

Happy returns

Combining old and new created the perfect home for a Brisbane couple

During 30 years of working overseas for the United Nations, Brisbane couple Malcolm and Maureen learned to adapt to challenging environments. Life in Bangladesh, Laos, Vietnam and West Africa was thrilling but being on the move meant repeated attempts at making a new home.

Despite a lifetime of upheaval, upon their return to their original Brisbane home, they decided more change was necessary.

"When we got back, we weren't sure whether we would renovate this house or see if there was something else we could buy," Malcolm says. "We started looking around intensively but I thought it would be a nice exercise to try and improve and renovate."

Maureen was slightly hesitant, as she had developed strong connections with a place of cherished memories and inter-war period

charm. "This house always felt nice, I had a lot of problems changing it. I really didn't want to lose how it felt," Maureen says.

So began the task of choosing an architect who was sensitive to these complexities.

"We looked at many houses, in many aspects, in many places and that's when we came across Shaun's work. That is where I could see there was someone who understood how to enhance a Queensland and still keep a sense of space, elegance and charm with a modern sensibility as well," Malcolm says.

Architect Shaun Lockyer says the initial task of assessing the site was informed by the couple's astute appreciation of their surroundings: where the coolest breezes came from, the best angle to capture views of Mt Coot-tha (through the decaying balustrade of the rear timber stairs) and the specific part of the garden to showcase.

From this, Shaun and his team developed



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a design that enhanced the site's existing qualities while repairing the house's functional shortcomings. Where possible, elements of the historical architecture were kept: the roof, facade and ceilings, even architraves, picture rails and vertical joint boards. As an extension to this, a staircase was introduced, along with two bedrooms at the rear and a covered deck. Every addition made was sympathetic to the original architecture.

Upstairs walls between the living room and the sleep-out were removed to increase the sense of openness and allow cooling breezes through the house. So too, the opening between the living and dining space was enlarged. The back wall of the house was replaced by sliding glass, connecting the kitchen and dining space to the new timber deck and creating a visual axis from the front to the back of the house.

A side extension, designed to improve the entry into the living space, also provided a more generous kitchen with a better outlook. From the kitchen sink there are views through the living and dining spaces to the street, the



garden and mountains beyond. The glazed apex of the gable roof above the stove floods the space with natural light and in winter delivers northern sun deep into the interior.

Downstairs, the spaces have a better connection with the garden. In the art studio, two walls slide away to reveal greenery that feels as though it is part of the room. A low garden retaining wall forms an inviting seat and frames the edge of the house. When you sit there you are under the house and on the lawn.

Shaun says the success of the design lies not so much in how the house outwardly appears, but in how it functions. "When people think architecture is an aesthetic pursuit they lose the way. For us, while we care about what things look like, that is not where we start. We think about how things work and the relationship of spaces and people in the spaces and then we



CHALLENGE ... Elements of the historic architecture were maintained. **PHOTOGRAPHS** - Scott Burrows

compose all those things so that they present in a way that is cohesive and attractive," he says.

For Malcolm and Maureen, success is evident in the experience. "I just love it when I come home," Maureen says.

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