

home



THE AIM
Elegant and minimalist split-level terrace replacing red-brick eyesore.

TIME FRAME
Design: Four months
Council: 15 months
Construction: Eight months

GREEN POINTS
■ Vertical and horizontal cross ventilation through many louvre windows.
■ Multi-level stairwell acts as a natural light well and thermal chimney.
■ Original flooring timbers in living areas.
■ Floor heating in concrete is set for off-peak.

FAVOURITE FEATURES
Carter: "The liberation of light and space."

INSIDERS' TIPS
Carter says don't be put off by difficult or conservative councils or contractors. "Your home is your first universe. Fight hard for that belief."

DESIGNER
Shaun Carter of CarterWilliamson, 9716 4566, carterwilliamson.com

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
O'Hearn Consulting, 9806 2988

JOINERY
Kad Kitchens, 9627 7486

The devil is in the detail

This residence needed an architectural exorcism to let in the light, writes Susan Redman.

The liberation of space and light is just one of the many "big ideas" underpinning Shaun Carter's design of this modern, split-level, steel and glass residence. Light was so successfully harnessed within the building, an owner once remarked that even on a stormy day it was like standing in the rain without getting wet. "This sounded to me like a liberation of spirit as well as light and space," Carter says.

Carter has a point, considering the original 19th-century house had suffered so many disfiguring changes over the years and was in dire need of an architectural exorcism.

"My first impression was that the house was fundamentally flawed and dark," says Carter of the final 1960s incarnation. "The facade needed to be redesigned and the house had to be opened up. I felt the levels were wrong. But it wasn't until I could extract the building from its physical condition that I began to see the way forward."

Carter spent four months labouring over the challenging design task, eventually expelling the ghosts of past architectural blunders. In their stead, a sparkling new home materialised, displaying all the hallmarks of the designer's talent for the dramatic interplay of light and space, intersecting horizontal and vertical planes and extensive use of clever cabinetry.

Carter describes the new three-bedroom house, which is in a traditional Balmain terrace, as a bold "re-interpretation of the Victorian original to better suit Sydney's climate and a sympathetic response to the streetscape". Most of the houses that share the same steeply inclined car-free road have water views.

The extensive use of glass in Carter's design virtually brings that outside view indoors. The entire street facade of the house comprises steel-framed glass panels. Carter installed a masonry wall just inside the glass front, which blocks any outside interest. From this small, street-level vestibule, stairs lead up to an open-plan dining room and kitchen where occupants can readily see out but cannot be seen.

"I wanted the owners to open the front door and not have strangers looking into their lives," Carter says. The reception area ensures privacy and captures

'My first impression was that the house was fundamentally flawed and dark.' Shaun Carter, designer

the light from the property's eastern orientation. The front door is 3.8 metres high and sits a half level between the kitchen/dining area and the large main bedroom at basement level below," Carter says. "The distortion of scale of the entry is deliberate so as to appear as a two-storey building when it is three."

Another of Carter's ideas was to create demarcations "for times when the occupier's personality is social ... and rooms for when privacy is required".

Living rooms are at the front and overlook the street, garden and harbour. Bedrooms are on three levels for privacy and the outdoor area is separated into two cool courtyards flagged with sandstone.

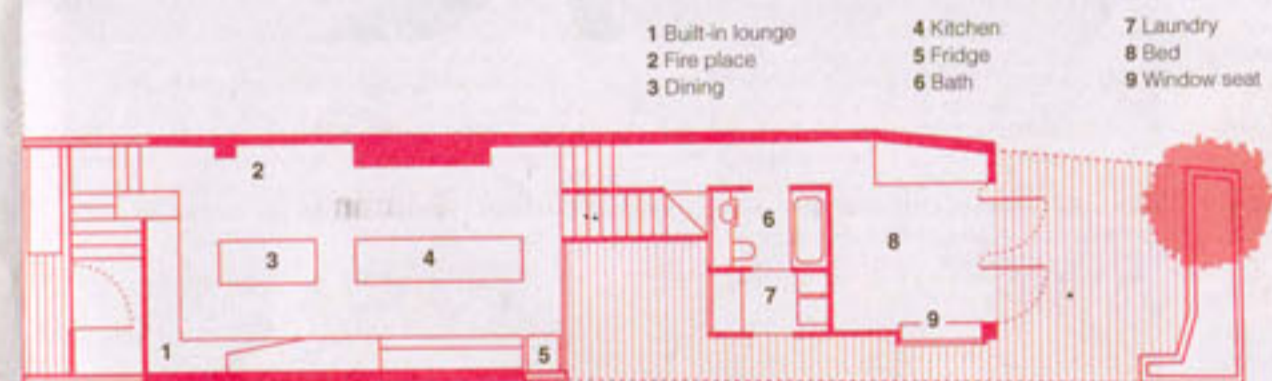
Lot size is fundamental to development in tight urban sites, Carter says, especially in an old inner city suburb such as Balmain. With only 125 square metres to play with, Carter achieved spaciousness by organising his plan vertically, rather than horizontally. "Small or even reasonable spaces feel bigger and more friendly if they have height," he says. "The ceiling heights of the main living spaces, the kitchen, dining and lounge rooms, are all 3.2 metres."

Glass-enclosed stairs in the middle section of the house act like a huge light well. The stairs are a source of most of the natural light in the heart of the building and separate the public and private areas. They also draw in fresh air through lower louvres while serving as a thermal chimney. The stairs are next to a courtyard and flanked by a two-storey shoji screen illuminated at night by fluorescent lights.

With so much attention to robust structural elements, it's not surprising that the pale walls, lime washed timber and concrete floors of Carter's interior set the tone for a restrained colour palette. The designer has a very particular objective in mind. "A good building should be a canvas for the people who live in it to decorate," he says.

Carter's design allows owners all the fun of individually branding their home with art and mementoes. Cabinets accommodate a lot of fairly unstylish necessities such as kitchen appliances, air-conditioners, water heaters, sound systems and lights.

"Shaun was clearly passionate about the project and every detail and issue has been addressed," the owner says. "I feel so spoilt in this house."



- 1 The dining room allows occupants to see out but not be easily seen.
- 2 A two-storey shoji screen in the stairwell is lit up at night with fluorescent lights.
- 3 The facade is made up of steel-framed glass panels.
- 4 The small street-level vestibule leads to the open-plan dining and kitchen.
- 5 Clever cabinetry, with strong horizontal and vertical planes, hides functional objects in the living room.

Photos: Brett Boardman
Plans adapted by Robert Parkinson