

Cinderella moment for worker's cottage



Trisha Croaker
From the Drawing Board

When Kathy and Graham Sale found a charming old weatherboard workman's cottage in the inner west, they knew it "ticked all the boxes".

It was pretty from the front, in an area they liked, near their children's school and in a great street.

There was only one problem – it didn't work the way it was. The 1890s-built cottage had celebrated its 100th birthday with a 1990s-style makeover – one leaving it more end-of-the-evening-dishevelled than belle of the ball. Rather than clearly defined rooms, an awkward configuration of newly added spaces looped one to the next, limiting the internal functionality and minimising external spaces.

The Sales took an obvious, but often overlooked, approach – occupying the house for 18 months to understand what they liked and didn't, before calling Andrew Burns of Andrew Burns Architect for help.

"We approached this with a willingness to explore what could be done,"

Kathy Sale says. "Our brief was to make better use of the space, to get a comfortable homey home without it being a show house, enough room for the kids to have their own space, and a garden, all within a tight budget."

Burns says the site was basically a flat 300 square-metre rectangle, bordered by a wide tree-lined street to the north, a rear lane, one unobtrusive single-storey neighbouring house west and a two-storey renovation along the eastern boundary. Site constraints were the small size of the block and privacy and overshadowing issues.

His solution was to refresh the weatherboard cottage, housing two bedrooms downstairs and an upstairs living area. Moving an internal wall, he was able to expand the children's bedrooms and simultaneously create an inviting, generous front hallway, which acts to connect the new and old sections.

The 1990s addition was demolished and replaced with an L-shaped two-storey lightweight pavilion



accommodating kitchen, dining, living areas and services downstairs, and new study, bathrooms and bedroom upstairs.

Floor to ceiling glazed retractable doors and large expanses of retractable oversized windows have been used with a simple palette of materials and colours to create an open, light-filled family home.

Sites of this size, and the way they're developed, are important for the future of the city, Burns says.

"A key component when designing this project was that it could be a model for middle-ring and outer-ring

Light-filled ... the worker's cottage, above and right, after its transformation. Photo: Brett Boardman

suburbs, demonstrating how a 300 square-metre site can be used efficiently, combining the presence of a freestanding dwelling at the front of the site, but the efficiency of a courtyard model at the rear of the site."

Working closely with assistant Nath Rankothge and Peter Ginns of Genuine Building Services, Burns has created a house with a greater sense of generosity of space than might be expected on a site this size.



Rug up ... a bold, geometric runner brings life to a hallway. Interior: Robyn Cosgrove

Lay a course for colour and comfort underfoot



Rikki Stubbs
The House Whisperer

WHEN I'm working on a colour scheme or decorating a room I start with the floor. It's the largest area of colour, pattern and texture and that often means a rug. Rugs define areas within an open-plan space, such as the dining or TV area. They anchor the sofa and chairs creating a sense of place and visually hold everything together.

English decorator Chester Jones says "rugs bring humanity to a room". He believes they resolve the mood of a room. I don't want a carpet to shout at me. It has to behave."

Leading Sydney rug specialist Robyn Cosgrove agrees. I talked with her in her stunning showroom surrounded by piles of gorgeous hand-knotted rugs from Nepal, India, Iran and Pakistan, made of silk, cactus, wild

nettle, bamboo and Mongolian cashmere. The rich colours sing in persimmon, pagoda pink, daffodil and indigo.

These rugs are inspired by classic designs from the Orient and Europe contemporised with a modern palette. Because they are hand-made there are no solid colours. As the weaver stops and starts the colour varies like nature. The yarn is hand shorn, carded, spun and loomed. They have a relaxed imperfection. Traditional techniques ensure the natural lanolin stays in the wool.

The contemporary rug was born in the mid-1970s when Bombay-based Shyam Ahuja launched their pastel durries. Decorators went mad for them. Until then wall-to-wall carpet with a traditional Persian rug was the norm.

In open-plan contemporary homes with hard floors, rugs are essential. Acres of bare floors don't just feel cold, they look spartan.

If you are selling your house in winter use rugs to warm up and visually lift the atmosphere. In summer, bare timber floors inevitably get gritty.

Even in a beach house I would have something casual on the floor – a flat weave cotton, rag rug or sisal.

Pure and General have beautiful small colourful rag rugs from Morocco that would look great in a children's room.

I grew up with rugs. My mother would seek out a lone dealer in Brisbane who ventured into Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan to bring back exquisite small rugs woven for dowries and prayer. We had them in every room – under the sink in the kitchen, the guest loo, hallways.

I can't imagine living without beautiful rugs underfoot. There would be a void in my rooms and in my life.

Ask Rikki your design and renovation questions each Sunday, 5pm on 2UE (954AM).



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