

Retro revival

An addition to a 1930s house is inspired by the past, writes Cindy Lord

A CRISP wind of change is blowing through the suburbs, ushering in a truly modern approach to home renovation.

It's a retro revival with a new wave of architects drawing on the modernist 1950s for inspiration.

Take the renovation of Paul and Andrea Bidwell's 1930s home at Hawthorne by architect Chris Bligh.

The addition is reminiscent of 1950s architecture. Its cuboid form, tall wall of glass, white batten screen and brown

rough-hewn plywood walls, reflect an architectural shift away from spindly to strong sculptural form.

"There's a general mood these days to be more minimalist and pared back," Chris says of the crisp box-like room.

"But things are more hybrid, less strict than in the '50s. There's a more relaxed feel, with the combining of timber with materials such as glass and steel."

The use of timber battens and dark-stained, rough-hewn plywood, with its tactile grain, helps tie the

slick bits in with the old timber house, while lending a retro feel, says Chris.

Andrea and Paul were keen for the renovation to reflect contemporary thinking in architecture.

Seven years ago, they swapped an architect-designed timber and tin house at West End for this unrenovated family home on a larger piece of land.

Built in the 1930s, the house had been home to a radio station in its early years, and retained all its original features. "We decided if we were going to buy an old

house we would buy one in its basic form," says Andrea. "We didn't want to pay for other people's renovation mistakes when we could make our own!"

Immediately after moving in, a kitchen, dining room and deck were added. The garden-loving owners set the extension down half a level to get more connection with the yard. But the house still suffered from lack of space and poor layout, and their frustration levels continued to grow.

"There were times when we felt like dumping the whole house in the river and starting again," Andrea says.

Financially, this was not a realistic option, but renovating again was.

This time they asked Chris to add on a new living room and remodel the deck. Again they wanted a strong connection to the garden.

Chris' immediate response was to project the house into the gently sloping yard to make best use of the established trees and leafy outlook. A glass balustrade allowed unimpeded views.



On deck: glass balustrading allows unimpeded views of the garden, *left*; the front porch has been closed off and is now a small bedroom, *right*

Andrea says they were initially hesitant about the idea of glass balustrading thinking it was "too groovy" for them.

But now the glass barrier is a key aspect of the design.

"You can get away with it because of its strong form," says Chris. "And because it comes out beyond the house, the glass balustrading doesn't conflict."

A second deck space, enclosed by a built-in bench, is more of a "nest" space, a place to sit around the table in summer.

Chris says by giving each space a different feel, the house appears bigger.



essentials

Architect: Bligh Graham, 3369 0244
Budget: \$80,000

features

- ▶ Mesh and galvanised steel arbour
- ▶ Toughened glass balustrading
- ▶ Shugg windows, aluminium sliding doors
- ▶ White batten screens over windows
- ▶ Rough-sawn plywood walls
- ▶ Outside lights recessed in concrete path
- ▶ Recycled wooden sliding doors

The front porch has been turned from a circulation space to a small bedroom, and the old lounge room has become a children's playroom.

The integration of the house into the garden was finally completed by the mounding of earth up to the back stairs.

"Paul has always wanted a hill, so the kids could roll down it," says Andrea.

"I was sceptical (at first), but now that it's finished it's amazing."




Connection: a glass balustrade encloses a deck on the cube-like extension; rough-sawn plywood and a timber screen add texture
home Saturday, August 2, 2003

Pictures: Mark Cranitch



Clockwise from left: Andrea Bidwell with her daughter, Sophie, 4; a timber deck is a great place for outdoor entertaining; a covered walkway directs visitors to the rear of the home; low-level windows and huge sliding glass doors flood the living room with light; timber floors create a flow-on effect through the rooms

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