

RENOVATION



Vision splendid in Armadale

Lou Sweeney tells how a builder found by Google brought a skeleton to life.

NIKKI KINSELLA had a vision. After moving from Perth, living in a house she didn't much like in Camberwell, she was pretty keen to find the right place for herself, husband Craig and children Ashlee, nearly three, and Jack, 1, so life in Melbourne could really begin.

Trawling the leafy inner suburbs for her dream home, she came across what she describes as probably "one of the worst houses in Armadale".

"It didn't look great but I could see its potential. It's like I had some kind of vision of what it could be."

It's that rare kind of foresight some have that can really turn a sow's ear into the most magnificent silk purse or in this case, a pretty tired period home into a sharp, modern family residence.

What Mrs Kinsella initially saw was a double-fronted Victorian with terraces, out-of-plumb walls and a very outdated granny flat tacked onto the rear. Through the gloomy, outmoded interior she identified the

bare bones from which she could fashion something special. "The floorplan was really good and I could see I'd get what I've always wanted here: a large front room, bedrooms off the hallway, open plan out the back. All the structure was in place, then it was a case of finding someone who could do it for us," she says.

Enter builder Sean Kiley and his team, who understood Mrs Kinsella's needs and set about realising her vision of a contemporary family home. "I really didn't know anyone to ask about builders so I searched (Google for) Sean and he came out and was fantastic.

"For example, he was really honest. Unlike some other people we contacted, he told us he wouldn't be able to start work for several months, but he gave us a start date and was ready to go on that day."

Mr Kiley says this particular renovation brought up many issues for him and his team to solve. "It seemed to me that there had been at least two major renovations done to the house prior to this one and they weren't great, the place was a bit of a mess."

One of the major undertakings was to remove the chinker brick from the original timber and then render the exterior. Internally replastering, restumping and wiring were extensive processes.

"We actually had to bring the backbone into the house and excavate all the earth that the granny flat out the back was just sitting on," says Mr Kiley.

The house as it presents today is virtually unrecognisable from the erstwhile unloved old Victorian. The ultra-modern look is achieved via a series of rendered rectangles that intersect to form the facade. Timber rib-like screens rise up to the second level and an oversize front door with opaque side panes complete an urbane exterior.

The essential footprint of the old house hasn't changed here, but Mrs Kinsella's configuration gives the house a zoned feel with the bedrooms and bathrooms central to the



Nikki Kinsella — in the kitchen with Jack and Ashlee — saw promise in a faded double-fronted Victorian house.

PICTURES: GARY MEDLCOOT

house while living zones at either end offer flexibility.

A large front window in the living room looks over the street and turning around to face the rear, the long, broad hallway takes the eye to the excellent rear open plan, giving the entire section a sense of connection and flow.

In a nifty move, the first room on the right has double doors so it can be a study, playroom or bedroom. A simple idea such as this one provides terrific versatility for a growing family.

All the bedrooms retain their original sash window frames, something that Mrs Kinsella wanted, along with the lofty ceilings, to remind her of what had come before and how those small things had inspired her vision.

The main bedroom has a semi ensuite that is accessible from both bedroom and hall. It's a pretty flash affair, too, with charcoal tiling, twin vanity, huge glass shower and Corian benches.

There are two more bedrooms along the hall lit by a large skylight. The light and air that have been incorporated into the design here are simple, but very clever ideas and the airy feel they convey connects the spaces in a most relaxed way.

Out in the open-plan rear there's no sign of that old granny flat. In fact the deep yard stretches out with a north-easterly aspect and plenty of space for both outdoor entertaining on the rear deck and children's play. The kitchen sitting to the rear left is a stunner. Hard to imagine now the old yellow lino on floors with rust spots. A picture of clean lines and functional design, cabinets are white, square-edged vinyl wrap, with CaesarStone benches and a fine pale latte splashback.

The best thing is the bifold window over the sink on the east wall. This thin strip of glass looks great and also provides a lovely, interesting frame for the garden. In this kitchen everything has a place and a use and the space just about hums.

A terrific first-level addition adds more versatility to an already smart configuration. Stairs leading off the front section of the house take you to the rangy space of, what is, until the children can negotiate the stairs with confidence, the guest suite.

The Details

The brief: To change a one-storey period house into a stylish, modern, family house with another level.

Suburb: Armadale

Builder: Renovation One, 9370 7978, renovationone.com.au

Plasterer: Alpha Rendering and Hard Plastering, 0419 580 897

Roof plumbing: Rob Allava, 0413 381 464

Electrician: Pro Spark, 0418 585 570

Size: 47 square metres

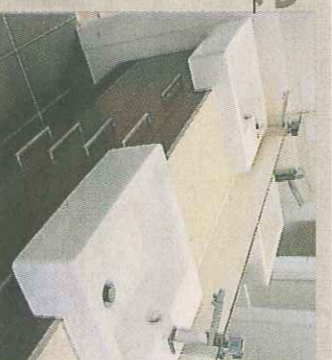
Budget: About \$350,000



What we love

Bathrooms and kitchen: "I just love how well everything works here. The bathrooms and the kitchen are my favourite things. There's plenty of room for everyone and the kitchen is the most functional one I've ever had," Mrs Kinsella says.

Open-plan area: "Along with the front living room and the study in the hall, we have so much room, the kids have their spaces, we have ours but we can all meet. With two children at home, there's a lot less cabin fever."



Bifold kitchen window: "I love the way this looks and works. From here I can see the kids out in the backyard while I'm in the kitchen," she says.

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