

Chris Maher has the drill on all your handy hints and hiccups

Bathroom tiles are relatively hardy, but they do crack from time to time, and that's when you'll need a replacement.

If your tiles are old, you may have some trouble finding a match. For original tiles, try Obsolete Tiles at Rydalmere on (02) 9684 6333. Email a low-resolution picture of your tile and the company will let you know if it has something suitable to replace it. The address is obsoletiles@bigpond.com

For reproduction tiles, try Olde English Tiles at Camperdown on (02) 9519 4333.

Q One of our bathroom tiles is cracked. What is the best way to replace it?

A First, scrape the grout out from around the cracked tile using a grout rake. Then, break up the tile using a cold chisel or bolster and remove the pieces.

Naturally, you must take a lot of care with this or you'll end up having to replace more than one tile. Scrape away the adhesive from the wall, and if you see evidence of mould, clean it with a mould killer and allow it to dry. Then apply adhesive to the back of the new tile and put in place.

Make sure the tile is lined up with the other tiles, using spacers or matches if you need. Press it firmly into place and leave it for several hours (check the exact time on the label).

Then, grout around the new tile using a grout applicator. There are several choices with grout, including powder, which needs to be made up, and pre-mixed grouts from companies such as Selleys.

Sponge off any excess grout within five minutes, using a diagonal action to avoid removing any of your new grout.

You may need to sponge again after about two hours. The grout will need to fully cure before you'll be able to use the area, probably for one or two days, but check on the packaging.

Q How should I drill into a bathroom tile to attach a soap holder?

A Use masking tape over the spot where you want to drill, so that the drill bit is able to get a good grip. Use a low speed on your drill and start the work with a thin drill bit, then go up to a thicker bit. Make sure that you drill right through the tile and into the wall. Then, insert a wall plug and screw the soap holder into place.

If you have any diy questions, you can send them to diygy@sundaytelegraph.com.au



estate of the art

From 1930s bungalow to ultra-sleek space – you may not think it to look at it, but this is now the ideal sanctuary for a self-confessed slob. And he didn't mind a bit that his budget blew out because it's just right for his paintings and his dog, too, he tells **Jeremy Bass**.

For Tony Lewis, the attraction to this house lay mainly in the way it backed straight on to the Bronte Park gully. "I'd always loved the area, and this spot is perfect. You can actually walk all the way from here to North Bondi or down past Coogee without crossing a road," he says.

Before finding the place, in 1997, he searched for four or five months, missing out along the way on places in Clovelly and Woollahra. This one came to his notice because it was owned by someone he knew.

"I asked the agent how much they wanted to take it off the market and they said \$800,000. Whether or not that was a bit steep, I don't know. All I knew at the time was that it was as near as I could think to exactly what I wanted."

The original house, a three-bedroom, single-storey, double-brick bungalow dated back to the 1930s. It was in livable enough condition for Lewis to occupy for several years before starting on renovations. He says that's important for any successful renovation job, as it takes quite a while to really get to know a place, the lie of the land and how it responds to the elements.

What emerged were firm ideas about what he wanted. First priority was to make the most of that outlook. And he wanted to do that from inside and out, ideally from a vastly expanded living area with plenty of glass. But he wanted all that glass only at the front, and particularly the south-facing rear of the house. The side walls he wanted to reserve for the larger pieces of his substantial art collection.

"Basically, I wanted a place that looked contemporary without being precious. I'm actually a bit of a slob and I want a place where Elsa (his utterly non-threatening rottweiler-ridgeback cross) can sleep and hang out where she wants, as much as I can."

In a complete remodel of the house, architect Caroline Pidcock, interior designer Briony Fitzgerald as well as

builders Constructioncorp have come up with a smart, energy-efficient, ultra-modern design. Most notable is its abundance of natural light, and the advantage it takes of the beautiful views across the thickly forested gully to the beach. In the backyard, there's a viewing platform-cum-outdoor eating

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area and a small, pebbled dipping pool. "The backyard's small, but how big does it need to be?" Lewis says. "All you have to do is walk through the back gate and you're in the park. Plus, when you open the back doors, the yard and the living room pretty much become part of each other."

All that's preserved of the original place are the two front rooms – now a television room and a ground-floor guest bedroom. Upstairs, there are two more bedrooms, an office, a large bathroom and a big built-in wardrobe with six-metre frosted glass doors, accessible from an alcove balcony



overlooking the dining area. A balcony off the south-facing master bedroom makes stunning use of that view.

The house has ducted air-conditioning systems that were installed for each floor, but ventilation is good even without them. The key is the two-storey cathedral ceiling over the dining area,

with electrically operated louvres. The work went smoothly. Lewis was, he says, a hands-on project manager. Not surprising, given his background in the construction industry. "I'm not in it any more, but I grew up in and around it, and it proved a real boon."

Surprise costs along the way were many and varied. "I blew my budget left, right and centre," says Lewis.

But he points out that this was never going to be a cheap makeover. "I've built the place to live in, not to sell."

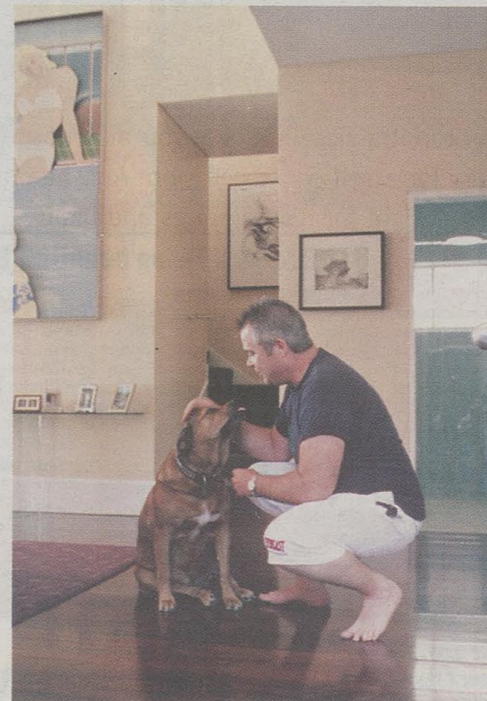
An example: the front door, which he had custom made from stainless steel and frosted, toughened glass.

Then there's the floor. Lewis chose recycled ironbark floorboards, an expensive option at about \$20,000.

The house boasts a proliferation of attractive surface materials. There are the opaque-green glass wall tiles in the main bathroom and the unusual floor tiles in the guest bathroom, made of white pebbles suspended in clear epoxy.

A big man, he's built the place to suit himself. That's most evident in the kitchen – the benches are a good few centimetres taller than standard.

And, coming from a family interested in art, he's put the walls to good use. Large, modern pieces overlooking the living area are supplemented by Whiteley nudes and a huge kangaroo by US painter Don Nice in the master bedroom. "I've built a place I like and filled it with things I like," he says.



Clockwise from top left: A feature wall for a favourite artwork; the lavish pool; the man-size kitchen bench; a hidden wardrobe on the alcove balcony; soothing colour; built-in shelves save space; light floods the living area; a zen touch; the viewing platform; the \$20,000 ironbark floorboards in rich tones

Pictures: Adam Craven



The aim
To give an old house a major contemporary overhaul, making the most of a magnificent view and providing the wall space for a substantial art collection

Renovations
\$1.1 million: construction cost \$800,000; architecture and interior cost \$300,000, including furniture and audio systems

Time frame
10 months

Setbacks
None – architect, designer and builders worked well together, with owner as hands-on project manager

Return on investment
Original house cost \$800,000 in 1997; now valued at up to \$3.5 million

Surprise costs
Plenty, but they were all voluntary

BRONTE SNAPSHOT

Average house price	\$1,081,000
Av. apartment price	\$456,000
House: unit ratio	45:55
Av. weekly rent (house)	\$600
Av. weekly rent (unit)	\$340
Owner: renter ratio	80:20
Av. rental yield last year	3.6%
Av. house price last year	\$924,000
Capital growth last year	17%
Expected growth this year	21%
Av. online hits last week*	7063 (up 69.7%)
Homes now listed online	55
Distance to city	6km

Figures supplied by www.propertyvalue.com.au
* Searches on www.realestate.com.au compared with last week