

BOWEN SHAUN LOCKYER ARCHITECTS

Words by Aaron Grinter • Photography by Cieran Murphy • Architecture by Shaun Lockyer Architects • Interior Design and Styling by Cedar + Suede
Build by J.H.Dixon • Landscape by Green Care Project • Engineering by Westera Partners





On a verdant Brisbane street lined with jacaranda trees, Bowen unfolds as a fashionable yet perennial expression of living in the subtropics. A renovation and extension of a pre-war Queenslander by Shaun Lockyer Architects and interior designers Cedar + Suede, the project represents a dynamic interaction of the timely and the timeless.

Nestled back into the site on Lower Bowen Terrace, New Farm – a suburb described by Shaun Lockyer as the “ground zero of cool” in Brisbane – Bowen is very much a collaborative affair. The client, who had worked with Shaun Lockyer Architects over many years, enlisted their sister-in-law Carlene Duffy at Cedar + Suede to reimagine the interior design whilst the project architect, Associate Michael Ford at Shaun Lockyer Architects, passionately led the architecture. Then, the clients’ close friend, Sam Dixon of builders J.H.Dixon, “built it like his life depended on it,” says Shaun. The result – a carefully crafted home that bursts with personality and responds to the clients’ nuanced brief – is a testament to this team approach.

“What was important to the client and what they’ve loved about our work is this balance between the quite light and ephemeral nature of Queenslanders, recognising that and honouring that, but also recognising that they wanted a house that has some resilience and permanence to it,” describes Shaun. This is borne out as the lightweight weatherboard character front confidently transforms to a robust solidity at the rear. The delicate white façade, with its single level of ornate bay windows, is a familiar sight. Yet within the home, a more complex and exciting narrative emerges.

The land falls away from the street and, in response, Bowen playfully divides itself over multiple levels, embracing both the topography of the site and the contrast between the old and the new, the light and the heavy. Though the site is a mere 12.8 metres wide, the architects have used these dimensions generously. Stepping inside, one is offered an enticing selection of different levels, light peeking through the open-rise stairs to the room below, producing an unbroken interplay between the different spaces. Moving further within the home, the room feels as though it is opening up to absorb you, 3.8-metre-high proportions extending outwards, creating a cathedral-like volume.

Looking up, the void that passes through the upper levels extends to a towering 8.5 metres, the skylight at the top gleaming light through to the space below. “It’s really lovely theatre, but it also brings light into the deep part of the plan,” Shaun describes. Even though one stands in the middle part of the lower level of the house, the space is soaked in natural light, little vignettes onto the landscape peeking through various openings. The windows at the bench seat are compressed to head height, framing the view to the garden, creating the sense of being immersed in nature even though the tight boundary of the suburban block is almost within touching distance.



The kitchen runs seamlessly into the outdoor area through a large timber sliding door.

One is reminded that this is very much a family home, the client's three young children making considerations – such as a drop area for school bags – a necessity of the design. Equally, it is clear that, though the heritage bones have been respected, this is a home worthy of its trendy locale. The muted heritage façade comes alive with colour and form internally, the finishings all tapping into the contemporary design zeitgeist as blond timber washes into opulent marble and ceramic. Here, the timeless and the timely blended effortlessly by the collaboration between Cedar + Suede and Shaun Lockyer Architects, as Shaun describes – “the collaboration with this house is kind of chasing a timeless architecture, but within the interior that is very much of its time.”

Even so, the design does not take itself too seriously. A self-aware quality puts guests at ease; they can forget their manners and sink languidly into the soft cushioning of the custom leather upholstery curving around the built-in seating. The whole effect is inviting – low, relaxed gentle curves and soft fibres ask one to sit and linger. Pale leather and pink clay tones set

the mood, with Carlene's finishing touches in the main living space, such as the woven Pop and Scott light installation, the green dining chairs and the vibrant lounge settings, completing the scene. Meanwhile, the hues in the kitchen act to both soften and enliven the space, enhancing the effect of the garden peeking through the low window.

The kitchen runs fluidly into the timber frame of the large sliding door, opening the entire side of the room to the outside. The timber continues into the hardwood panelling on the walls of the outside space, creating a seamless continuity between indoor and outdoor, which Shaun describes as “a conscious attempt to try and extend the feeling of furniture and cabinetry from inside to that outside space. So that, rather than feeling one is leaving inside to go outside, there's just a flow of the two.” With the L-shape of the rear extension creating the longest possible axis across the optimal north-east orientation, the large opening admits the sun and breezes whilst the south-west is closed off, defending against the inclement weather from that direction.



Stepping inside, light filters from the levels above, producing an unbroken interplay between the different spaces.



The home connects to the landscape at every opportunity, enabling interior spaces to breathe.



This demonstrates the deep consideration given to the experience of living in the subtropics, which entails the need to open up and let the space breathe. This was the main driver for the clients, who requested “a house that, at every opportunity, connects you back to the landscape,” Shaun recalls. Downstairs, the slope of the site is used to create a built-in seat, offering a vantage over the pool and beyond. Upstairs, the second living area similarly opens to a balcony and sculptural cement planter, gently graduating downwards to provide a softening curve, whilst accommodating the soil depth of trees of different sizes. The effort of the planting and the canopy of the nearby tree is palpable, creating a “lovely, kind of serene, calming counterpoint to a busy, trendy suburb.”

As Shaun reflects, the overall composition of a “heavy structure that both grounds itself and connects you with the landscape” sitting in pleasing contrast to “what is otherwise a very light and transient form of architecture” encompasses Brisbane’s two prevailing architectural styles. Certainly, when exploring the house, one has a feeling of moving through history. With the nostalgic Queenslander opening playfully to a heavier open structure at the rear, the airy concrete outdoor room comes to read as a punctuation mark in this historical narrative – all the while brimming with the energy of daily family life.