



No space has been wasted on the small site, which feels much larger than it is.

Taking it back to the beginning

Childhood memories proved the perfect preparation for a thoughtful lesson in urban living, writes **Robyn Willis**

PROJECT

Owners

A young family who had returned from living in London

Architect

Shaun Carter from Carter Williamson, carterwilliamson.com

The problem

A weatherboard semi in need of an extension that would not impact on the street

The site

A steep site with a 6m fall from back to front

Design solution

A two-storey steel, glass and weatherboard extension

How long did it take

Almost 4½ years from design to construction

“The great reward is knowing you’ve done something meaningful”

Shaun Carter, architect



When architect Shaun Carter talks about this house in Balmain, it sounds like a living, breathing entity.

Part of a series of semi-detached weatherboard cottages on the street, the house had history and character already — as well as plans for an extension.

“They had a design on the house from a decade ago but it was a cookie-cutter response,” he says. “The house was not going to respond in a traditional sense where you go down the party wall and open to the back.”

Down memory lane

Perhaps part of the reason why Shaun speaks of the house as though it is alive is because he was on familiar ground.

“I spent a lot of my childhood in this street — my mother grew up down the road,” Shaun says. “So it was a bit weird to come back to this building. I intuitively knew the layout of the owners’ house because it was the same as my nan’s house.”

Shaun also has fond memories of playing at the park across the road and understood the importance of the green space to the local community, especially those in the street.

Given the dense urban environment it was positioned in, the challenge was to design something that would still offer the young family privacy and sanctuary, as well as a sense of joy and playfulness.

But the wedge-shaped site imposed considerable conditions, with a fall of 6-7m from back to front. Streetscape was also an important consideration, so the rhythm of the old houses was not disturbed.

Somehow, Shaun took the limitations of the site and turned them into its best assets.

The original house was left intact, providing for three bedrooms and a bathroom plus valuable attic storage.



Casement windows make the bathroom feel part of the outdoors.



The curved void makes the downstairs living space feel larger and draws natural light through the house.



A steel-framed box with large window at right gives the house its name, Peekaboo

Using the natural fall of the land, Shaun designed a completely new addition at the rear with open living spaces on the ground floor and a main bedroom suite above.

Quiet moments in the city

From the street, the new work is barely visible, except for a steel-framed box with a large window jutting out from the side designed for quiet contemplation while viewing the park. It has given the house its name: Peekaboo house.

"These days when you have so many screens vying for attention, the white noise is deafening," Shaun says. "But you can still create these moments."

Because the back of the block is quite high, Shaun says it offered the possibility of a walled-in garden. The new extension, which is connected to the original house via a small courtyard, is bathed in light all year thanks to a generous void above the living space.

"We wanted to anchor the living room with a void which makes the space feel bigger and it draws the light through the whole house."



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CONSIDER INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACES AS A WHOLE TO CREATE AN INTEGRATED SPACE

Materials were chosen to reflect the existing housing in the street with steel, glass and weatherboard dominating.

Between the design and approval process, waiting for the right builder and construction, which included a complex drainage system, the project took 4½ years.

The result is a family home with a living, breathing heart — and a view of the park.

It was a finalist in the Inner West Council Built Environment Awards and the Dulux Colour Awards for 2018, among others.

Pictures Brett Boardman

THE SOURCE

Builder David Fletcher Construction 0408 278 291

Landscaper Garden Life, gardenlife.com.au **Living room sliding doors**

Vitrocsa, vitrocsa.com.au **Pendant light over kitchen island bench** Custom

designed Step & Kick by Volker Haug, volkerhaug.com **Pendant light in living**

room void Conehome by LAAL, laal.com.au **Wall lights in bathroom** IC Wall

Lights by Michael Anastassiades from Euroluce, euroluce.com.au

Bathroom taps ICON from Astra Walker, astrawalker.com.au