

# Simply sympathetic

A re-imagined Hawthorn home makes the most of nature, reports **Pollyanna Sutton.**

**W**HEN your view is a gentle curve of the Yarra River and a wide expanse of parkland, it's elementary that the landscape will become an important influence on the redesign of the family home.

For a Hawthorn couple, whose children had flown the nest, their relationship with place was too important to sacrifice for a modern house in another street. They had lived near the river in a single-storey '20s house for almost 30 years, but it did not take full advantage of the view and was not a low-maintenance option in retirement.

They asked Schulberg Demkiw Architects to design an alternative that broke the conservative model, embraced the view and had a sympathetic impact on the area.

The solution had to put most of the living areas and the main bedroom on the same level while being cost effective, low maintenance and energy efficient.

Architect Ray Demkiw says the brief to place the rooms so they captured the north-western aspect created a cube. The old house was demolished and in its place a simple, double-storey glazed and rendered box overlooking a sun terrace was planned for the northern end of the site.

In an area where some new houses were overbearing, the clients were deeply concerned about the impact their design could have on their neighbours. The top of the site was excavated and reinforced with sleepers and landscaping so the new building would not be much taller than the original house.

The architects enlisted a builder, Momentum, to keep costs down through lightweight construction methods and low-maintenance building materials. The architects chose render, glass, aluminium frames, and Alucobond; and contrasting materials that would age gracefully including rammed earth.

To make the house energy efficient, northern windows were protected by large eaves, and minimal windows were used to the south and the east. The house cross-ventilates and large areas of glazing reduced the need for artificial lighting. Large tanks under the house water the gardens.

Originally, the clients explored the possibility of dual tenancy on the corner block.

Once the preliminary design was done and the main house oriented to the northern view, it had essentially turned its back on the remaining land. They gave the land back to the



The strong, simple shape is low maintenance and energy efficient. PICTURES: DALLAS STRIBLEY

neighbourhood vista, using only enough to build a driveway to take cars to the garage at the rear of the house. The rest became a large garden with beds of grass trees, pebbles and native plants that sweep away down the slope to the timber fence line on the perimeter.

The design and documentation process for the house took about eight months and the building was completed over the course of a year.

From the street, it rises up as a strong, simple shape defined by a mixed palette of white-rendered walls, hardwood timber battening and wide, recessed eaves. Access to the property is up a gentle ramp past an old peppercorn tree and simple landscaping.

The wide front door pivots to create a strong entrance. This level is where the clients spend most of their time. The large open-plan living, dining, and kitchen area overlooks the terrace through a wall of glass. Doors slide back and screens slide across to open the house to the outdoors.

In the corner of the lounge area, two walls of glazing meet to orient that part of the room towards the parkland view.

The clients wanted as much space as possible, and the design obliged with large, open rooms. They also wanted to take advantage of technology but not be overwhelmed.

In the living zone, heating, cooling and external metal-louvered blinds operate with a simple on-off

command. The high ceilings house recessed halogen lights and speakers for the sound system.

Throughout the house, interior colours were kept to simple palettes of grey and white, and natural materials, providing a neutral backdrop for the mix of antique and contemporary furniture.

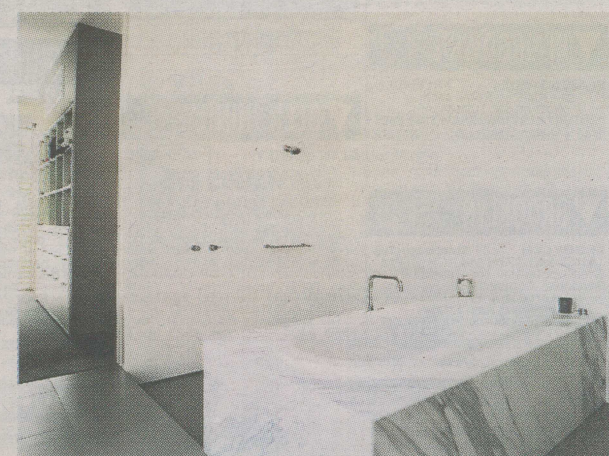
The minimal kitchen, with its composite stone island bench, sleek joinery and stainless-steel work surfaces, was positioned at the rear of the room to serve both the formal dining area inside and the informal entertaining area outside. The stark, modern lines are warmed by a floor made from tallow wood.

Beyond the kitchen, a door leads into the hidden utility areas — a walk-in pantry and a large laundry room — and provides access to the garage and storage. Downstairs, there is a multi-purpose room, which has become a proxy children's storage facility, and a wine store.

The rest of the ground floor is a main suite with an enormous bathroom, walk-in wardrobe and sleeping area. The luxurious bathroom makes use of marble, large sinks, an elegant bathtub and a large walk-in shower. The bedroom also has the advantage of the parkland view.

Upstairs, the floor plan has been designed for a variety of uses. There are two bedrooms for visiting family and a full bathroom. The rest of this floor is used as a large study and informal lounge, with purpose-built joinery and storage including a kitchenette hidden behind cupboard doors. It functions as a separate living quarters, if needed.

From the upper-storey windows you can appreciate the exterior forms and elements such as the vertical battening and white river pebbles scattered along the wide eaves.



This house is an elegant, modern design that makes a statement without being obtrusive. It ticks the checklist around function, space and maintenance that the clients required for the next phase of their lives.

Mr Demkiw says not only have they created an easily maintainable building, but it will stand the test of time and age gracefully.

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