

INSIDE

ANNUAL RENOVATOR'S GUIDE

**RENOVATE, REVAMP
AND REBUILD**
DESIGN SOLUTIONS
FOR EVERY HOME

PERSONAL HANG-UPS
CREATIVE PROJECTS
FOR WALLS & WINDOWS

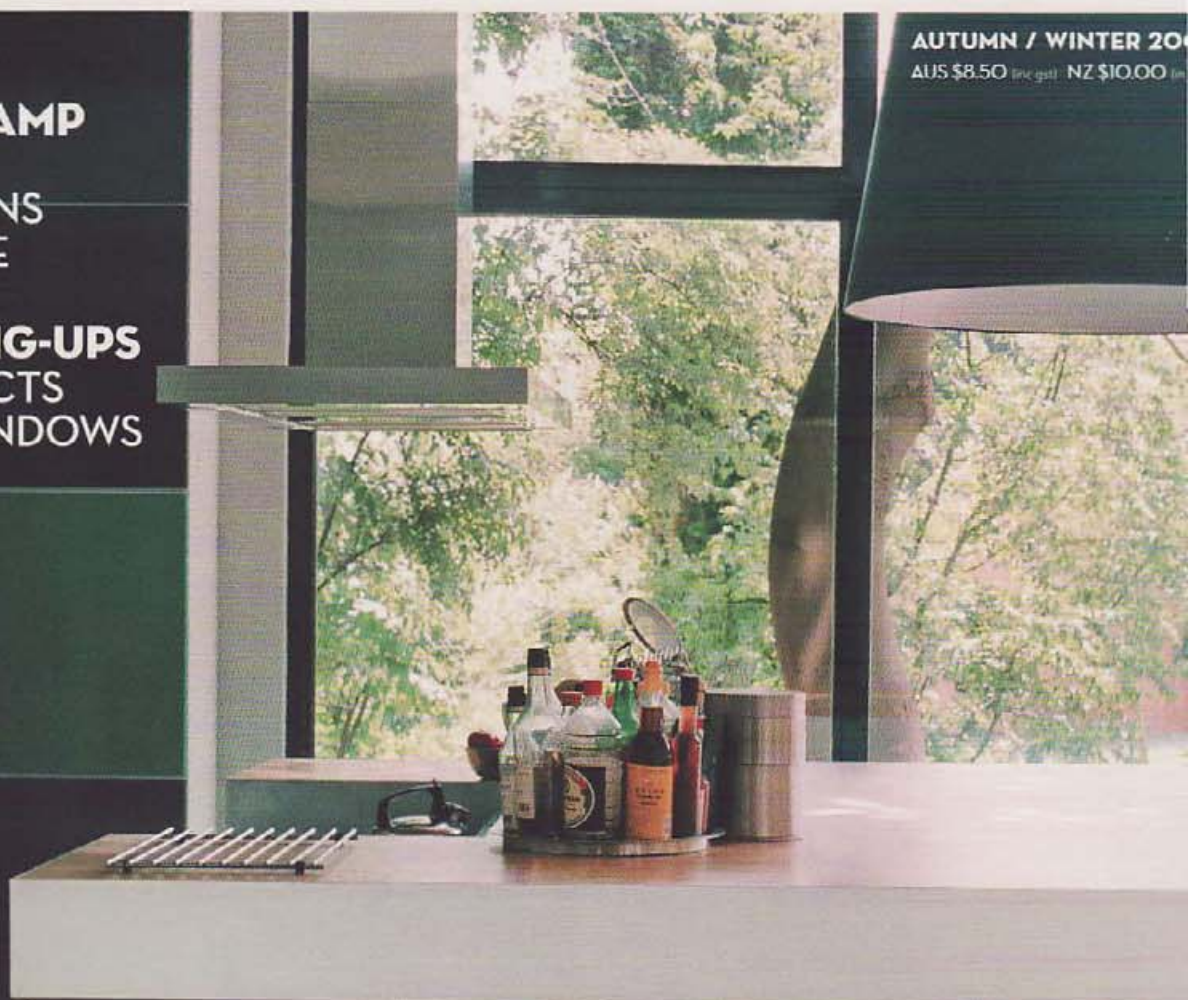
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KITCHENS &
BATHROOMS
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PLUS: YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO PAINTING WALLS AND CHOOSING FLOORS

BEHIND THE FACADE

WHEN A HERITAGE LISTING ON A MELBOURNE PROPERTY PREVENTED A COMPLETE REBUILD, THE DESIGNER CHOSE TO CREATE A MODERN INTERIOR TO ACCENTUATE THE HOME'S ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURE

WORDS **RACHELLE UNREICH** PHOTOGRAPHS **LISA COHEN** STYLING **MEGAN MORTON**





Designer Matt Gibson not only updated a rundown Victorian terrace, he also designed the dining table and chairs, as well as the coffee table in the living room. "We wanted to keep a clean, minimal look throughout," says Matt. The panelled feature wall disguises the stairs on the other side and provides storage space behind several doors.

RENOVATION BRIEF

NEEDS THE CLIENT WANTED TO SUBDIVIDE THE EXISTING PROPERTY AND DEMOLISH THE PART OF THE BUILDING THAT WASN'T HERITAGE-LISTED. HE ALSO WANTED TO RENOVATE THE BUILDING TO INCORPORATE THREE BEDROOMS, TWO BATHROOMS, A LARGE, GROUND-FLOOR ENTERTAINING AREA, AND A SECOND LIVING AREA UPSTAIRS.

ISSUES A PLANNING AND BUILDING PERMIT WAS PASSED ON FROM THE PREVIOUS OWNER, ALLOWING THE CONSTRUCTION OF TWO PRECAST CONCRETE DWELLINGS ADJACENT TO THE HERITAGE-LISTED, BLUESTONE FRONTED BEDROOM. "THE HERITAGE PART MEANT THAT WE DIDN'T HAVE AS MUCH CREATIVE FREEDOM AS USUAL," SAYS DESIGNER MATT GIBSON. "WE HAD TO ADHERE TO CERTAIN PARAMETERS."

OPPORTUNITIES THE RESTRICTIONS LED TO A UNIQUE RESULT. MATT GAVE THE PRECAST ENVELOPE A SLEEK, MODERN INTERIOR AND REFURBISHED THE OLD BLUESTONE BUILDING WITH A NEW BUT CLEARLY VICTORIAN INTERIOR. COMBINING THE TWO VERY DIFFERENT STYLES ALLOWED ONE TO ACCENTUATE THE OTHER.

Melbourne designer Matt Gibson loves a challenge, and a Victorian house owned by a friend certainly provided that. "It was a total dump," says Matt, who has his own firm, Matt Gibson A+D. "It used to be a squat and was decrepit and run down."

The fact that the home was in such bad condition wasn't too much of an issue, as Matt's brief included demolishing most of the existing building. The only problem was the heritage listing on the front bedroom. Music personality Molly Meldrum, a neighbour, had made front-page news in a campaign to have the Richmond building heritage-listed. This meant that Matt's work on the building could either make him a hero or turn out to be a publicity disaster.

"As a planning and building permit had already been passed, we could go ahead and construct two precast concrete dwellings," explains Matt. "However, these were adjacent to a beautiful bluestone-fronted bedroom, which couldn't be touched. The problem was how to make these two elements work with each other without looking like they were competing – a heritage cottage versus a factory complex."

But what could have been a difficult →

The Symonite finish of the kitchen cabinets (**this page**) is normally used on high-rise buildings, but designer Matt Gibson (**opposite bottom**) has used it here as a joinery material. "Light shines on it and it gives a nice sheen," he says. It was also a cost-effective finish. In the living area (**opposite**), large glass doors can be opened during the day to blend inside and out, while a fireplace gives the room warmth at night. A painting by Anna Gibson displays a subtle palette in keeping with the room.



experience for Matt soon became a dream: the owner gave him carte blanche to do whatever he pleased. "He just said, 'Make it look good!'" says Matt. The owner's brief was simple: he wanted the existing building renovated to include three bedrooms and a large, flexible, ground-floor entertaining area.

"The biggest challenge was working out how to deal with the old and the new," says Matt. But it also provided an opportunity. "I thought, 'Why not give the precast envelope a sleek and clean-lined interior, and refurbish the old bluestone building with a new but clearly Victorian interior?'"

"For me, there was excitement in the junction of the two languages, and how one could play off and accentuate the other. What we've done is clearly provide a distinction between the two. Hopefully, we meld them, but at the same time show what's old and what's new. So there's a bit of a story going on as you walk through the home."

Mission accomplished. From the moment

you enter the bluestone exterior, it's clear that this isn't your regular period-home renovation. The front bedroom is a sleek take on traditional Victoriana, with mouldings on the ceilings and an old-world fireplace. But keep walking and it's as if H.G. Wells himself pressed a time-machine button: the door to the past closes, and the house enters the present, complete with metallic finishes, recessed lighting and shadow lines, all blending in an open-plan space that combines kitchen, dining area, living room and paved courtyard.

The transition from one century to another is made easy thanks to the echo of neutral colours in both areas. It also helps that the modern addition has been infused with warmth: a gas fireplace centres the lounge room and incandescent pelmet lights frame the kitchen, adding their own golden glow. The timber floor is burnished with a Black Japan stain, providing contrast to the expanse of white walls. The Kitchen and

lounge joinery are both finished with panels of bronze-metallic Symonite, which change hue as they pick up reflected light.

Details lie in elements that turn out to be surprisingly functional, too. A panelled feature wall dominating the kitchen/dining space neatly masks the staircase, and some of its panels open up to reveal cupboard space. Mirrored edging at the top and bottom give the wall a sensation of floating.

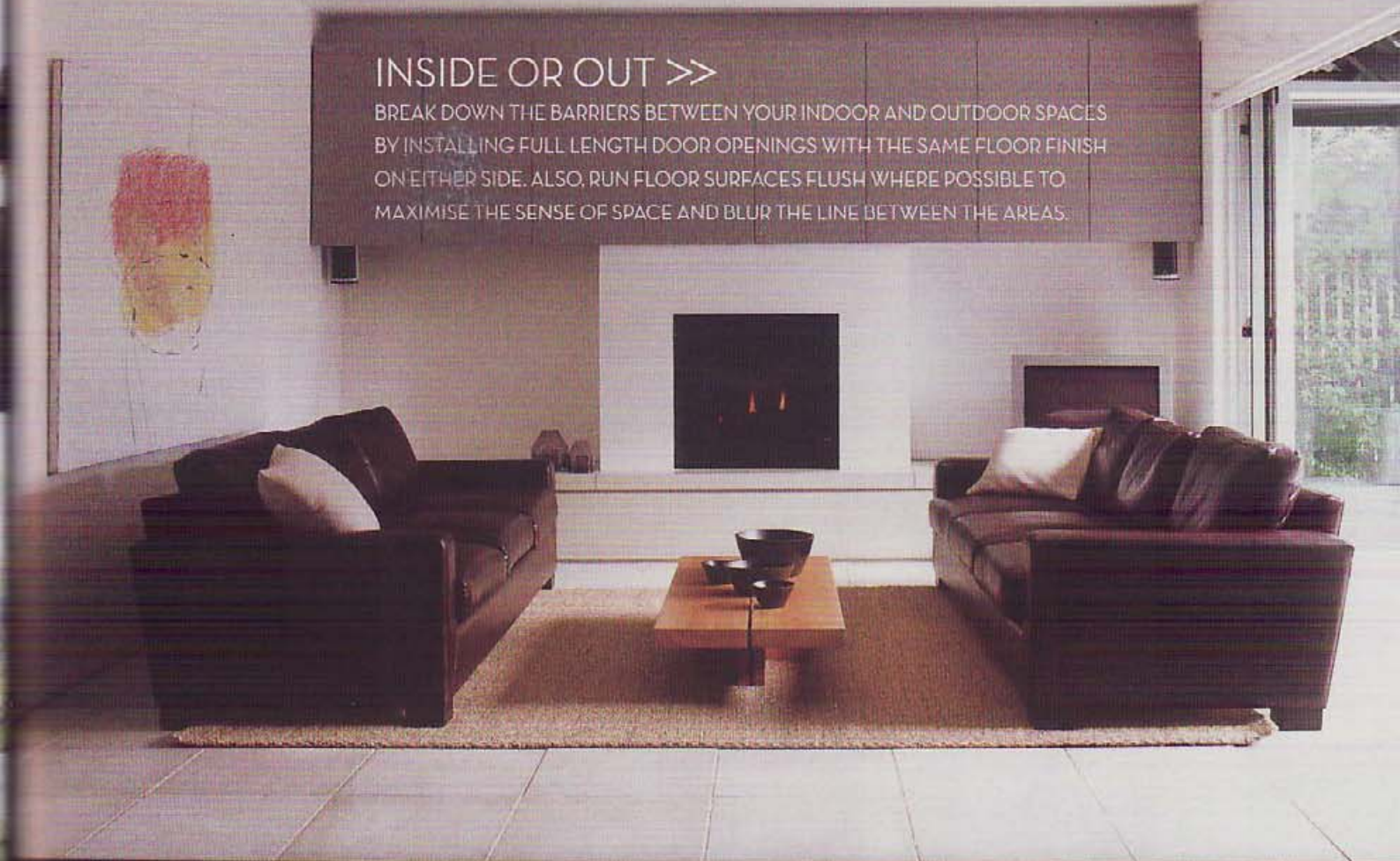
More storage is hidden in the lounge room's banquette seating, while the integrated kitchen soon reveals its own secret – one of the seemingly built-in benches actually sits on castors and can be detached for use as a DJ desk when the owner hosts parties.

Upstairs are two bedrooms and a master bathroom (a second bathroom is downstairs), as well as a retreat lined with bookshelves. Here, there are only clean lines – the doors have floor-to-ceiling pivots instead of Victorian architraves of old.

The main bathroom features a skylight

INSIDE OR OUT >>

BREAK DOWN THE BARRIERS BETWEEN YOUR INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACES BY INSTALLING FULL LENGTH DOOR OPENINGS WITH THE SAME FLOOR FINISH ON EITHER SIDE. ALSO, RUN FLOOR SURFACES FLUSH WHERE POSSIBLE TO MAXIMISE THE SENSE OF SPACE AND BLUR THE LINE BETWEEN THE AREAS.



and split-face textured tiles for a natural, outdoorsy feel. The owner, says Matt, likened it to "showering in a cave"!

"We had fun turning the restrictions into opportunities," says Matt. "Window and door openings were swapped over, French doors became bi-folds, and eliminating one ensuite lead to greater robe space."

Not only did Matt create a sleek, functional environment, but the redesign helped him win the 2005 Award for Emerging Practice at Australia's Interior Design Awards. And by all accounts, the owner feels like a winner, too. As Matt sums it up, "He got a home that was open and flexible, incorporating a design that catered more specifically to his needs – a better flow of space, greater use of natural light, more storage and a bigger master bedroom and ensuite."

Even Molly Meldrum has come around. Says Matt, "He invited us to his party, so I think he's happy with what we did!" →

DESIGNER'S TIP

MIX PAST AND PRESENT

"ADD TO THE STORYTELLING OF YOUR RENOVATION," MATT ADVISES. "OLD AND NEW BUILDINGS DON'T NECESSARILY HAVE TO BLEND SEAMLESSLY. EXISTING AND MODERN DETAILING CAN BE PLAYED OFF AGAINST EACH OTHER CREATIVELY TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE OF BOTH. ONE OF THE SIMPLEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO ACHIEVE A COHESIVE LOOK BETWEEN THE TWO STYLES IS BY USING SIMILAR COLOURS THROUGHOUT."





The cosy upstairs retreat (**above and middle**) acts as a getaway from the open-plan downstairs. The large Anna Gibson artwork, packed bookshelf and low ceiling all give the space a sense of intimacy which is intentionally different from the other areas of the home. The ensuite bathroom (**above, right**) features a skylight above the shower which gives the impression of bathing outside. "I wanted to give it a bit more of a glamorous feel than the downstairs bathroom," says Matt, who used atmospheric pelmet lighting to pack an extra punch.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE? The design of this Richmond home took three to four months, and the building took a further four months. Matt says, "The design was pretty quick on this one, because the permits had already gotten through, so it was a case of redocumenting and retricking up the interior. It was pretty straightforward."

HOW MUCH DID IT COST? "Building the home cost around \$350,000, and then there was my fee," Matt says. "The main expenses were the kitchen and the bathrooms. We spent a lot on those because they're the selling factors at resale and everyone loves a great kitchen and bathrooms," says Matt. Another expense was lighting. "We took

a lot of care and attention to get the lighting right." Savings were made on building one ensuite, instead of two as originally planned, and on some of the joinery.

WHAT IS THE DESIGNER HAPPIEST ABOUT? "Definitely the lighting," says Matt, who came up with unusual ways to combine artificial and natural light. "We tried to avoid the standard, double-hung windows you usually see in Victorian houses." Matt is also pleased with the flow of the house. "In a lot of places, there aren't doors, or they're in cavity sliders which can be hidden away. The spaces are very open."

DOES HE HAVE ANY REGRETS? "Not really – only in the garden, perhaps," Matt

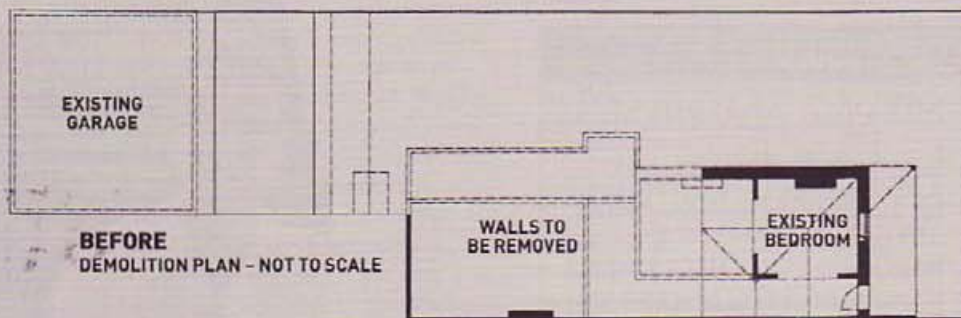
admits. "I wanted a solid wall around the courtyard, but the owner chose a picket fence. I wanted to create an outside area that was more sealed off, so it was part of the inside space. But it still works well, so it's not a major issue."

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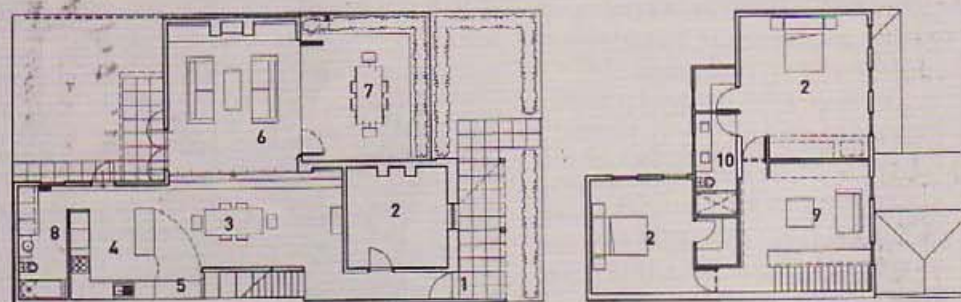
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JOINERY Muggleton & Roper, Mulgrave VIC (03) 9561 5566.

ENGINEER Don Moore & Associates, Toorak VIC (03) 9824 1631. ✦



BEFORE
DEMOLITION PLAN - NOT TO SCALE



AFTER

1. ENTRY. 2. BEDROOMS. 3. DINING. 4. KITCHEN.
5. PORTABLE BENCH. 6. LIVING. 7. COURTYARD.
8. BATHROOM/LAUNDRY. 9. RETREAT. 10. ENSUITE.

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