

*Private viewing this page* A Jes & Laub chair from Anibou in the master suite, which is divided into four areas - bedroom, bathroom, study and wardrobe. Fixed louvres on the balcony offer privacy while allowing natural light to flood in. *opposite page* The new two-level masonry and glass "box" extension - added to the rear of a small worker's cottage - as seen from the rear boundary.



# COTTAGE INDUSTRY

In adding a modern double-height extension to a small worker's cottage, Sydney architects Tobias Theodore created a *functional zone* for a sporty couple and their children with plenty of space for work, rest and play.

**Text by Margie Blok. Photography by Sharrin Rees.**

#### A BOLD APPROACH TO THE EXTENSION OF A SMALL WORKER'S COTTAGE

in a heritage conservation area has won Sydney architects Tobias Theodore a local council award for best urban design. "Our clients wanted a strong house and we knew the council would want to keep the existing cottage, so we decided to create a distinct contrast between the old house and the extension and set up a respectful dialogue between the two sections," explains Telly Theodore.

Nick Tobias, the other half of the Paddington-based design duo, said their clients had specific ideas of what they wanted. "They are a sporty family with two young children, so the house had to be functional. They wanted a practical house with a kids' zone separate to a designated master suite where the husband – a trader who often works into the early hours of the morning – could retreat into an office attached to the bedroom. It was also important for the parents to have a visual and aural connection to where their children would be sleeping in another part of the house," says Tobias.

To achieve this, the architects designed a two-level "masonry and glass box" connected to the original cottage by a double-height void crowned with a huge skylight. This passage of light, explains Tobias, is a key circulation point and a transient space separating the old and new. "It also provides an elegant frame for the existing roof. The void acts as an intermediate zone for traffic coming through to the main bedroom, or from the garage at the side, or into the living space from the kids' bedrooms in the original cottage."

Occupying the entire upper level of the box is the master suite – an open space with zones for the bedroom, study, bathroom and wardrobe. One side looks into the void "like a balcony to the heart of the house". The other side has a wall of floor-to-ceiling glass sliding doors opening to a balcony overlooking the garden and pool. Timber fixed louvres on the balcony outside the study provide privacy while allowing natural light to flood inside. Separating the bedroom and study are timber veneer doors that slide into wall cavities; the doors can be left open to create one huge space or closed as needed.

Ensuring their clients' desire for a "strong house", the architects used zinc on the exterior of the upper level. "We chose this material because the grid pattern and the modulated surface echo and complement the cottage's brick facade," says Theodore. "This zinc-clad upper level forms a bookend for the pitched roof at the front. The rear box is a simple and distilled structure; it didn't require super-expensive or extraordinary internal finishes."

The ground level of the box has huge expanses of sliding glass, allowing the open-plan living/kitchen area – with its soaring ceiling and floor of wide blackbutt timber boards – to flow freely into the garden. An island bench topped with manmade stone anchors the practical, pared back kitchen fitted with a stainless steel cooking niche and light timber veneer cabinetry. Stairs at one side of the living area lead up to a carpeted children's playroom with tall glass doors opening to a charcoal-coloured cement platform surrounding the wet edge pool. "This room acts as a big playpen where the kids' mess can be contained, and the location is logical because it's close to Mum in the kitchen," says Tobias.

Challenged with a level rectangular site, Tobias Theodore elevated the 15-metre pool "to create modulation in a dead flat space". Water spills over a white-tiled wet edge into the garden creating an effective balustrade beside the lawn and landscaped space with a bank of mature cypress pines on the back boundary.

During the day the interior is flooded with natural light, but the lighting used during the evening is an important design component. "In our opinion lighting is seriously overused and should only be installed to illuminate specific areas and artworks. Throughout the house we used task lighting such as the Erco track with spots above the dining table," says Tobias of a move which was welcomed by their clients. "This project entailed a collaborative approach and trust between us and the clients," he says. "They had their opinions and put their views on the table, but from the outset they listened to us and trusted us to express what they wanted from the house." □

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*Functional living* The softly-lit edge of the raised lap pool can be seen from the new open-plan kitchen/living area. The practical kitchen features a bench of manmade stone and a stainless steel 'cooking niche' with light veneer cabinets.





*Design notebook...*  
**Zinc cladding** Architect Nick Tobias chose zinc cladding on the upper level for its classic qualities of malleability and low maintenance, using it in a contemporary way with specially prefabricated panels. "It ages beautifully and it's a wonderful, natural material," he says. The VM Zinc panels were supplied by Copperform, tel (07) 3273 7999, www.copperform.com



“THIS PASSAGE OF LIGHT IS A KEY CIRCULATION POINT – A TRANSIENT SPACE SEPARATING THE OLD AND THE NEW.”

*Out of the box this page* The master suite occupies the entire upper level of the new extension and a balcony runs the length of the room offering views across the landscaped garden. *opposite page* Reinforcing the concept of one space with defined areas is a visually unbroken line formed by a long timber bench in the bathroom (below) matching the bedside tables in the adjacent bedroom (top left). The day spa-style ensuite bathroom is a generous space finished with glass-louvre window panels and cantilevered basins. The masonry and glass extension is connected to the old worker's cottage by a double-height void crowned with a huge skylight (top right).