

# HOUSES

THE RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

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DESIGNING  
THE DETAILS  
CLEVER IDEAS FOR  
DISTINCTIVE HOMES

HECKER PHELAN & GUTHRIE IN PROFILE  
SCULPTURAL TALES BY PETER McLISK



ADDING ON: REFINED RENOVATION  
**YEARNING FOR FURNITURE?**  
THE LATEST PIECES + NEW FABRICS





# expanded space

Bawa-inspired courtyards add vigour to this restoration and extension of a narrow Victorian worker's cottage by Matt Gibson A+D.

**Story by Christopher Moore Photography by John Wheatley**

**WHEN ARRIVING** to tour a professionally designed house, it's always fun as a design writer to try and guess which house in the street is the house in question, without knowing the street number. Usually it's not too difficult – no matter where I've travelled to tour a house, the subject is normally conspicuous by the evidence of an architectural touch. When that house is a single-fronted worker's cottage in a heritage-protected street, though, the task becomes a little more difficult.

Designer Matt Gibson has completed many alterations and additions in these types of suburbs, but even so, he has managed to make his influence perceptible from the facade. His method? A carefully selected colour for the front door. Even in this Albert Park street in Melbourne's bayside area, where the Victorian-era stock is repeated and barely discerned, the creamy facade punctuated by a glossy, vibrant gold front door announces Matt's influence.

It is here, at the front door, that the designer establishes a sunny seaside palette of colours that serves to mesh this project together and connect the spaces within. The range of hues is limited to three, but their execution within the house caught the eye of the Dulux Colour Award judging panel last year, which awarded the project Best Residential Interior. From front door to floor tiles, banquette detail to joinery, Matt has an innate sense of palette and materiality, as well as a happy knack for expanding space both physically and visually.

Although he hasn't deliberately set out to court these kinds of houses, Matt has made something of a specialty of this type of project. It's not difficult to see why owners of these houses are keen to update them – typically, single-fronted inner-city cottages are too small for today's family lifestyles, but they're often in sought-after locations. Rather than move to a bigger house in a removed suburb, they renovate and extend. Enter Matt Gibson.

This house is typical of the old worker's cottage in this area, and the designer has countered the lack of space and the long, thin block by integrating two courtyards into the program. The first is located in the middle of the house and acts as an internal breathing space that punctuates the structure. It marries the front half of the house – the original house, largely retained and renovated – with the back, a two-level structure that helps make this a comfortable and accommodating family home.

The internal courtyard has sliding glass doors that pull away to create a seamless indoor-outdoor room. On the south side of the space, a small garden has been installed and, beyond that, a full-height mirror that visually expands the space. It's one of Matt's oft-used

devices to employ reflective surfaces in this fashion. For the visitor, there is a charming moment as you enter one of these expanded spaces and it gradually dawns on you that the person standing on the other side of that courtyard is in fact yourself. Timber decking has been used both in the courtyard and in the interstitial space that adjoins it, furthering the seamless quality that is emblematic of this house.

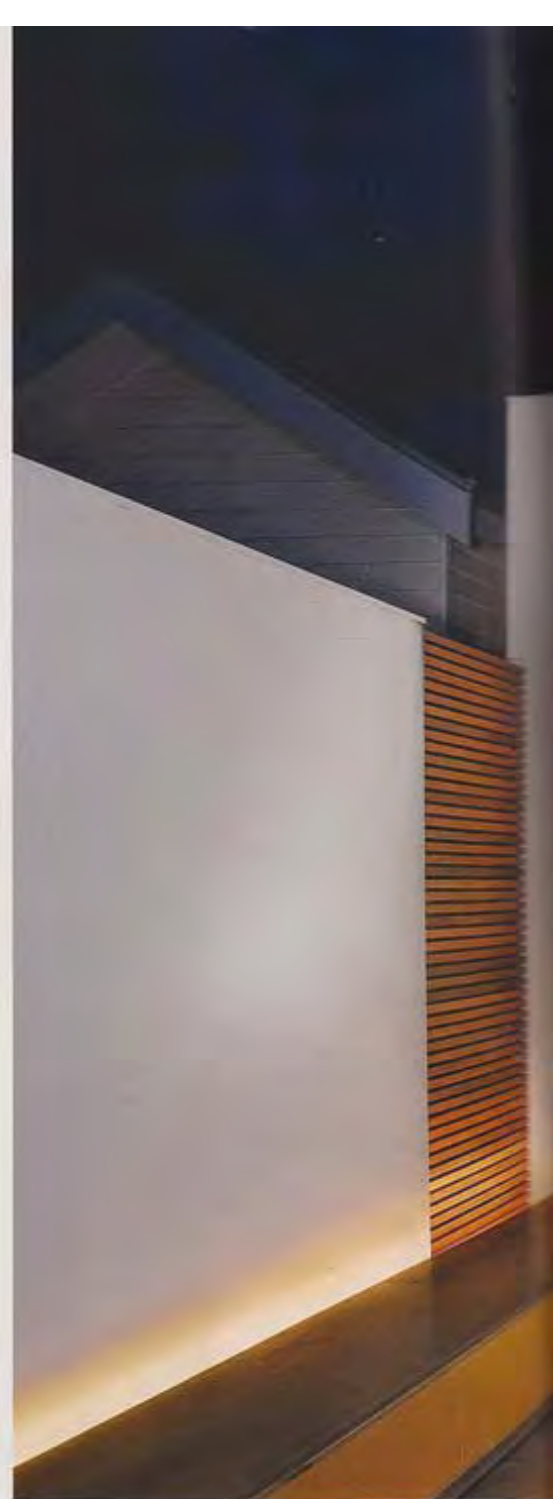
The structure at the rear houses the kitchen and living area downstairs and the main bedroom and ensuite upstairs. To say that this volume has been punctuated by windows is an understatement – upstairs, light floods the rooms via perfectly located skylights, slot windows, sashless windows and sliding glass doors. Uplighting has been judiciously employed throughout to give the house a warm mood in the evening. In suburbs such as this one, where houses sit cheek-by-jowl and issues of over-looking and over-shadowing are of utmost import, Matt has crafted a light-filled, airy house with a two-level rear volume, where no-one can see in and you have to work hard to see into anyone else's backyard. It's these details that aren't immediately obvious to the visitor but, considerately designed and finely executed, they tell of a designer who values a house's amenity. True to Matt's stated edict of "extracting every last millimetre" from the narrow confines of this house, a small and beautifully detailed study has been installed at the top of the stairs.

Downstairs, the kitchen and living area are abutted by the two courtyards and feel generously proportioned. Visual distraction is minimized, and all the joinery in the house, from the bedroom cupboards to the kitchen storage and the crafted wall that battens the stairs, is a minimalist affair. A linear banquette runs from inside the living room to outside in the rear courtyard and also houses the fireplace and television. This piece of joinery looks like an in-situ concrete structure, but it is in fact fibro-cement sheet coloured to look like concrete and accented with a golden accent colour that reflects that of the front door. As a design element, it draws the eye from inside to out, lengthening the apparent dimensions of the volume. Its construction also mitigated the need for an expensive concrete pour, rendering a luxury look with an eye to the budget.

In this house, Matt has evolved rather than revolutionized his design signature. The subtle and appropriate use of colour, the clever and varied use of available floor space, the deceptions of perception via mirrors, windows and artificial lighting all add up to a designer well versed in the mysteries of mood and utility. H

**PREVIOUS PAGES:** A central courtyard separates old house from new house. Mirrors amplify the space and light. **OPPOSITE:** A mirrored island bench continues the reflective theme inside. The kitchen's minimalist joinery has been installed to reduce visual distraction.

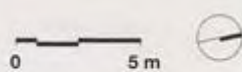




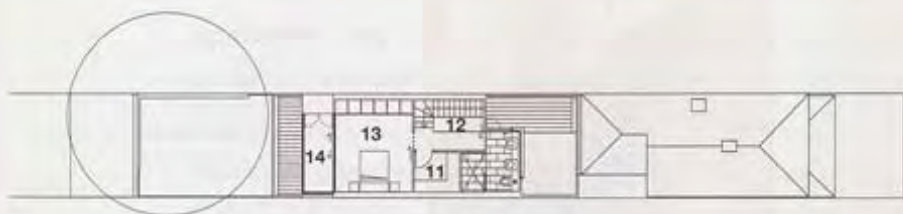
- 1 Front courtyard
- 2 Entry
- 3 Bedroom
- 4 Laundry
- 5 Sun court
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Dining
- 8 Living
- 9 Private open space
- 10 Garage
- 11 Walk-in robe
- 12 Study
- 13 Master bedroom
- 14 External deck



Ground level



LEFT: Subtle colours combine with marble and timber in the open-plan kitchen and living zone.  
RIGHT: A concrete-look banquette flows from the living area into the rear courtyard, joining the spaces.



Upper level



Section



#### DESIGNER

**Matt Gibson A+D**  
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#### PRACTICE PROFILE

The practice engages in residential, retail, commercial and hospitality projects.

#### PROJECT TEAM

Matt Gibson, Anna Maritz

#### BUILDER

MMD Constructions

#### CONSULTANTS

**Engineer** S & L Design  
**Landscaping** Client  
**Joinery** Anton Gerner Furniture

#### PRODUCTS

**Roofing** Flat metal deck, Colorbond 'Woodland Grey'; Custom Orb in same for the existing structure  
**External walls** Existing weatherboards; rendered fibre-cement sheet; courtyard wall painted Dulux 'Hog Bristle' **Internal walls** Existing walls painted Dulux 'Antique White USA' and 'Hog Bristle'; new walls painted Dulux 'Vivid White' **Windows** Glazed bifold and slider panels to rear dwelling  
**Doors** Existing Victorian 'cricket bat' door, painted Dulux 'Sunshine Surprise'; glazed sliding and bifold doors to rear dwelling  
**Flooring** Blackbutt floorboards, finished in clear satin polyurethane; limestone concrete pavers; Godfrey Hirst Sussex 'taupe' carpet; limestone tiles to ensuite  
**Lighting** Masson; Famco **Kitchen** Fleece sanitaryware; Carrara marble benchtops; white 2-pac polyurethane paint finish to cupboards; Symonite veneered MDF **Bathroom** White 2-pac polyurethane paint finish; Carrara marble **Climate control** Jetmaster open fireplace; reverse cycle ducted a/c **External elements** Merbau decking **Other** Aluminium louvre privacy screen

#### FLOOR AREA

200 m<sup>2</sup>

#### PROJECT COST

\$550,000

#### TIME SCHEDULE

**Design, documentation** 14 months  
**Construction** 9 months

**THIS PAGE:** The new volume has been added to the rear of the existing Victorian worker's cottage. A limited colour palette has been used to link the two structures.