

Clear solution

A deck and skylight resolved a dark problem, writes Francene Ridley

This extension and renovation to a house in Gaythorne is small on the budgetary scale, but big on architectural philosophies. It forms part of a trend that, while not new, is certainly gaining momentum, says architect Tania Coward.

She says she's receiving more and more queries about projects of a similar theme and for more and more post-war houses.

"It seems that people want to stay where they are, not spend too much but make the spaces better where they are, which is great," she says. "In my early days as an architect, I was passionate about how architects should be doing more for the general populace. But nobody tells the general populace what architects really do.

"So people aren't interested in using an architect because they think it's beyond their budget. But you know what, it can be affordable

if the architect and client are prepared to put in the time to work within the budget."

What Tania has done with this house, on a limited budget, has certainly changed her clients' outlook. For one thing, they are now more connected with their green space, which was high on the agenda for the keen gardeners.

The new deck at the rear of the house is the central reason for being able to appreciate their work-in-progress landscaping.

Such a ubiquitous part of Brisbane home renovations, it's hard to believe anyone ever built a house here without a usable deck.

"So many of the designs of our earlier houses come from colder climates, so to make a home liveable we have to recognise our climatic context in Brisbane," Tania says.

Previously, this home suffered stifling summer heat due to the tiny openings and narrow hallways common in the post-war house.



The door to the deck is one big piece of joinery. It was expensive, but it has a lovely aesthetic



To bring light and breezes into the house without altering too much structure, Tania put shutters into the wall separating the front part of the house from the new kitchen, dining and lounge area at the rear. This also maintains distinct zones for the occupants.

"The father of one of the clients is also living in the house," says Tania. "At the front of the house, two existing bedrooms together with a refurbished existing bathroom form the father's wing, which is opposite the new main bedroom, ensuite and study. This allows the family members to freely circulate within their own private spaces."

Most of the sunlight and breeze, however, comes through the skylight windows in the kitchen. "We unexpectedly tested the ventilation properties of the skylight last summer, the first summer we had in the house after renovation," says one of the clients.

"Initially, the controller for the skylight didn't work and so the windows hadn't been opened. When we finally opened the windows, we could feel the difference immediately. Even on a still day, we could feel a slight breeze generated by the heat sucking up through those windows."

Tania positioned the skylight windows to the northeast, which she finds is a better orientation than due north.

"The idea of a northern aspect is wonderful, but I reckon our best aspect is north-northeast," she says. "If you're looking north, you get the brunt of the southwestern sun at your back."

The windows also frame a view of treetops, which is another reference to the clients' love of all things garden related.



"I'm a garden person myself, and in my architecture I'm constantly thinking about how the garden and house will work together," Tania says. That's evident even in the bathroom where a window over the sink looks out to the soft grey leaves of a native tree. The window was an expensive option, but it was the sort of choice that elevates a project above the mediocre.

"I try to juggle the budget to allow for architectural detail where it counts," Tania says. "The door to the deck, for example, is one big piece of joinery. It was expensive, but it has a lovely aesthetic."



BLUE SKIES ... the design improves airflow and lets in the light. **PHOTOGRAPHS** • Richard Waugh

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