

Front up

A multipurpose room proves an all-round winner for an inner-city house

This is a story about one room, and the positive difference it has made for a family of two adults and two teenage children. The 6m by 3.5m space is an addition to a four-bedroom Queenslander house in New Farm. It was designed by architect Chris Bligh, who also worked with the family on a previous renovation that saw two bedrooms, a bathroom and rumpus room built in downstairs.

The value of the new room lies in its flexibility: it is a music room and home office, future guest room and current veranda room. It has improved the house's street appeal and made a two-car garage possible in one of Brisbane's most densely populated suburbs. All this was achieved without impinging on the spacious rear garden of the 800sq m lot.

"The clients needed more floorspace, but also wanted to keep their big back yard, which

in New Farm is quite an asset," Chris says. "The front of the house had an ugly gable on it, with really odd proportions. However, there was also a decent setback from the front, so the obvious thing to do was use that setback to add a room, under which we could build in a double garage."

The room's prominent position at the front of the house called for a careful choice of building materials. Chris wanted to acknowledge the character details of the Queenslander, while still differentiating between old and new.

"Even though it's a contemporary plug-on to the Queenslander, the addition doesn't scream out at you," Chris says.

The original house is clad in timber, so it was an obvious choice for Chris to use the traditional material of weatherboards on the exterior of the addition. But while the old house has vertical boards painted a fawn shade, the new boards have a natural stain, are wider and



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run horizontally. There's no gable on the new room, but the traditional window hoods have been included, albeit in a more modern way.

Below the weatherboards are the concrete walls and a translucent roller door that separates the garage from the room upstairs. Even in the utilitarian garage Chris has included a reference to traditional materials. The concrete is imprinted with a pattern that subtly mirrors the weatherboards above.

"The concrete is a contemporary material, but the pattern gives it a textural quality of timber grain that ties in with the wood grain of the weatherboards," he says. "It's more expensive, but looks better than having a wall of sheer concrete."

Chris has also dispensed with the bland by using translucent material for the garage door. During the day, the material takes on a soft, almost greenish hue, and by night, glows like a lantern. This kind of aesthetic appeal is what Chris refers to when he says the choice of material for the garage door "gives something back to the street".

Upstairs inside the room, the walls are lined with slotted plywood.

This material is handy for two reasons. One, it's good for acoustics and sound insulation. Black lining behind the plywood adds a layer



STREET CRED ... Textured finishes add interest. PHOTOGRAPHS • Scott Burrows

for absorbing sound. Two, you can hang pictures or musical instruments from the slots.

When music practice is over, open the blinds and slide back the windows and suddenly the room feels like a deck; not a bad place to have your home office. In flows the breeze and out goes your gaze to lush garden foliage and a pretty New Farm street scene. As Chris says, this room is like the traditional front veranda, where you would go

to escape the summer heat, find the winter sun and watch the world pass by.

"The clients were keen on having the house engage with the street," Chris says. "Again, it's about the degree of adaptability: the room can change according to the weather and privacy required, while still having that nice Queensland feel to it."

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