



Novel solution

With a fresh plot, these three storeys needed character development to fit the new with the old

For more than 20 years they lived in a single-storey house in outer suburban Brisbane. Now this family of father, mother and teenage daughter have swapped the daily car commute to work for a congestion-free ferry trip and moved into a three-level home in Bulimba. The lifestyle change was their chance to build a house to suit their needs. But the switch to a riverside enclave wasn't without some major compromises.

"The site comes under the town planning character code, but my clients wanted a very contemporary-style house," says architect Tania Coward. "So we had to negotiate the clients' request for a contemporary house with the town planning department's character code requirements."

Although the original farmhouse was on the block when Tania's clients took possession of

the site, they were able to demolish it and start afresh. The plans had to include reference to the character code, however, and that is where Tania included exterior features such as weatherboard cladding and a gable effect in the roofline. But overall, Tania says, it's a "contemporary Brisbane house that sits well with the other contemporary homes in the street".

Most modern houses are designed to do away with multiple, smaller living rooms (for example, a sitting room, a lounge room and a formal dining room) in favour of fewer, more spacious open-plan areas. Tania's objectives for this home had a similar aim but with the added challenges posed by a small block (323sq m).

"I wanted to explore the concept of generous space and privacy, given the limited site size. On the other hand, it was important to ensure the house didn't look too large for the block," says Tania.

To satisfy the clients' requirements with the allotted amount of land, the design had to go to three levels, which helps to accommodate the various family activities, Tania explains. For example, the basement level is perfect for father and daughter to jam on drums and guitar in the soundproof music room beside the media room. A suspended concrete slab above this level was a must-have for the noise insulation and it also assists with insulation.

The middle level is dedicated to the kitchen and living areas including a terrace where the family likes to dine while enjoying the views of the golf course directly behind their block – a "borrowed landscape" says one of the owners.

On the top level, the four bedrooms are all on the northern side of the house and there is also a deck – an alternative space to take in the views over the green and pick up the breezes.

Tania wanted interesting spaces in the house, for rooms to flow and inter-relate well and to ensure good ventilation and light levels.

"Attention to natural light levels and air circulation is evident in the main living areas," she says.

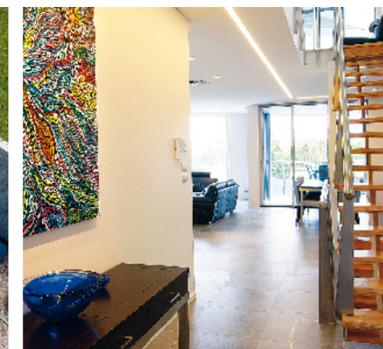
"The internal stair was purposely kept open with no risers on the steps to allow air to circulate and glass balustrades let in more light."

Artificial lighting had to be energy efficient and offer a variety of options for mood and task. During the evening a continuous dimmable fluorescent light recessed in the ceiling guides visitors from the entry hall to the living area.

Outside, Tania wanted spaces to be part of the usable architecture, so that although the house is close to adjoining properties, privacy is found in more intelligent ways than putting up a sheer, monolithic wall to block out the neighbours.

"The southern boundary between the two houses was used to the benefit of both houses, with the use of complementary materials to create an interesting arrival path along this boundary for both of them," says Tania, whose design has been a coup. After all, it's not easy to end up with a large house on a very small allotment and a contemporary design within a character code area.

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CONDENSED VERSION ... family and code conditions are met on 323sq m. Photographs // Richard Waugh

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