



renovation

Salute to the past The faded 1960s signage serves as a reminder of the building's days as a workshop, while an old timber roller shutter has been made into a window for Neil and Heidi's new office, where their firm, Mackenzie Pronk Architects, is now based.



Factory finish The workshop's original, triple-brick walls dominate. The bricks were sandblasted to give a bold, urban look, while some were pulled out to make a ledge for pot plants in the courtyard. Above, metal artworks capture the building's industrial feel.



Touching the void A large void above the dining area allows light to flood in and encourages natural ventilation through skylights in the bedrooms above. Steel and glass doors fold right back in the ground-floor living areas (right and below right), creating a seamless transition onto the central courtyard.



Industrial

A dingy old workshop is transformed

resolution

into three award-winning apartments.

IT CAN be tough trying to climb the property ladder, but Neil Mackenzie and his neighbours joined forces to buy their homes - and preserved a piece of history in the process.

Tired of wasting money on rent, architects Neil and his sister Julie Mackenzie, his partner Heidi Pronk and friends Jason Veale and Kieran McInerney decided to pool their resources and transform a 1920s workshop into three apartments. The result is a renovation so authentic, peaceful and private that no one would know it existed.

"We wanted to gain access to the housing market but also retain heritage significance," says Neil, of the former metal works and mechanics shop they took two years to find.

"Buying a place like this seemed out of our reach financially but when this one popped up it was much smaller than the others we had looked at," he says.

Measuring just 27 metres by eight metres the grime-ridden building, with its tiny, street-side office and rear toilet facilities, had a dark, dingy interior. But, after getting to know its previous owners, Kevin Smith and Allan Goodfellow, who had worked in the property as mechanics since the 1960s, the inspired home-hunters were taken by the industrial history of the place.

"We wanted to retain a tangible memory of its past by removing layers of dust without erasing the patina of age," explains Neil.

But the project proved hard to pull off. While the tight, narrow block, in one of Newtown's conservation areas, posed light, space and access issues for builder John Pullan, finances put the biggest spanner in the works.



PHOTOGRAPHY: OLIVER BERLIN



Space mission To give the apartments a light and airy feel, a central void, surrounded by stainless-steel balustrades, was crucial to the design. Exposed beams, a wall-length robe in the bedroom and double-sided bookcase on the left of the stairwell also help open up the space. Dappled light fills the rooms and dimmable, low-voltage downlights create a gentle mood.

"Two banks dropped us," explains Neil, of the group's quest to obtain a joint loan for the \$660,000 price tag. "It was too hard because we weren't Mr and Mrs," he laughs. Eventually, one of the banks agreed on the purchase loan and \$550,000 construction costs but the project took five years because of the group's changing work circumstances.

Neil, Julie, Jason and their partners now live in the three, 70-square-metre, loft-style apartments and love their new urban environment.

"I suppose you would call it restrained, contemporary style," explains Neil, of the surprisingly spacious units. In the common entrance corridor, time-worn rail station plaques announce the number of each apartment and an original ladder and line shaft, that once drove workshop machines, remain as a nod to the past.

Open-plan living/kitchen and dining areas on the ground floor are bordered by wall-to-ceiling glass doors that lead onto a decked courtyard. Upstairs, sturdy Oregon trusses were removed, revived and replaced 600 millimetres higher, making loft-style bedrooms with cathedral ceilings behind Neil and Heidi's shopfront office.

Each unit has a floor-heated bathroom and versatile study. Rough, sandblasted walls, a stainless-steel kitchen and factory-style doors give an urban feel but recycled ironbark stairs and floorboards add warmth.

"We won a National Trust Heritage Award for adaptive reuse," says Neil, whose apartment has been valued at \$440,000. "I'd happily do it again."

BECKY BARKER



Challenges

Amalgamating the ideas of three architects. Site access was limiting. To remove and replace roof trusses, workers had to get up on a scaffold and use a hand winch. Finding a bank that would accept a joint loan.

Tips

Building into the roof, concealing storage space and the laundry, and installing skylights and floor-to-ceiling glass give an aura of space. Take time to find the right building for your purposes and pocket. We love the decked courtyard area. "It really makes the space - the dining room and living room feel much bigger and we're living half outdoors," says Neil.