



the great wall

A beautiful brick wall weaves the renovation history of this character-filled Melbourne house together.

PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL DOWNES



Left: This Edwardian-style house has real street appeal but it has a very special secret inside.

Right: This renovation marries the old with the new and creates a spectacular space with lots of light.



From the street, you'd never guess what a huge transformation this home has undergone.

As one of five identical Edwardian-style houses which line a street in a south-eastern Melbourne suburb, it started out as a three-bedroom, single-level dwelling and from the front, still looks like that's all it consists of. But, step foot inside the front door and you soon realise that this home has a different story to tell from its neighbours – one that consists of four bedrooms, a study, an expansive light-filled open-plan living area and a completely new second level.

But architect David Saunders from S2 Design was passionate about retaining the charm and features of the original building from the get go.

“That’s always my philosophy when renovating a period home,” says Saunders. “I think that, where possible, the original features should be retained and restored, and

then the new ‘renovation’ should be allowed to contrast with that.

“So we agreed that things like fireplaces, light fittings and architraves would all be allowed to stay in the original part of the building, and that the ceiling height for the new structure would be consistent with the original house so that the two spaces would complement each other well.”

Saunders’ brief? To create a home for a growing family that would provide space and natural light. “The home had a decent orientation, but was cramped and pretty dark indoors, so apart from creating more bedrooms and living space, it was also important to introduce as much natural light as possible, and also provide a good outlook onto the garden.”

As well as maintaining some of the home’s original features, something else that Saunders included to help merge the old with the new is the exposed brick wall, which runs

the length of the open-plan living area. It was a contentious plan but one that Saunders remained committed to making happen.

“Apart from the Baltic pine floorboards which were matched to extend through from the original home to the new space on the ground floor, the brick wall is really the only element which connects the two spaces. It provides warmth and texture, and a real sense of history.” Saunders explains how, if you look at the wall, you can clearly see four distinct sections or panels, three of which are from the original home, reflecting different stages of earlier renovations, and the final panel is Saunders’ addition. “So it’s like a timeline in a way which is a nice touch.”

Originally, the owners were determined to cover the wall, or at the very least paint it, but Saunders eventually managed to talk them around. “I think before the house was completed, it was hard for them to imagine how an old – and new – brick wall would

THE FACTS

Project name Middle Park House
 Architect David Saunders, S2 Design www.s2design.com.au
 ph (03) 9534 9181
 Builder Unique Constructions
 ph (03) 9511 4925
 Structural engineer Ross Greer & Associates ph (03) 9809 1887
 Budget \$300,000
 Landscape design Renata Fairhall Garden Designs
 Time to complete 12 months
 Brick Boral pressed red brick and existing pressed red brick,
 Other materials aluminium composite and galvanised steel panel wall cladding, marine grade plantation plywood wall cladding, plantation plywood wall panels, recycled Baltic pine floor boards, polished finish concrete slab floor, Briggs TruGrain timber veneer

PHOTOGRAPH OF DAVID SAUNDERS, JØRGEN TALHAUG KNUDSEN

Saunders’ brief? To create a home for a growing family that would provide space as well as light.



David Saunders, S2 Design.



Few Edwardian houses offer the light and space evident in this tasteful renovation. About 90 per cent of the original property has been retained with a highlight being the sustainability and environmental qualities of the original brick.



work within a contemporary scheme, and I was constantly having to buy it some time. I'd always be encouraging them to wait a bit longer before making a final decision, even up until a few weeks before they moved in. There was always the option there for them to cover it, but in the end they did decide to stick with it and I'm so glad for that.

"I think particularly for families with small children, exposed face brick walls indoors are a great option to consider because they are so durable – compared to a white wall, there's no danger of marking or damaging it."

Saunders is also drawn to the sustainability and environmental qualities of brick. "Combined with the polished concrete slab in this home, the brick wall provides great thermal mass, but there's also the issue of recycling – it just makes sense to utilise original materials on a renovation wherever you can." In the end, 90 per cent of the existing house was retained and the home's back wall has been curved around slightly so it faces true north, adding to the home's

sustainability factor. "It means the polished concrete floor slab is northern-oriented so it benefits from direct solar heat gain in winter. The bank of north facing windows, double-glazed skylights and clerestory windows, means we've also significantly reduced the dependency on artificial heating and lights."

An ardent advocate of 'green' design, Saunders says he's often asked why he doesn't advertise as an 'environmental architect'. "Because that would be like preaching to the converted," he says. "It's much more satisfying to take clients who aren't necessarily as interested in things like thermal mass or reducing reliance on artificial heating and lighting, and help to educate them. I enjoy that role. And there are always things you can introduce to a project to make it 'greener' whether that's the owner's priority or not. I like to think that by working this way and with clients who aren't necessarily 'green', I'm able to make a difference." 🍷

