

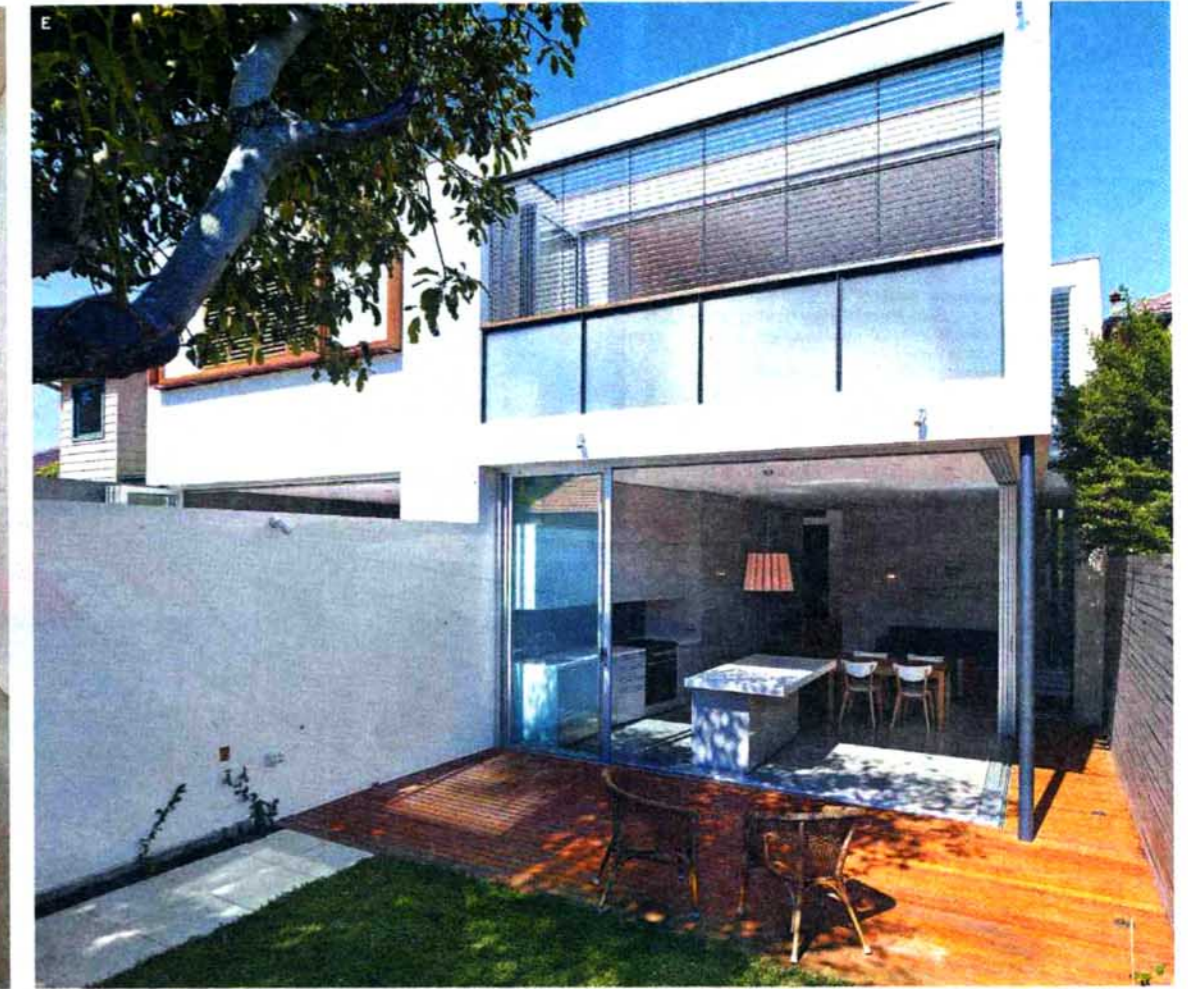
**FACT FILE**

**THE BRIEF**

To take a pair of unloved semi-detached houses and transform them into contemporary seaside homes

**THE ARCHITECT**

Shaun Carter,  
Carter Williamson Architects



**A** Street view of the northern semi **B** Flow is maintained from the kitchen to the garden on the north side **C** The northern semi has a centrally positioned kitchen **D** Timber steps lead down into the new northern concrete living area **E** Natural light floods the southern living space **F** The southern main bedroom **G** Timber stairs lead to the bedroom suite on the north side **H** The main northern bedroom



# Semi seriousness

A mirror-image makeover proves a challenge when each owner has different objectives

It sounds like a great idea, in theory at least. Friends who own neighbouring semi-detached houses decide they want to renovate at the same time.

Among the benefits it provides, there is potential to save money because of the economy of scale, as well as minimising the stress and inconvenience to your neighbour on the other side of the shared wall. Notoriously tricky to navigate through council on their own, because of the mirror-image nature of the houses, working on a design together means both sides should be happy with the outcome.

After some shopping around by the owners on both sides of these three-bedroom semis, the task of pulling it off was given to architect Shaun Carter from Carter Williamson Architects.

It was not the first time such a project had come across his desk, but they usually did not get past early planning stages.

"It is not uncommon for people to want to develop at the same time but it is unusual that we would get this far down the track," Shaun says.

Located in the beachside suburb of Manly on the Northern Beaches, one house faced south to the boundary and the other faced north.

And although they wanted a similar level of finishing, the owners were looking to meet very different objectives.

**"They were a younger couple working in finance and they wanted much more of a lifestyle home"**

"One couple had two kids and another one came along during the process so they wanted a four-bedroom house and a study," Shaun says.

"They also wanted a nice central kitchen with a living and dining space." On the southern side, the couple without children were very much

focused on using their home for entertaining and relaxing on weekends.

"They were a younger couple, working in finance, and they wanted much more of a lifestyle home," Shaun says.

"That is why the kitchen is positioned along the boundary wall." They were able to go up another level without exceeding height restrictions and so have room for a spacious main bedroom with ensuite and walk-in robes in both houses.

**Wall to wall**

Renovating together also allowed a little more space to be allocated into the design.

A shared wall in semi-detached houses is economical with space, because it need only be one thickness either side.

However, if an extension is completed on its own, it needs to comply to the building standard and be two layers thick.

Building together would allow the single wall approach to continue.

But while Shaun and both sets of owners thought they had eliminated any traditional areas of concern for planners, the design came to a halt with council.

Shaun says this was partly because the houses were being assessed according to the general nature of the suburb, which is characterised by larger blocks.

"Council's development control plan (DCP) and local environment plan (LEP) are suburban oriented and a semi is much more of

an urban house," he says.

This also meant that both houses had to provide off-street parking, despite already having small backyards to enjoy.

After the final approval was sorted, the serious work of building began.

**Set sale**

Before it could get started, however, the couple on the southern side decided to sell up.

Shaun says the couple with children opted to move ahead anyway and hired their neighbour-friendly builder to start on the

six-month process in late 2007.

During this time, the new owner popped her head over the fence to have a chat with Shaun.

**"Before it could get started, however, the couple on the southern side decided to sell up"**

"She bought the place and saw the design," Shaun says.

"She came over during construction and we started up a conversation about picking up where we left off." →



## GET THE LOOK

### HERE AND CHAIR

The simplicity of the materials used in the semis allows the owners to add their personal touch. The dining suite is typically simple with a wooden table and classic chairs. For similar seats, look no further than Ikea. The Nordmyra chair is made from solid birch with a plywood seat; it is stackable and easy to clean. They are priced at \$65 each.

● MORE INFORMATION  
Ikea [ikea.com.au](http://ikea.com.au)

### LIGHTEN UP

When the architecture is so restrained, there is opportunity to add shape and texture in unexpected ways. The light fitting over the kitchen is the Snowball pendant light by Poul Henningsen. Matt Blatt furniture offers a replica version in aluminium for \$149.

● MORE INFORMATION  
Matt Blatt Furniture [mattblatt.com.au](http://mattblatt.com.au)

### BAR FLY

The beauty of an island bench is that apart from the extra workspace, it lends itself to so many other purposes, especially with the addition of a couple of bar stools. For something similar to those used in the semi shown, try the Mia barstool from Oz Design Furniture. It has a chrome base with brown seat in regenerated leather and is priced at \$99.

● MORE INFORMATION  
Oz Design Furniture [ozdesignfurniture.com.au](http://ozdesignfurniture.com.au)



A The southern kitchen, which runs along the boundary wall, features Spotted Floral wallpaper by Florence Broadhurst positioned behind the splashback  
B The neutral-coloured north ensuite has rooftop views  
C The new, open study area on the northern semi



Although it would have been ideal to work on both houses at the same time, the builder did the next best thing and started on the southern side once he had completed the northern semi.

Despite the slightly out of step process, the results have been a great success for both sets of owners.

### Twin set

Referred to by Shaun and his colleagues as the "fraternal twins", the semis are the same but different, with similar elements used in both to achieve different aims.

While timber has been used in the

original part of the houses, as well as for the stairs and upper floor, both have concrete slabs with underfloor heating for the new ground-floor sections.

**"The result is a cohesive pair of houses that work particularly well for the people who inhabit them"**

While harnessing natural light was not such an issue on the northern side, the new south-side extension has been set slightly off the boundary with wrap-around sliding doors to pull the sun in as much as possible.

The result is a cohesive pair of houses that work particularly well for the people who inhabit them.

They also feel much larger than their footprint would suggest.

"We like to think our houses have a 'fitness' about them," Shaun says. "There is no excess space."

"You only build what you need." ■

Robyn Willis

● MORE INFORMATION  
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