

ADULTS: 2
KIDS: 2
AREA: 2075QM
FOOTPRINT: 212SQM
SITE AREA: 698SQM
SITE COVERAGE: 30%
DISTANCE TO CITY: 16.2KM
LOCATION: SURREY HILLS, VIC

FOREVER HOUSE



WOODWOODWARD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN GOLLINGS

MORE FRONT, MORE BRICK

This great little house in Melbourne's leafy, pleasant, conservative Surrey Hills reworks the classic triple-fronted suburban house. The clients and their young family asked talented architects WOWOWA to design them a house they could stay in 'forever'. The project quickly became a reworking of their existing house, to build on what was good and improve what was not.

The site is quite distinctive – a triangular corner block with a large front yard and not much of a backyard. A little 'nugget' of a building has been added to the front of the house: a small intervention with a big impact. This extension is an addition to the site, not just an addition to the house, and the architects have considered the bigger picture by aligning the addition to the site boundary rather than the existing house. At the same time the extension is very much of the house – it's another brick front in the tradition of multiple-fronted houses.



NEW SUBURBAN

Below: the central island kitchen bench repeats the shape of the site on a smaller scale, and is a focal point for family life.

Materials are central to how we experience our buildings, and brickwork is central to the mid twentieth-century Australian suburb. The clinker bricks used in the original house provide the inspiration for the new – a combination of common and glazed bricks that sample the colours of the clinkers. Brick kilns are themselves made of bricks, and through the process of repeated firings, the ones inside the kilns take on dark and purple tones, the result of volcanic-type reactions. These became clinkers – over-fired bricks. The Arts and Crafts Movement at the turn of the century incorporated clinkers, and in the interwar period they became popular. In this house, the clinker's complex set of colours and hues are made graphic – the new bricks are a pixilated version of the clinker. The new is not distinct from the old, they are connected: the fuzzy pattern of the new brickwork comes from the original building.

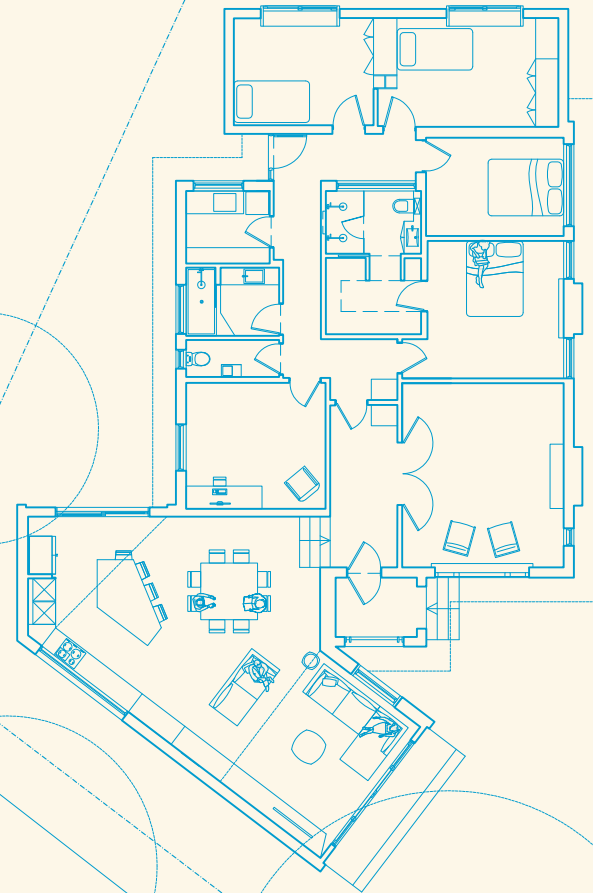
The design process inverted the front and backyards. The old front yard becomes a functional backyard, the key playing area for the kids and dog. A successful yard needs connection to living areas, and the new building is primarily a living space. The extension pushes itself into the new back garden, with a dark brick edge around the façade recalling Howard Arkley's famous paintings, framing timber glazed doors and surround. This timber links the house to the deck, and is another clever moment where the materials slip into each other.



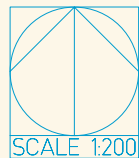
REMAKING FOR FAMILY LIFE



*WE DARED TO DREAM THAT WE
COULD TURN A DARK DINGY 1930s
CLINKER-BRICK HOUSE INTO A
LIGHT-FILLED, MODERN, PRACTICAL,
FAMILY HOME. WE ARE THRILLED TO
HAVE ACTUALLY ACHIEVED IT.*
— OWNER



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SCALE 1:200

The floor level of the new living space is lower than the existing house, transitioning down to the lower garden level. Like the site itself, the living space is an angular and roughly triangular space comprised of three zones – sitting, dining and kitchen. Natural light comes from many directions – the entry hall, the main garden, a side garden and a triangular skylight above. The multiple outlooks and light, as well as a decent ceiling height, make this space seem large and generous, a pleasure to be in. Bands of timber-edged cabinetwork and kitchen joinery also tie the new back into the existing house, with its timber architraves and doors. The kitchen island bench further resolves the geometry of the site and room, creating a focus for family life.

The rest of the house is refurbished around contemporary needs and has several rooms that are inherently flexible, particularly the former front room which can work as an additional living space, playroom for the kids, home office or indeed anything. It is big enough to allow for this – small rooms tend to be used only for bedrooms. Bathrooms have new excited high-level tiling that recalls the original building's Art Deco era and glams up the wet areas, but not in the conventional way with complicated fixtures and fittings. A wrapping corridor services the cluster of rooms in the rest of the house. At the end are two kids' bedrooms, occupying and extending the former garage. These rooms feature deep window reveals for sitting in, with views onto the old backyard. This project, with only a handful of additional square metres added, is a super-smart transformation of a small brick house into a family dwelling with enough quality space, inside and out, for now and the future.

Below: the highly patterned brickwork is a sampling of the colours of traditional clinker bricks.

