

HOUSES

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CLINTON MURRAY
IN PROFILE

BELLEMO AND CAT
COCKINGS
FORM
GIONFRIDDO
HEATH
JONES
KIRK
LAHZ NIMMO
OWEN AND VOKES
UHLMANN
WARDLE
WRIGHT

SLEEK BATHROOMS



IN A SENSITIVE HERITAGE ZONE IN INNER MELBOURNE, ARCHITECT ANTHONY GIONFRIDDO HAS DESIGNED A VERSATILE HOME AND OFFICE OVER THREE LEVELS.

heritage insertion



INTERIORS

A DESIRE TO RIDE HIS HARLEY DAVIDSON through this inner Melbourne house was the initial brief from the owner, who was also the builder for the project. But, while appealing at the concept stage, the practical difficulties of inserting bike ramps through a narrow dwelling soon became apparent, especially when weighed up with the brief's more functional requirements – providing a home and office. So, open plan living and achieving a logical separation of space and function became the main objectives. Capturing as much natural light as possible was also a priority. A ramp from the garage into the multi-purpose room is the only remnant of the original Harley-inspired concept.

This new three storey townhouse/office is located in a little street tucked in behind a busy shopping precinct in Richmond. Mindful of city views available from the west-facing rear of the site, and the gritty panorama of commercial properties to the south, architect Anthony Gionfriddo has created a private domain of large, light, airy living spaces with windows that frame the urban domain beyond. Very little of this is revealed to the passerby at street level.

The site presented many challenges with its heritage and planning restrictions. Although not a heritage building itself, the original single fronted, single storey warehouse ends a row of two storey Victorian terraces of greater historical significance. Together these form part of a listed heritage streetscape. This meant that there were limited options regarding what could be done to the front facade, as well as how the windows could be placed. The main advantage of the tight site was that the existing warehouse had 100 percent site coverage, which enabled design solutions that otherwise may not have been possible.

One enters from the street into a foyer. There are two separate entries from the foyer, one to the home and the other to the office. An open

plan office accommodating two to four staff has the street frontage. To the rear of the office are a kitchenette and a powder room. These can be used by those in the office or, for social occasions, the office area can be closed off. Then, the kitchenette and powder room can be used by guests being entertained in the adjoining multi-purpose room. Located under the floor of the multi-purpose room is a small cellar, a late addition to the project. The floors throughout this ground level are sealed concrete, aiding the reflection of light spilling down from a light well above, and from the existing south-facing windows along the hallway.

The existing warehouse was gutted, and the rear of the property was excavated to allow for a garage off the laneway. Due to the state of the external walls, the new structure was built within the existing shell.

Set off the hallway and centrally located, the stairs feature spotted gum timber treads and a stainless steel balustrade. Flanked by a utility zone on each floor, the stairs appear to be floating in a light well due to a substantial rooflight above, which projects light from the third level down to ground level.

Planning the first and second levels created a dilemma from the outset – determining which level should have what function. The first level has the larger floor plate and the second level has the better views. The final arrangement, locating all living on the first level and all private space on the second, evolved out of the most logical and efficient use of space.

On the first level the stairs arrive at the point between the formal and the informal living areas. The formal lounge and dining are located to the front of the building with the informal living to the rear. The dining is on an elevated platform, which aids in defining and breaking down the space and at the same time allowing additional clearance to the office and entry below. As well as coming in from windows on the



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front wall, light is gained from a skylight running the width of the building washing down onto a feature wall. This complements a sizeable dining table the owner made from roof trusses salvaged from the original warehouse. Openings are cut into the void of the stairwell, offering a sense of activity and movement without jeopardising the privacy of the space.

Timber floorboards run throughout the first level linking the living zones. The informal living comprises open plan kitchen, living and meals areas. This opens up on to a rear deck with views of the city over the roofs, creating an indoor-outdoor space. The north wall of the living room rakes as a consequence of planning setback provisions, and the windows are all highlights with obscured glass for the same reason. The repeat windows to the south wall are set at 1.7 metres high, breaking up the mass of the space and directing views out over rooftops. Although the deck has 1.7-metre-high screening one does not feel enclosed, due to the views beyond and the generous size of the deck.

Throughout the second level, carpet is laid on a concrete slab to ensure good sound insulation between the floors. To the front of the building, two modestly-sized bedrooms (for the children) have their own deck, partially visible behind the parapet of the existing building.

Spacious, light and with revealing city views, the main bedroom also opens up on to its own deck. Given the volume of the room, a rhythm of highlight windows has been adopted in order to gain natural light and help break down the scale of the room. These windows also offer glimpses of views over rooftops towards some of Melbourne's landmarks. As a result of this glazing strategy the bedroom and deck boast complete privacy without losing any available vistas. One can also see the city from a window in the ensuite shower. Apart from some feature

lighting in the ensuite, the lighting design by Jane McGuinness has been structured to be discreet but have maximum effect. And, with a pair of full height windows, the hallway between the bedrooms acts as a high-level breezeway offering a natural form of ventilation in this central circulation space.

Externally, the client was less interested in making any strong formal gestures. The planning controls also played a large role in determining what could be done. As a consequence the front facade has had minimal work done to it, apart from rendering it and making the openings functional for the new brief. There is a clear separation between the new building and the pre-existing structure – all new work features cladding with an acrylic rendered finish in a light grey, whereas the existing building has a dark grey render. This render acts as a logical connection to the new work. The new south facade, which faces the rear of commercial properties and a laneway (but can be viewed from the street) offered more scope for architectural expression. As a consequence there is more articulation in regards to windows, a rainwater head and the firebox which cantilevers out into the laneway. The existing part of the building on this side has been left virtually untouched.

Due to efficient use of space, this three storey townhouse has been created within a two storey envelope. Working with the client, as builder, had the advantage of being able to address issues as they arose on site and creating the best outcome possible. With its attention to detail and clever workmanship, this thoughtfully considered project deserves to be the showcase for the builder that it has become. Indeed, it was a winner of the Master Builders Association National Housing and Construction Excellence Award (Alterations and Additions over \$250,000) in 2002. **SD**



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- 2 Rumpus
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- 6 Office
- 7 Entry
- 8 Kitchen
- 9 Living
- 10 Deck
- 11 Lounge
- 12 Dining
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- 14 Main bedroom