

cover story | Guy Allenby

# Home work

Away from the office and the constraints of clients' briefs, architects are free to experiment.



Top draws, from left: Sam Marshall, Caroline Pidcock, Vladimir Ivanov and Stephen Buzacott. Photos: Kate Geraghty, Danielle Smith, Quentin Jones

**J**UST as chefs rarely cook away from work, it's no surprise to discover some architects' homes can be perpetually half-finished. Others, meanwhile, are a botchpotch of every brilliant idea they've never been able to use on a client's home.

Most will admit to more than a little experimentation in their own homes. But if you do cross a threshold belonging to any Sydney architect worth his/her salt you're likely to get a good sense of the signature, the approach and even the creative restraint.

As architect Sam Marshall puts it: "I find there are a million ideas you can pursue on a project but it is really a matter of limiting those ideas. I find a lot of the young designers want to do many things on one house, not realising it is a matter of keeping those ideas and then exploring them when the opportunity comes up."

**SAM MARSHALL**

MARSHALL and wife Liane Rossler make a mighty imposing couple, at least in design terms. Not only is Marshall a respected architect with the state's highest award for housing under his belt (he won the Wilkinson Award in 2000 for a warehouse conversion), but Rossler is one of the

driving forces behind Dinosaur Designs. "She's a lover of modernism," says Marshall. "We share the same ideals so it was fantastic to have her as a bouncing board and she really was an integral part of the process."

Together they set about renovating their first home as a couple: a 1920s cottage in Queens Park with a 1965 addition that became the inspiration for the whole place (unlike some renovations which take their lead from the older, original front part of the house). The most immediately striking element of the newly renovated home is the concrete blades flanking the entrance (see cover photo). The blades, Marshall explains, "hold the roof up there and so it cantilevers further so you get more weather protection. It's just to give you a sense of entry."

The house is also fundamentally "a container" for Rossler's "great collection of art and objects". Marshall's previous home was an early 20th century horse carriage workshop in Darlinghurst which he turned into a home and studio over several years on the meagre budget of \$60,000. It would've made "a great bachelor pad", but just as he put the finishing touches to it (and won the Wilkinson Award for it), he got married. The Darlinghurst place was essentially an

experiment. On top of the existing building's fabric, Marshall added only the barest of contemporary elements to transform it into a home and studio.

The new home is "more restrained" although it was still, he says, a pleasure to create (if finished a tad quicker than the previous one). This was due in no small part to "Liane cracking the whip".

**Signature** Joinery as composition (note the well-lit kitchen alcove for found objects).

**Favourite feature** The business and openness of the living/dining/kitchen which relates to the courtyard and to the pool. Plus, it faces north, "which isn't any great invention of mine - it was all there - but I've capitalised on it."

**Least favourite feature** "Do architects admit those things?" he laughs.

## CAROLINE PIDCOCK

IF THERE'S a fringe benefit most architects can boast about, it's being on good terms with builders at a time when building has never been more mind-bendingly expensive.

Caroline Pidcock, president of the NSW chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, admits to knowing "a very kind builder who was doing some much bigger

projects for me, who did the work at cost price. Which was very generous of them."

Pidcock doesn't relish working on her own home after hours but her eastern suburbs apartment was in such a state when she bought it that she "couldn't even contemplate moving in" before renovation. "It had a pink carpet and wallpaper all over and the kitchen was completely hopeless," she says.

Originally a two-bedroom flat, Pidcock has opened it up, effectively creating one big room. "At some stage I intend to put sliding doors in so that you can close it down and have some privacy," she says.

Featuring a tiled floor and a matching chocolate brown carpet, the most telling thing about the whole design process, she reveals, is that a tile dictated the entire renovation. Not exactly an orthodox approach and not one that Pidcock would usually apply to her professional life. But the body corporate vetoed her original plans for a new timber floor, so the alternative was "a particular tile I really fell in love with so I based the whole design around that". Fortunately, she found a carpet to match. Natural white paint on the walls completes the palette ("putting colour in natural paints is hard").

**Signature** Accomplished style without the over-seriousness of some.

**Favourite feature** "The thing I love about my apartment is that it is north-facing, it gets sun all day and has a view all the way to Manly across the water. And it gives me direct access on my kayak to the harbour, which is a really special thing."

**Least favourite feature** "The next thing I'd like to do is upgrade the second bedroom a bit so it is more useful. But I'm really happy with the apartment and I'm really happy with what I did to it. So I don't think there's anything I would change."

## VLADIMIR IVANOV

DROP in on Vladimir Ivanov at the Bellevue Hill apartment he shares with partner Sarah and you discover that here's one architect yet to really tackle his own home.

The last thing Ivanov wants to be doing after a hard day at the office is going eight rounds with his block's body corporate. It rejected his plans on a technicality and although Ivanov says there wouldn't be a problem getting them approved if he persisted, once the momentum was lost "Sarah and I thought that this wasn't the place we wanted to put all our energy into."

Originally, the couple had grand plans to remove some of the structural walls and swap the kitchen with the master bedroom, but the

revised plans will mean remodelling the kitchen and bathroom plus replacing the bathroom door with a large frosted glass door because "the hallway is really dark".

Meanwhile, Ivanov has to be satisfied creatively by furnishing it with his own furniture designs (bookshelves, bed, CD rack and TV and stereo shelf) as well as providing a home for a prized music collection.

**Signature** If you can't do something innovative, question if it's worth doing at all.

**Favourite feature** "The greatest feature of that apartment is that something good can be done with it."

**Least favourite feature** "To be within the confines of a body corporate."

## STEPHEN BUZACOTT

Living and working in the same place may not be ideal for some but it generally suits Stephen Buzacott. "I don't mind living above the shop," he says, "but it's a bit close sometimes."

Not that Buzacott actually lives above the office, because the way he has reorganised his Surry Hills terrace is to have the bedroom on the ground floor, living room-kitchen-cum-meeting room on the first floor and the studio in the loft.

As Buzacott sees it, the front rooms (or often the master bedrooms) "are usually the best ones anyway". Besides, the terrace was in such a woeful condition that all that has been retained of the original structure are the four outer walls.

Like so many architects' homes, the terrace is a work in progress and some of Buzacott's ideas are experimental.

The floor-to-ceiling glass wall in the bathroom, for instance, was an experiment (one that he wouldn't repeat), as is the huge sliding door on the bedroom. Buzacott has stretched artist's canvas over the door's steel frame, although insulation has yet to be added to it. Similarly, the recycled blackbutt staircase awaits a handrail.

Downstairs, the master bedroom looks out onto a small courtyard and the studio has a terrace with city views. Buzacott loves the idea "of not having to worry about anybody else's taste" when designing for himself. "I'd like to do another one. I've got my eye on a building nearby."

**Signature** Pared-back, sharp-edged design and a simple palette.

**Favourite feature** "Most of the people that come in there really like that space [the living/dining room] because of the proportions of it. The proportions of that living space are really comfortable."

**Least favourite feature** "The full-height mirror in the bathroom is not entirely practical. But what I'd really like is a garage."



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