

NEW HOMES REN

A journey of discovery

Modernising this courtyard house took 32 design revisions, but one simple decision resolved everything, writes **Jenny Brown**.

IT IS one of the nagging, back-of-the-mind questions that accompanies the exercise of residential renovation: At what point does the expenditure on a large renovation run dangerously close to equalling or exceeding the cost of a total rebuild?

The owners of a mid-century courtyard house at Mount Waverley started with a moderate budget to cover their plans of tweaking some of the internal spaces in their Modernist home. It is in an area that would have been the height of residential fashion in suburban Melbourne in the mid-1960s.

When, several years later, they emerged with a four-bedroom house that had been basically rebuilt behind the original two rooms of the front facade, "the original budget had probably more than tripled", the owners say.

"Actually, in the end (we) didn't want to know what it was costing because we had made the decision that we wanted to be here for a long

time so that we might as well make a house we would enjoy. I'm glad we spent the (extra) money."

After finding local architect Mark MacInnis and concurring on a mutual appreciation for the Californian style of Modernism, they started generating a design to rationalise a handsome house with an unfortunate "mass of little rooms" at its core.

The prolonged design argy-bargy, which, MacInnis says, eventually went through a total of 32 design revisions in two years, kept eddying into a vague feeling of dissatisfaction for both parties.

Then a decision to move the old kitchen, which had looked to the front street, to the central wing of the house, in order to look out to the northerly oriented courtyard with its trapezoid pool, resolved everything.

"Suddenly," the owners say, "it all fell into place and after that it became smooth sailing," albeit with a much-hiked expenditure sheet.

Although the genesis of the plans



The open-plan kitchen looks out to the courtyard.

NOVATION



The original grey concrete bricks helped keep the flavour of the original house.

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took 18 months longer than expected, MacInnis patiently trusted the process because he believes "if neither architect or client is 100 per cent happy, there probably is something wrong with the design. So you sit with the idea until your perspectives change."

"Having time to look," he says, often serves the outcome well "because the (on paper) design is so critical and because once it does get built, you can't really change things."

Being respectful of the original house and liking the proportions of the four-square living room that looks through picture windows to a golf course anyway, the architect opted to leave the front wing basically as it was. Even the unadorned grey concrete brickwork had appeal.

"The bricks had a crudeness and we deliberately kept them to maintain a balance in the period character of the house," he says. "You've got to be careful not to over-refine too much and kick the life and character out of a building like this."

It's certainly convincing: from the mid-'60s street, the house looks like it has been merely given a fresh lick of grey render and a newly landscaped garden entry to emphasise a spectacular pink-limbed

probably a seedling when the house was first raised. MacInnis sees the tree as a "gorgeous" adornment.

Behind this front wing, which he calls "Brady Bunch Modernism", the house was stripped to its back walls. The whole centre of the squared-up, C-shaped wings disappeared back to a concrete slab and arose again as an

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ONE OF THE OWNERS

open-plan kitchen and a casual living area that receives plenty of sunlight but is moderated climactically by sustainable features such as double-glazing.

The return back wing that embraces the courtyard contains upstairs and downstairs bedrooms and three bathrooms. The main suite

private. "I can lie in bed and look at trees and sky without being seen," one of the owners says.

The Mount Waverley makeover is, in effect, a new house on the old footprint and apart from its overt shape, the architect has made the renewal so convincing because he heeded the original scaling.

"All the proportions came from the old house," he says. "The walls are where they are because they felt right and this means a commonality of scale has been used throughout the building. There was something very right about the original footprint of this courtyard house. All it really needed was reorganising."

A big budget blowout was the real surprise of the reorganisation, yet one of the owners says: "We wouldn't want to change a thing now and that is such a compliment to Mark ... And to be honest, I knew all along that it was never going to be either a cheap or a simple renovation."

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