

# Lovable union

## Instilling modern verve in a traditional home wins hearts

**T**hey may not have found their dream house to love, but the owners of this Chelmer home have come to love the house they're in. For 18 months now, they've been happily ensconced in this updated Queenslander cottage, even though their hearts had been set on living in something quite different.

"For a long time we looked for a cavity brick house in St Lucia," says one of the owners. "We wanted cavity brick because we could make it into a very modern house, but when nothing came up, and we had been renting for two years, we realised we could be waiting forever."

"When this house came up, we thought, 'What the hell, we're used to Queenslanders, but we'll put something modern on the back.'"

Architect Chris Bligh was asked to blend the traditional "timber and tin" architecture of the home with a new extension, a process helped by

the fact that the 1087sq m block has two street frontages. To avoid compromising the strong street presence of the original cottage, Chris placed the new extension at the back, along the southern boundary.

"The relatively blank facade of the extension effectively becomes a fence along the second street frontage," he says. "It felt OK to do that because the street is almost like a service lane in which there are a lot of other wall-like fences."

Built to accommodate the clients' adult children when they visit, the extension includes a double carport and storage area, two bedrooms, a bathroom, laundry and living area, which is presided over by a study on a mezzanine level.

A "slab on ground" wing, the extension sits lower than the original house, which was built on stumps in traditional Queenslander style.

On one side, the extension is a fence to the street, but it also encloses the backyard,



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creating a walled garden. By reducing the size of the existing pool, Chris regained some of the backyard, which has been terraced to meet the rear deck.

Sitting on the edge of the deck, with feet touching the ground, is one owner's favourite place in the house.

"That's the nice thing about having a deck close to the ground, you have a real intimacy and immediacy with the garden," says Chris, who notes that the deck was added in a previous (not particularly well done) extension to the original house, as was some floor area out from the current kitchen. Chris' job was to unify these disjointed additions with the original house.

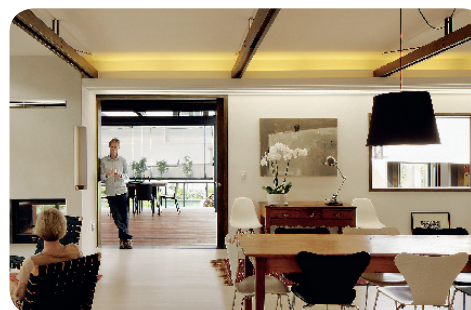
"The problem with extending Queenslanders is the roof line," he says. "You tend to be limited by the gutter height of the original building. In this case, we've exposed the trusses (in the previous extension) to make the roof as thin as possible, which pushes the ceiling up higher."

The exposed beams also segue into the modern theme the owners wanted.

In the laundry, Chris has left the fibre cement cladding unpainted, giving a raw, urban feel in contrast with traditional Queensland details.

The subtle industrial aesthetic continues with rusted steel plates around the double-sided fireplace, which opens outside to the deck and inside to the living area in the main house. Steel plates also appear on the top of the built-in desk in the study, and in the kitchen on the base of the concrete island bench, creating a "piece of furniture in itself", Chris says.

"The problem with a lot of new building work is that it's actually hard to get a sense of



the hand that went into making it," Chris says. "That's why in this house we've introduced these handmade elements: the concrete benches, steelwork, exposed trusses and timber. They soften the new spaces with a language and scale that are more in keeping with the old."

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