

essential dream home

All eyes north



An architect alters the aspect of a Victorian home to reconnect with the great outdoors.

Words Jane Burton Taylor
Photos Tim Wheeler, Jamie King
 and Fiona Morris

IT WAS when they were walking their dog that Caroline Pidcock's clients first spotted their future home. They hadn't been looking for a new house but the For Sale sign on this one got them wondering. They were particularly intrigued by the home's unusual, triangle-shaped block.

The home was an unrenovated, double-fronted house dating from the 1890s, one of

the owners explains, and it had a large garden and a long, north-facing boundary. "It looked like it had some serious potential for redevelopment," he says.

The couple decided that rather than renovate their existing home, which was in the same suburb of Stanmore but on a narrow, poorly orientated block, they would buy the old Victorian house.

They spent the next few years thinking about what they wanted to do before calling in an architect. "From day one, they were very keen to do a really environmental house,"

Pidcock recalls. The site was not without its challenges. It was an awkward shape, had a narrow street front – at the tip of the triangle – and public lanes on two sides. But it also had the massive potential to be reorientated to the garden and the north, just as its owners had recognised when they first saw it.

The original house had three bedrooms and a 1960s rear addition of small separate rooms and a narrow veranda, essentially the only place where you could sit outside and enjoy the sun. "It was totally disconnected from the garden," Pidcock recalls.

"You were either enclosed in the house or in this big beautiful garden.

"So their brief was to create a sustainable urban oasis, with a real relationship between inside and outside, maximising the garden, so it could be well-appreciated."

Early on, Pidcock and her clients decided to keep the front section of the original house and demolish the addition.

There was then just one change to the old layout – Pidcock swapped the position of a bathroom on the north side of the house with a south-facing bedroom. This allowed her to



Aim

To create a sustainable urban oasis.

How long?

Four months to design, nine months with council and nine months for construction.

Favourite features

The light, air quality and space. It is liveable at all times of year, in all weather conditions.

Insider's tips

Integrate green ideas from the start – that way they won't add a lot to the overall cost.

Green points

- Gas-boosted solar hot water system.
- Two rainwater tanks collect water for clothes washing and toilets. A grey water system filters this water for reuse on the garden.
- 1.6 kilowatt photovoltaic system provides about one-third of the home's power.
- High operable windows for ventilation.
- Ceiling fans in all rooms.
- Light fittings are either fluoros or LEDs.
- Paints are organic, so no off-gassing, and natural oil was used on the timber floor.
- Passive solar design, north-facing living areas and concrete slab as heat sink.
- All windows have overhangs, not just for shading but to open up on rainy nights to introduce fresh, cool air.
- Reuse of original building.
- Overall a small house, 200 square metres, which means fewer materials were used in building and less energy in its operation.

Architect

Caroline Pidcock, 9357 1366.

Builder

Manik Constructions.

- 1** A comfortable timber deck connects rooms.
- 2** The long dining area is open and airy, with plenty of light.
- 3** Sitting areas on timber reflect the modern, casual mood.

keep three bedrooms but give two (rather than one) a northerly aspect.

In planning the rear addition, Pidcock had to contend with several mature gums. Luckily, the siting dictated by the trees made design sense, allowing her to locate the addition along the southern boundary with all rooms opening to the north.

The addition now links up with the old house to form a U-shaped plan. It has a long kitchen, dining and living area (on the eastern boundary) and a second, smaller, sitting room wrapped around a central deck. Bifold doors link the new rooms to the deck, so the spaces can be opened or closed down to form different configurations.

"We were trying to create some different spaces that could be closed down and quite intimate or all opened up and connected," Pidcock says.

The central timber deck, which has a barbecue and a pergola of operable louvres, serves as both a linking space and a separate living area.

"It connects all the rooms and has stairs going down to the garden, so that gives you another place where you can sit," Pidcock says.

The owner adds: "It really can be used in all sorts of weather, even when it is raining. It is essentially like another room of the house."

The two internal living rooms are likewise useable year-round but differ in mood. The smaller space is "a snug, internalised room but

still with views out and light", Pidcock says, whereas the sitting area at the northern end of the dining room is "a space to read and talk".

"The land slopes gently so that it is a bit elevated," she explains. "So when you are in there, it feels as if you are in the garden."

The one room that has been added upstairs is another potential space for reflection. Set up as a home office, it, too, faces north.

"It has views to the city and parts of Annandale and surrounding rooftops," the owner says. "It is a nice place to chill out, too."

Since the renovation, the owners have lived in the house for four seasons and are thrilled with the marriage of the original house, which now has insulated floors and ceilings and so is

more comfortable, and their new, north-facing living rooms opening to the garden.

The house works both as an energy-efficient building and as a home. "It is fantastic; really liveable. The air and the light are really good," the owner says. "And we've achieved our aim to make it sustainable. Our water bill is 40 per cent of what it was before. We only use about 30 or 40 per cent of the electricity we did and even though we have gas-boosted solar hot water and a gas barbie, we use less gas."

Pidcock seems pleased with her sustainable reinvention of the house.

"They've reduced their impact significantly," she says. "And they have extended the life of the little house well into the future."