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FACT FILE

THE BRIEF

To create a new living space that feels like it is part of the garden

THE ARCHITECT

Michael Bell

Open-door policy

Steel posts, beams, deep eaves and glass bring a pergola-feel to this entertaining area

By today's standards, this project is almost not a renovation. There is no new upper storey, no super-sized garage and no major encroachment on to the backyard. This is not because there was insufficient room or council was too restrictive. It was just, in the owner and the architect's view, unnecessary.

Risky business

When architect Michael Bell got a call from an old friend of his wife, he started the design process with a little trepidation.

"It is risky whenever you work for friends," he says.

"You do not want anything to go wrong and, in building, things do go wrong and you have to deal with it, so I am often reluctant to work for friends."

A 1920s full-brick home on Sydney's North Shore, the house was designed in a style typical of the era with two bedrooms to one side of the hallway and a formal dining and living room to the other side.

There was a second living room to the rear, which was small and had no connection to the backyard or the northern light to the side.

"There was an old living room there, but it was tiny," Michael says.

"It was quite dark, [the ceiling] was low and hemmed in and other junk like trellises had been added on to the back."

"Because it was relatively expensive ... we needed to find other ways to add value"

The situation was further complicated when the owner revealed he had a tight budget and, in effect, was only looking to add one room.

"The original budget was \$140,000 but it ended up costing about \$200,000," says Michael.

"It was essentially a single room but there was building to be done, the sewer needed

fixing and the doors were expensive.

"Because it was relatively expensive [for one room], I thought we needed to find other ways to add value to the house in the original planning stage so that if the house was ever sold, it had relevance."

Michael's plan was to do exactly as the client asked and add on a large new open-plan living room, essentially a steel and glass box, to the rear of the property.

The kitchen, which was well positioned in the middle of the house, was left alone but included in the design in such a way that it could be upgraded easily later.

"The kitchen was neat enough and the planning of it was fine," Michael says.

"If you are going to keep something like this and you want to upgrade it at some point, you do not want to have to change the planning around."

At the front of the house, the old formal living and dining room would be converted into a bedroom suite including an ensuite and walk-in robe, effectively



A The extended living room is basically a steel and glass box
B Architect Michael Bell took into account the amount of entertaining the owners did
C Some original elements remain unchanged **D** The laundry and powder room **E** The airy design offers cross-flow breezes
F The new living area gives the impression of sitting in the garden
G Extended eaves provide protection from the elements



turning the house into a three-bedroom home with all the modern conveniences.

Ask an expert

For those concerned about justifying the costs of renovating, Michael suggests it is a worthwhile exercise to ask a real estate agent for a market appraisal.

"When the [builders'] prices come in, there is often a bit of apprehension about spending that kind of money on one room," Michael says.

"If you are worried about it, show your

plans to a real estate agent and ask them what the house would be worth with the work completed.

"Usually the response is that it is well and truly worth it."

Because the work was relatively minor, the plans sailed through council. The plans also included a swimming pool, which the owner did not proceed with but kept the option open for the future.

Michael's concept was to create a pergola-like structure using steel posts and beams.

GET THE LOOK

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Part of the success of the new living space is the use of different textures to give light and shade. To contrast with the soft flokati rug, the owner bought a low-lying coffee table with wraparound metal legs. For something with similarly simple lines, look for the Bonsai coffee table from Brescia. Finished in dark oak, it has two drawers at either end to hold all of life's bits and pieces. It is 142cm long by 74cm high and is priced at \$630.

MORE INFORMATION Brescia Furniture
bresciafurniture.com.au



BE SEATED

Simplicity defines the new living space created to the rear of this 1920s house but given the owner likes to entertain regularly, finding a dining chair that was comfortable and stylish was a high priority. These Melrose dining chairs from Oz Design Furniture offer the same look. Designed with a chrome frame, you have the choice of black or white PVC for easy cleaning. The Melrose chair is priced at \$159 each.

MORE INFORMATION Oz Design Furniture
1800 682 444, ozdesignfurniture.com.au



SOFA SO GOOD

The new steel and glass extension on this house could have been a little cold without some careful furnishing choices. To balance out the hard edges, the owner has opted for comfortable lounges with gentle curves. For something similar, take a look at the Waterford sofa from Paddington Furniture. It comes with a 10-year warranty on the frame and seating system, which ensures it holds its beautiful organic shape. Prices start from \$1699 for the two-seater in the fabric shown. It is available through Harvey Norman.

MORE INFORMATION
Harvey Norman harveynorman.com.au
Paddington Furniture
paddingtonfurniture.com.au



A The original bathroom **B** Back garden view from the new extension **C** The second bedroom **D** The new main bedroom with ensuite replaces the former lounge room



MORE INFORMATION Michael Bell Architects
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Apart from giving the room a sense of lightness, using steel meant there was no need for additional support pillars. The large expanses were filled with sliding glass doors and windows and topped off with deep eaves. "With the deep eaves, the idea was if it was a warm day and it started to rain, you would not feel like you would have to shut the doors," Michael says. The glass and steel construction also allowed maximum light to come in from the north to the side and the east to the rear. Michael says it works wonderfully

well for the parties the owner likes to throw a couple of times a year. "They have large parties, usually with more than 200 people, and there is a big difference in the way the house runs now," Michael says. "They have had a number of 40th birthday parties so it has become a bit of a party house, but they always invite the neighbours." **Low-key labour** In keeping with the rest of the project, the three-month building process was relatively low-key with no major

hiccups. Thanks to plenty of time in the planning, this is a flexible design that has room to move if desired. Michael says ample time helps to reduce stress in a working relationship, which is an important consideration when friends are involved. "A lot of people say they will do it one day. But don't wait until you want to start the work, because you can often be disappointed when it takes a while to be approved," he says. "It is more pleasant if they have plenty of time to do the planning." **Robyn Willis**



Photos: Katrina Tepper