

Flow of ideas

Challenges prove a wellspring of creativity

It's always a good sign when, after a major renovation, you can't wait to take on another building project. That's how the owners of this New Farm house felt even before they moved back in six months ago.

It wasn't exactly a straightforward extension and renovation project – it would have been far easier to demolish and rebuild the original three-bedroom worker's cottage, but council character codes dictated otherwise.

The trusses under the front veranda are about all that remains of the original timber. During construction, a natural spring was discovered in the back yard, which meant unforeseeable drainage work. But these "challenges" were redeemed by the fact that the block is 13m wide – a good 3m more than most in the inner city.

"We will never go back to a 10m-wide block," says one of the owners.

"This size block has afforded us a much

more practical house, and practicality is more important to us than glamour."

The extra width gave architect Shaun Lockyer the scope to design a four-bedroom house with three bathrooms, two living areas, a study, double lock-up garage and swimming pool.

"In terms of floor area, it's not as big as you think," Shaun says. "The volume of the void plays a big part in making it feel bigger than it is."

The centrally located void starts where the old house finishes and allows for natural light to stream into the ground-level kitchen, dining and living areas that form an L-shape around the outdoor room next to the pool. Shaun is a stickler for the understated, so the natural light is the most dazzling thing about this house.

"Good taste doesn't have to look expensive," he says. "It's not about how flashy it can be. For example, we tend to go with a matt finish specifically because it's not shiny."

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"Even the two-pac isn't 100 per cent gloss. We try to spend money on areas that will change your life for the better and what you spend beyond that is great, but sometimes you can embellish for embellishment's sake."

The clients say the new layout of the house has improved their life because they have "zones" that will adapt to suit their needs as their three children grow. Each child has a bedroom in the original part of the house, where they share a bathroom. The bedrooms open to a playroom, which is, according to the eldest child, the best part of the house.

"It's got a sliding door so we can close (the room) off, and it's always got sun," says the eldest, not yet 10 years old, but already seeing the benefits of good design.

The middle child likes the playroom's window seat; its vantage point, looking down to the front gate, is perfect for "spying" on incoming visitors.

A walkway connects the children's zone to the parents' area, via a study nook, also with a view of the front gate.

Although the walkway overlooks the kitchen-living area below, it's difficult to turn your gaze downward when the windows at this level offer such commanding views.

Inside the parents' zone, Shaun reveals where he believes he has failed on this project.

"I couldn't convince the clients to install heated towel rails," he says.

"We almost called Shaun during the wet weather earlier this year to admit we wished we'd put them in," one of the clients counters.

"It's not about heated towels," Shaun says.



Before



Before



"It's about dry towels." So what else besides the towel rails will go into the next project for this couple? "As much as I'd love to do it again, I struggle to think of what we would change," says one of them.

"We don't really need to move now, we've got everything we need at our fingertips."

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OPEN HOUSE ... Natural light streams through the new layout. **PHOTOGRAPHS** • Scott Burrows

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