no vestige of the original house, although the glass walls allow a view of the interior, which reveals one oddly angled wall – part of the old house's idiosyncratic geometry.

The Burra Charter, the contemporary guide to heritage conservation and restoration, recognizes the value of each era, each iteration. Gone are the days of choosing the most perfect past moment and demolishing or adjusting a building to return it to an "ideal" state. The charter also encourages new additions to stand out as new additions, rather than confusing old with new. While not dealing with a heritage-listed building, David set the new sections of the Caulfield House at a distinct angle to the old walls. The visual languages of the two halves are fundamentally different. For example, the rear facade has horizontal symmetry; the front, vertical symmetry. Despite these differences, there is a smooth transition between the two – no pause, no gap. Everything has equal weight, as if the two eras were interchangeable. The old skirting is reproduced in some of the new work. An existing door was relocated to the new bedroom. Old floorboards were found to match the existing floorboards for the new study.

Open planning brings a feeling of space through horizontal

expansion – without requiring a tall ceiling. Closed planning – namely the division of a house into small private chambers – achieves a feeling of openness through grand ceiling heights – a vertical spatial emphasis, rather than horizontal. The Caulfield House's airy ceiling height is unusually high for a modern extension – in a sense, the ceiling height of the new space is "old", bringing a between-the-wars loftiness to the horizontality of the open plan.

A square island of terracotta-coloured carpet set into the pale polished concrete floor defines a seating area. It is a borderless space, an expansive living room with the carpet providing a conceptual limit. In fact, there is no real boundary to the enclosure, as the predominantly glass walls do not limit the view. Instead, the suburban fence becomes an enclosing wall. Living behind a high-tech window-wall, completely transparent yet insulating (it has a low-E coating that reduces heat transfer), allows intimate connection with everything outside, limited only by the garden, timber palings, the neighbour's treetops and the sky. Like the skins of an onion, illusory boundaries give way to illusory boundaries.

Yet there is one definite edge defined by a double brick wall that provides protection from the cold south side, its thermal mass, along with the concrete floor, helping to stabilise internal temperatures. Originally conceived as a stone wall, in brick it becomes a reworking of the material of the existing house, and its exposure on the interior serves to exaggerate the sensation of being outside. Large sliding glass doors completely open out the interior and thus convert this impression into a literal truth on warm, sunny days – the house becomes an open-air pavilion under a broad plane of roof. A slot window above the kitchen bench also slides away, providing, among other things, excellent natural ventilation.

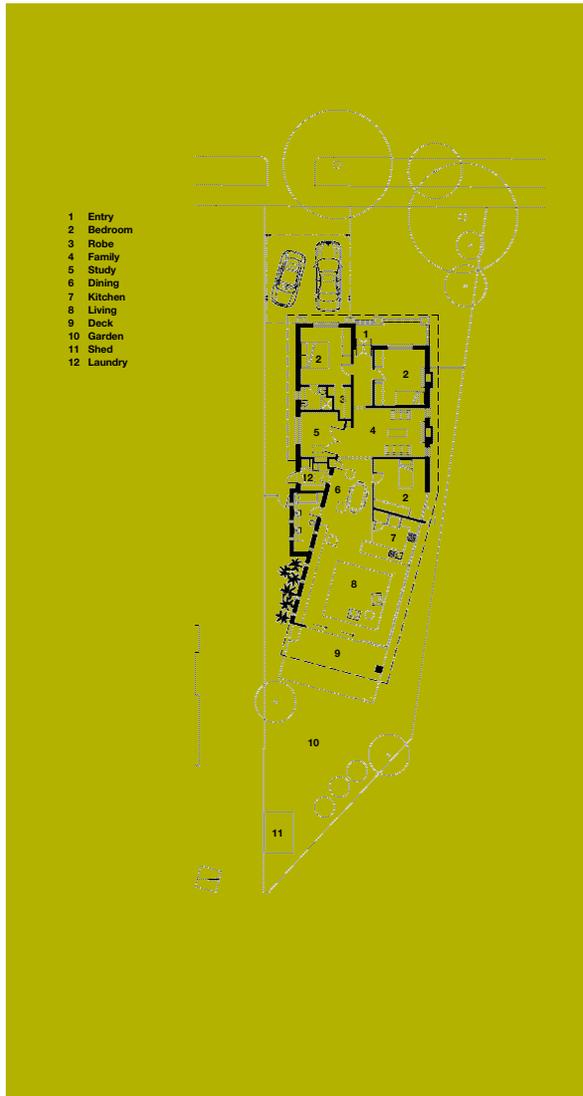
Warm timber joinery details soften brick and concrete surfaces, as do glowing pendant light fittings and the carpet. Other materials reflect details of the existing house. Weatherboards, which in the old house occur as decorative infill under the gable ends, are used as an internal lining to the kitchen bench, as well as an external cladding. They are employed in the traditional lapped manner, even when placed vertically on the rear elevation.

The rear facade presents a powerful and memorable image. Its ingredients: a large cantilever, a single column and a slightly off-balance composition. The eave of the new roof extends over the northern wall, providing summer shading, while allowing low-angled winter sun to enter – not an easy passive solar principle to adhere to on an east-west-running site. It also provides rain protection to the rear barbecue patio, which is a simple extension of the floor. The supporting column occurs near a mitred glass corner – a classic Modernist detail, separating walls from their structural function, making them weather screens that need only support their own weight. The wide roof fascia has expressed fixings, an unexpected detail on the surface of this otherwise minimalist element. But then, David Saunders is not an architect who adheres to conventions.

Rather than being an object for public display, the Caulfield House is more an object for private consumption. The rear yard has become the new front yard – a realm where a Modernist glass pavilion evokes Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House or Philip Johnson's Glass House, but on a modest, affordable scale. Monumentality in the backyard. **TOBY HORROCKS**



**PREVIOUS PAGES:** A square of warm terracotta-coloured carpet defines the living space without enclosing it. **THESE PAGES, ABOVE:** From the rear, the extension appears as a Modernist box. A mitred corner window and a reclaimed ironbark pillar from the Walsh Bay Wharf become striking features. **BELOW:** Viewed through the kitchen's sliding window, the double brick wall provides a definite edge along the house's southern side.



- 1 Entry
- 2 Bedroom
- 3 Robe
- 4 Family
- 5 Study
- 6 Dining
- 7 Kitchen
- 8 Living
- 9 Deck
- 10 Garden
- 11 Shed
- 12 Laundry



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**PRACTICE PROFILE**  
 The practice works on architectural and interior design projects including commercial, residential, installation art, landscape, urban, furniture and hospitality.

**BUILDER**  
 Samra Builders

**CONSULTANTS**  
**Structural engineer**  
 Alex Bursztyjn and Partners  
**Concrete** Mantone Pre-Mix and Pro-Grind  
**Joinery** Mikan Cabinets  
**Geotechnical engineer**  
 Harrook Geotechnical  
**Land surveyor** Calvin F. Raven  
**Town planning** Urbis JHD  
**Building surveyor** Australian Building Permits  
**Interiors, lighting** S2 Design

**PRODUCTS**  
**Roofing** Apex Apdeck 685 concealed-fix deck; R2.5 glasswool batts with 50 mm Stratatex blanket ceiling insulation; R1.5 glasswool batts wall insulation **External walls** Boral Bendigo Sandhurst Red pressed bricks; Bluescope Steel with Zincalume finish, mini-orb **Internal walls** Boral Bendigo Sandhurst Red pressed bricks **Windows** Creative Windows black anodized aluminium frames with low-E glass **Doors** William Russell solid-core doors with stained finish, raised cedar Edwardian door; Gainsborough 9600 Series door handles with 55 mm round rosettes **Flooring** Recycled Baltic pine, polished; 100 mm reinforced polished



concrete; Hylac Trackers 3 mm black studded snakeskin rubber; Tsar Astoria 60 oz wool carpet in Terracotta; Tsar Cafe 60 oz wool carpet in Mat **Lighting** Season Lighting downlights and outdoor lights; Australian Lighting Metro pendants; Clipsal slimline switches and power points  
**Kitchen** Miele wall oven; Simpson dishwasher; Qasair rangehood; Smeg gas hotplate; Plytech aluminium glass door frames; stained hoop pine plywood cabinet doors; Laminex Innovations cabinet highlights in Crafted Copper finish; CaesarStone Night Sky benchtop; Franke Eix621 sink and tap **Bathroom** Granito Oasis Steel Grey tiles; travertine tiles; Laminex Deep Sea first-finish benchtop; stained hoop pine plywood cabinet doors; Englefield Mirage toilet suite; Vitra Bergama and Caroma Harmony basins; Vita Cato chrome shower and basin mixers; Streamline Products Contessa enameled bath; Zucchetti Altia handshower; Streamline Products Gyroline accessories  
**Heating** Brivis gas central heating; Brivis ICE ac unit  
**External elements** Mea Mearin Channel 100 stainless steel drains **Other** Reclaimed ironbark post from Walsh Bay Wharf, Sydney.

#### TIME SCHEDULE

**Design, documentation**

21 months

**Construction** 6 months

#### SITE SIZE

551 m<sup>2</sup>

#### PROJECT COST

\$240,000

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Downes  
& Urban Angles

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Warm lighting and timber joinery soften the house's brick and concrete surfaces. Weatherboards on the front of the kitchen bench recall the materials of the existing house. **THIS PAGE:** Corrugated cladding with a Zinalume finish contrasts with the red bricks on the extension's solid south edge.