

## essential home

# Modern glow

A dark, narrow inner-city semi is now bathed in brightness.

**Words** Susan Redman  
**Photos** Brett Boardman

HOW do you transform a single-storey, inter-war semi into a property suited to contemporary living? It all comes down to space and light, says architect Shaun Carter, the principal of carterwilliamson architects.

"I try to get light in the middle of these old houses by pulling it down from above, breaking the building's mass with a light well or a courtyard, and extend from there."

In this narrow semi in inner-west Rozelle, Carter started at the home's core, where he placed a void and staircase leading to an upper level. In one stroke, he introduced light into the dark centre of the home, while providing a main bedroom, study and bathroom in an upstairs addition.

"From the street you see a plain brick facade, not very attractive, not very generous," says Carter of his initial examination of the house.

"Inside there was no light and low ceilings, particularly as you moved from the front two bedrooms and bathroom down the hall toward the back."

Carter was keenly aware of local council restrictions that wouldn't allow him to build above the original roof line or extend further than the original footprint. There was also an imposing factory backing on to the rear laneway to take into consideration.

"It was a smallish site of only 239 square metres. We had a tight budget and I needed to design a tight plan to match."

"My strategy straight away was to get light in. I broke off the back and introduced an expansive glass-roofed void over the central stairway, creating a double-height space," Carter says.

This solution created a dramatic focal point in the home, which now features all-white walls, spotted gum timber stairs and floors in the main bedroom and study, and warm taupe Sadlerstone tiles in the combined kitchen, dining and lounge room below.

This open-plan living area also displays Carter's characteristic clean lines. The whole space can be opened as aluminium bifold doors lead to what Carter refers to as the outdoor living room. Architecturally, it is sparsely decorated and for good reason.

"In Victorian homes, for example, the decoration is provided, both inside and out, so that the home could be anyone's," he says.

As a professed modernist, Carter believes that in good architecture, warmth, colour and decoration "should come from the clients' furniture, objects, art and artefacts".

"This provides a canvas for my clients' lives where they display their shared life experiences."

As Carter's clients entertain regularly, it was important for the living area to be both multi-functional and minimal.



Carter proposed a bank of warm wood joinery along the semi's common wall. "This would anchor and provide richness to this part of the house," he says, "as everything else was so light and bright."

A walnut-veneered line of cupboards hides a large laundry and pantry and features a black Rinnai fireplace at the sitting room end of the carpentry.

At the other end, the walnut wall transforms into a kitchen which features black granite benchtops, mirrored splashbacks and an island bench in the same materials.

The original entry to the home was halfway along a side path, and guests stepped straight into the living room. Carter retained the side entry but created privacy by erecting a small glass-and-steel-framed foyer, pushed out to the boundary so that the front door faced the street.

Painting the front door a vivid lime green also distinguished it.

Upstairs, the main bedroom looks across the lane to the factory. Carter gave it privacy by designing a very wide, deeply framed window across the rear wall and installed frosted floor-to-ceiling louvred windows on either side of the bed.

The ensuite has large panes of frosted glass at the end closest to the void, taking advantage of the abundance of light.

The rear of the home is clad in charcoal-stained sheets of vertically grooved wood panels and bordered by concrete pavers.

This demonstrates the stark contrast between the interior white and exterior black and between the roughly textured cladding and the smooth, natural, anodised aluminium-framed glass bifolds, the old brick front and the new timber back.

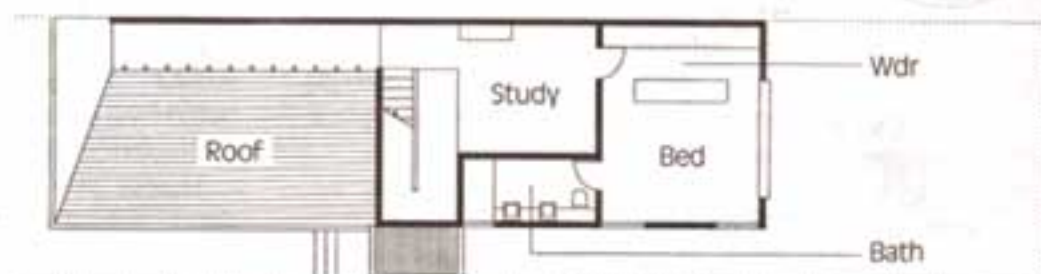
"The driving idea was always that the house needed space and, ultimately, to be bathed in natural light."

**1** The rear of the house with its charcoal-stained wood panels displays the architect's modernist trademark.

**2** In the kitchen a walnut-veneered line of cupboards hides a laundry and pantry.

**3** The front door, painted lime green, leads straight into the sitting area, which includes a black fireplace.

**4** Frosted louvres give privacy to the main bedroom. The ensuite features large panes of frosted glass.



**The aim**

To build a substantial yet private addition to a modest semi that would transform the living areas, introduce more light and add a new bedroom, bathroom and study upstairs.

**Time frame**

Design six months, council 12 months and construction seven months.

**Architect's favourite features**

"I'm really pleased with the colour palette and the joy of spatial expansion just after the constriction of entry, which is also enhanced by opening up the side doors."

**Green points**

- Natural light provided by the glass void.
- Cross-ventilation and orientation to the north.
- Stone-tiled floors have high thermal mass.
- Void attracts winter light and heat.
- Orientation reduces light and heat in summer.

**Architect**

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