

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2006

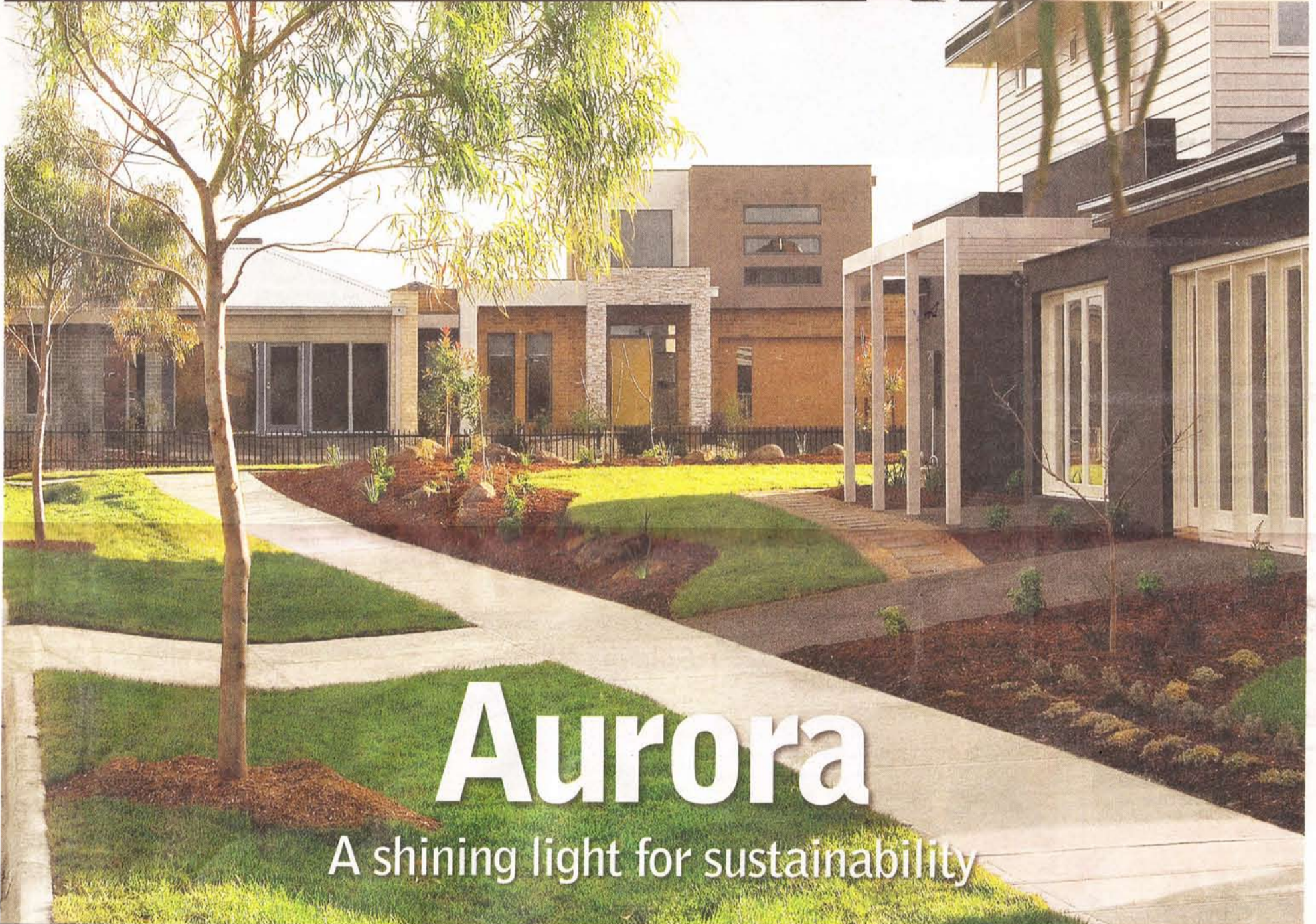
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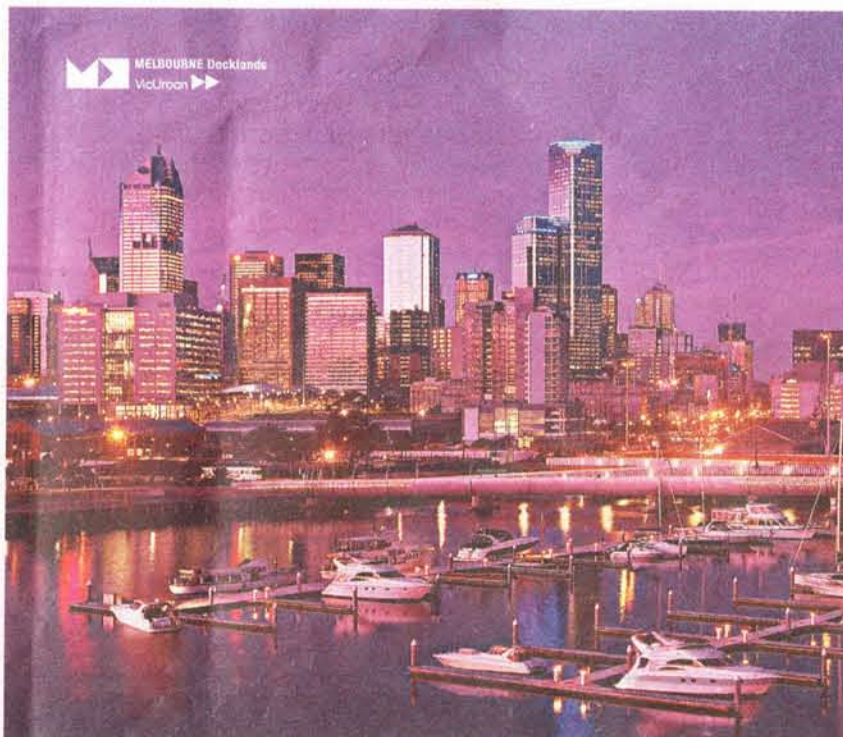
**PRIVATE  
PROPERTY  
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(T5) 

SMART IDEAS

STEP UP

The problem that became an opportunity. The floor leading to the main ensuite bathroom had to be raised to incorporate plumbing. Now, the stone steps with recessed lighting make up a grand entrance to a luxurious bathroom.



KITCHEN

Channels carved into the pale Carrara marble create a draining board beside the sink. The splashback is zinc and the dishwasher and fridge are hidden behind cupboard doors.



STAIRS

The exquisite blackbutt timber from Bowens used for the stair treads and floor comes in planks about 25 centimetres wide and about 3 centimetres thick. A light lime wash softens the colour. Detailing on the stair was kept simple to show off the timber.



Casement windows and a window seat replace the external door. The breakfast area doubles as a study.



PICTURE: SHANNON McGRATH

# Reborn on two levels

Seventy years later, this house works efficiently, writes **Beverley Johanson**.

**D**URING construction of this Toorak house in the 1930s, the owners had a change of heart, or a change of fortune, and what was to be a mansion with a contemporary nod to French Provincial style became two strata-title homes.

As expected, subdivision during building did not result in two dwellings with perfect floor plans; rather there were awkward areas in the interiors, lack of light in some rooms and some common areas.

Architect Matt Gibson of Matt Gibson a+d, commissioned to renovate one of the residences, describes it as being a dark, cold and introverted house with "an ambiguous layout over two levels".

Originally the ground floor consisted of a bedroom, garage, and a shared laundry, toilet, plant room and courtyard.

In a complex adjustment of title that must have caused bureaucratic headaches and contributed to the 1½ years' time span of the project, Gibson's clients purchased the common areas from their neighbour.

The aim was to reconfigure the first floor to function more pleasurably and efficiently and to connect the ground floor to the life of the house. There is now a generous living space opening to the rear courtyard and this has a kitchenette, banquette seating for summer dinner parties and wine storage. The rest of the rejuvenated ground floor is guest accommodation.

## An alcove is reminiscent of the thick walls of old Gallic houses.

"We did not add much in terms of the footprint of the house, but did a lot of rejigging of the interior and a complete refurbishment," says Gibson whose architecture and interior design firm won Best Emerging Practice at the 2005 DIA National Interior Design awards..

On the first floor, formal living areas and bedrooms were retained in their original position,

but the dark and isolated kitchen at the rear of the house, a room nearby that was used for storage and an enclosed staircase were opened up to the light.

Now there is a stylish breakfast room adjoining the kitchen that doubles as a home office. With banquette seating and pelmet lighting, it has something of a cafe atmosphere.

Gibson replaced the enclosed staircase with a simple spiral staircase with a wrought-iron balustrade that uses less space and gives a lighter, more open feeling.

The kitchen is pale, sleek and practical with Carrara marble benchtops, zinc splashbacks reminiscent of French bars and matt and satin-finish stainless steel..

An external staircase at the end of the kitchen, leading down to the courtyard, was removed and the doorway made into a casement window, similar to those in the rest of the house. References to the house's mildly French heritage have been sprinkled here and there and a window-seat alcove here is remi-

niscient of the thick walls of old Gallic houses. Storage is incorporated in the walls and under the seat and cupboard doors detailed with classic framing.

"This project is a bit more embellished than our usual work. Our interiors tend to be very clean lines," says Gibson who worked on the house with interior decorator Ambuja Hunt from Stuart Adamson decorating. "We were asked to keep this quite classic to retain a lot of the flavour of the existing house."

Ensuites to the main bedrooms were redesigned. The main ensuite has become luxurious with limestone, marble and Macassar ebony veneer. With no external window, it now has a lineal skylight spanning the length of one wall.

In a deviation from the pale contemporary lines, the powder room has a more moody atmosphere with strong references to the house's early days with dark timber and traditional fittings.

Contact Matt Gibson a+d, phone 9419 6677

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