

# Beauty of a project from every angle



**Trisha Croaker**

From the Drawing Board

**N**eil Mackenzie of Mackenzie Pronk Architects and I are sitting in an old butcher's shop in Marrickville, office and home base for Neil, fellow architect and life-work partner Heidi Pronk, family and team.

We're talking about one of their projects, but I'm distracted by Mackenzie's hand-drawn concepts. One illustrates a project from a drive-by perspective – Mackenzie's hands on the wheel and his reflection just recognisable in a rear-view mirror. They're charmingly whimsical, but also incredibly effective – allowing the practice to imagine every aspect of a project before proceeding.

They used this approach in an alterations-and-additions project in Drummoyne finished last month, scrambling onto the roof to explore the house in its suburban context.

The brief was a reasonably standard "touch up the front and build something very new out the back" for a couple with two children living in a 1915 double-brick freestanding home,

complete with a series of 1940s to 1960s add-ons. The house was "on a gorgeous block, in a great location, with family around the corner", and featured a stunning nine-metre gum tree evocative of country living.

On the downside, the northern boundary was wedged hard against its two-storey neighbour, robbing two of the principal front rooms of light for decades. The second bedrooms of both houses faced each other and were 900 millimetres apart – if you sneezed, your neighbours could pass the tissues.

Mackenzie and project architect Kitty Nghiem responded with a strategy they believe appropriate for projects of this kind in Sydney's inner-ring suburbs.

"We venerate worthy historic architecture and then create a very clear distinction, building best what we build in the 21st century at the back," Mackenzie said. "And like much of our work, these additions poke their nose up looking for the sun and any prevailing winds."



In the original house, they restored and refreshed where necessary, keeping the main four front rooms and existing configuration, and then cutting in a courtyard behind – allowing them to flood the old house with light, and enabling them to move the second bedroom window to face the courtyard and sky.

Addressing drainage problems at the rear, they put a new living and dining pavilion up three steps, running it east-west, maximising light and ventilation, and clearly distinguishing it from the old.

They placed the kitchen to one

**Secret spot ... a rear courtyard confers privacy and lights the interior, below.** Photo: Roger D'Souza

side, shielding the courtyard and liberating the living/dining spaces, and extended a large outdoor covered living area into the garden.

Inspired by the Australian-ness of the garden, Ned Kelly-like slot windows were used in the kitchen while a lined cedar roof in the living area is a further reference to a classic part of the Australian idiom. While the previous house sat "sadly" on site, it now celebrates it.

