

Balancing act

Converting a dark and pokey, heritage-listed terrace into a light and spacious modern design, while maintaining the traditional feel, has been a resounding success, writes **Jenny Ringland**. Photos by **Bob Barker**.



After enduring a weekly commute from Canberra to Sydney for many years, Liz and Richard Gilbert recently decided to settle in Sydney. With three children grown up and out on their own, downsizing from their rambling Canberra home seemed the way to go.

"We had rented in the North Sydney area before and knew that's where we wanted to look," says Liz. "Our aim was to find an unrenovated place, because we wanted the challenge of doing something up."

The only hitch was finding the right house. The couple found unrenovated houses were hard to come by in the area, but they kept looking and their efforts paid off when they stumbled upon a heritage-listed 1900s terrace that had undergone several small, but botchy, renovations over the years.

"Our main complaint was that it was dark and gloomy," says Liz. "The main bedroom was tiny and the upstairs ceiling was rotting. Downstairs there was a grimy outdoor toilet and laundry."

Liz and Richard moved in straight away, so they could get a feel for the house and decide on what changes to make. The couple sourced an architect from Archicentre. Richard says they were put in touch with Melonie Bayl-Smith of Liquid Architecture. But being heritage listed, the council approval process could have been a

nightmare. However, after only one re-submission, the plans went ahead in keeping with the Gilberts' original wishes. "They [the builder and architect] laughed when we said we wanted to stay living here during the renovation," recalls Richard. "It would have meant five months without a kitchen or bathroom."

In a case of perfect timing, the house next door came up for rent, so the couple snapped it up.

Let there be light

To convert the dark terrace into a light and spacious home, the front of the house was preserved, including the original brick front facade, but the rear was demolished. Liz and Richard opted to maintain a traditional feel in the existing building and experimented with modern materials in the newly erected sections.

"It was an ongoing three-way conversation about the design - between us, Melonie, and the builder Stuart Wilson," says Liz. "They'd come in with a few photos and we'd pick what we liked."

Upstairs the Gilberts were unhappy with their pokey bedroom, so Melonie suggested switching the rooms at the front with those at the rear. This meant the main bedroom was moved from the front to the rear and an ensuite added. The balcony was extended to make the most of the outlook onto the newly landscaped garden.

"The new ensuite and the main bathroom share a wall, so all the plumbing fits nicely together. It was the builder's idea to contain all the plumbing work in the walls and roof so that when you're downstairs you can't hear a thing; it's very quiet," says Richard. "We took the opportunity to update the main bathroom, too, and managed to fit a shower, bath, basin and loo into quite a small space. All credit to Melonie and Stuart."

Major work was carried out on the ceilings upstairs. Richard says it was made from lath and plaster, which was beginning to crack and rot. "We had to lower the ceiling by about six inches

[15cm] and replace it completely," says Richard. "At the same time they restored the light fittings to their original state - a previous owner had installed new fittings next to the original ones and made a mess."

Downstairs, they opened the original front rooms up, knocking down the wall between the formal dining and lounge rooms. The kitchen and meals area is a feature of the new addition.

"We wanted a well-laid-out kitchen with a big table," says Liz. "We have an extended family with three kids, two of whom have partners, and needed somewhere we could eat together."

Liz opted to focus the kitchen along one wall. It features CaesarStone benchtops and Kleenmaid appliances. Her one request was a walk-in pantry, which has proved to be a wonderful storage option.

Opening the house up provided the Gilberts with the opportunity to have it smart wired.

"We had the whole place completely wired for internet, phone, sound systems and other automated functions," says Richard. "It's good to have a central control for all our technology."

Being comfortable all year round was also high on their list of priorities, so they had sub-floor heating installed. "We think it was a good move. It's really quiet and we're finding it very efficient," says Liz. "And our dog Harry thinks it's wonderful."

For the exterior the aim was to achieve a balance between the old and the new. It was Richard's job

to salvage the bricks from the demolition and clean them up for re-use in the new construction. The existing brickwork along the side of the house and at the front was re-pointed, creating a seamless transition between old and new.

The stand-out feature of the renovation is the TerraCade cladding. Made from a similar material to roof tiles, it's an alternative to render. "The TerraCade was Melonie's idea," says Liz. "I think it's come up really well. It contrasts with the brick but still manages to fit in with the heritage style."

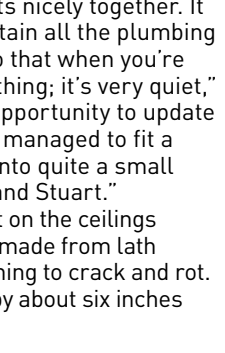
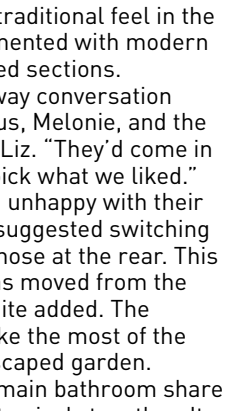
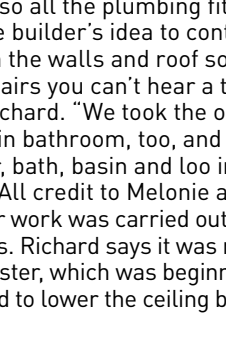
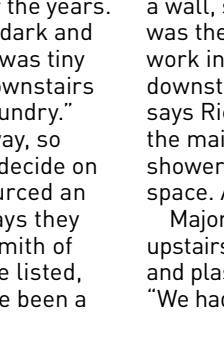
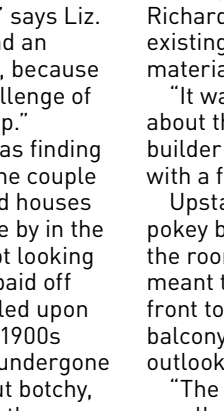
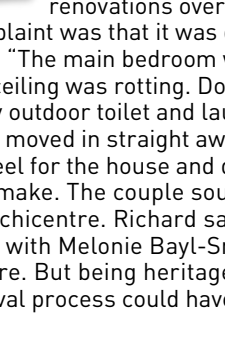
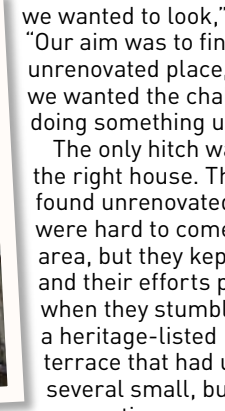
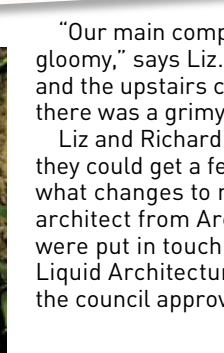
The landscaped garden, backing on to a natural stone wall, adds the finishing touch to the renovation. "We had two prerequisites: it had to be low maintenance and we wanted a perfumed garden," says Liz. "Stuart did the whole thing. He thought subtropical plants would look good against the stone wall, so we just let him decide."

One clever design feature is the two timber boxes framing the water feature. One box encases the air conditioning unit, which has served to turn an unsightly necessity into a talking point. ■

MORE INFORMATION

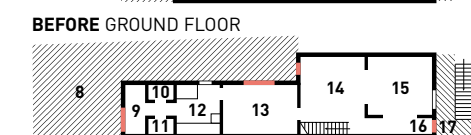
■ **Liquid Architecture** 9437 4759, liquidarchitecture.com.au

■ **Stuart Wilson Constructions** 0412 559 777

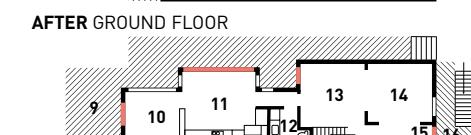
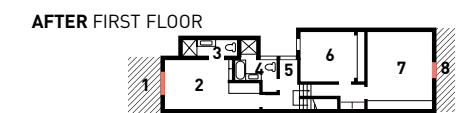


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D The facade and original bricks down the side of the house were preserved **E** An alternative to render, TerraCade provided a unique and stylish finish **F** The air conditioning unit is cleverly hidden in one of these timber boxes **G** Positioned along one wall is the new kitchen **H** The old kitchen



FIRST FLOOR 1 Balcony 2 Bedroom two 3 Bathroom 4 Study nook 5 Bedroom three 6 Main bedroom 7 Balcony
GROUND FLOOR 8 Courtyard/garden 9 Laundry 10 Hot water service 11 Toilet 12 Kitchen 13 Living area 14 Dining room 15 Lounge room 16 Entry 17 Veranda



FIRST FLOOR 1 Balcony 2 Main bedroom 3 Ensuite 4 Bathroom 5 Study nook 6 Bedroom two 7 Bedroom three 8 Veranda

GROUND FLOOR 9 Courtyard/garden 10 Family room 11 Kitchen/meals room 12 Laundry/toilet 13 Dining room 14 Lounge room 15 Entry 16 Veranda



GET THE LOOK

TERRACADE

A stand-out feature of the Gilberts' renovation is the TerraCade cladding from Austral Bricks. A relatively new material, it's suitable for use as cladding over an existing wall or it can be used on its own. This house features TerraCade in Franklin colour.

■ **Austral Bricks** 132 742, australbricks.com.au



SPLASH OF RED

Liz and Richard chose a predominately neutral palette for their home, adding splashes of colour through furnishings such as the carpet and the red kitchen splashback. Their splashback is from Decoglaze. Priced from \$450 per square metre, there is a wide range of colours from which to choose.

■ **Decoglaze** 9624 7099, decoglaze.net



TROPICAL FEATURE

There's something to be said about sitting in your garden listening to the gentle trickle of a water feature. Liz and Richard's builder

sourced theirs from Bali. For a similar design, Water Features Direct stock a wide range including the Gentung Polo [pictured]. A price of \$875 includes the water feature, base and pump.

■ **Water Features Direct** waterfeaturesdirect.com.au

