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home

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MONTH



All in the family

A whole lot of trust and talent went into this cottage **16**

4 Cosy up this season with our hot design tips

10 Win the space race with this clever dwelling

15 Why building for the future is key to success



FACT FILE

THE BRIEF

To extend an 1880s home without losing its cottage feel

THE OWNERS

Crissy Tomarelli and Matt Hagan

THE ARCHITECT

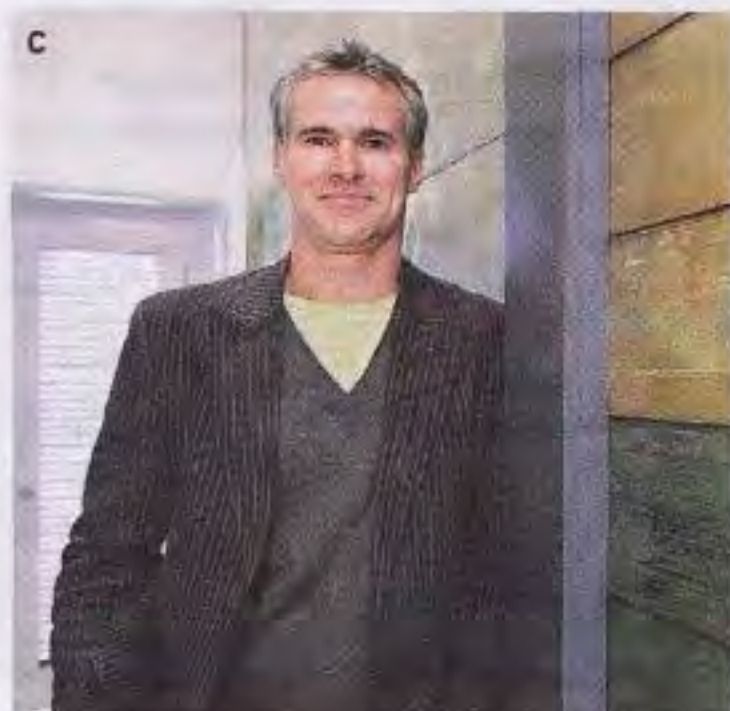
Tom Wills

THE BUILDERS

Hagan Built



A Matt and Crissy with their handmade dining table **B** The front facade with closed-in veranda **C** Architect Tom Wills **D** The timber ceiling runs the length of the living space and was inspired by a trip to Italy



Teamwork and trust

Putting together a crack team and letting everyone get on with their job proved a masterstroke

As George Michael said, you've gotta have faith. For all those involved in this jewellery box of a renovation, the trust they placed in each other played an integral role in its success. When Crissy Tomarelli and Matt Hagan laid eyes on the little weatherboard semi in Balmain, they knew it was for them.

Despite having just one bedroom, a lean-to kitchen and an outdoor bathroom, the couple couldn't wait to make an offer.

"We saw the house on the Saturday and we came back that afternoon and jumped the fence [for another look]," Matt says. "We put in an offer on Monday."

Building relationships

Although Crissy loved the cottage feel of the house, she was relying on Matt's experience as a builder that it was the right property to buy.

"We wanted to make use of Matt's skills so we were looking for a 'renovator's dream'," she says.

Working in the house's favour was its northwestern facing backyard, which meant the windows to the side of the house would have access to northeastern light.

As well, the site dropped away slightly

from the street giving Matt and Crissy scope for a change of level to the existing house and the chance to add an extra floor without impacting on the all-important heritage streetscape.

The couple spent two years living in the house to get a feel for how it worked best and what spaces they were naturally drawn to. While it was a worthwhile exercise, Crissy says it had its drawbacks.

"It was fun and exciting, because it was our first house together but there wasn't very much storage," she says.

"After two years of dashes to the toilet in the middle of the night and working in a small kitchen, it was time for a change."

They did not need to look far for some expert design advice with Matt calling in his brother-in-law, architect Tom Wills.

Matt and Crissy wanted to retain the front rooms, including a closed-in veranda, and add a bathroom plus a living, kitchen and dining area to the rear.

Upstairs they wanted a main bedroom suite complete with generous ensuite and walk-in robe, as well as installing as much storage as the house could provide.

An existing timber deck would be linked to the house via a new timber boardwalk.

Given they had bought the house

for its character, they were keen to retain the feel of a cottage.

"A lot of it is combining the ease and simplicity of a modern house but re-engineering the characteristics of an older house and getting those elements to work in harmony," Tom says.

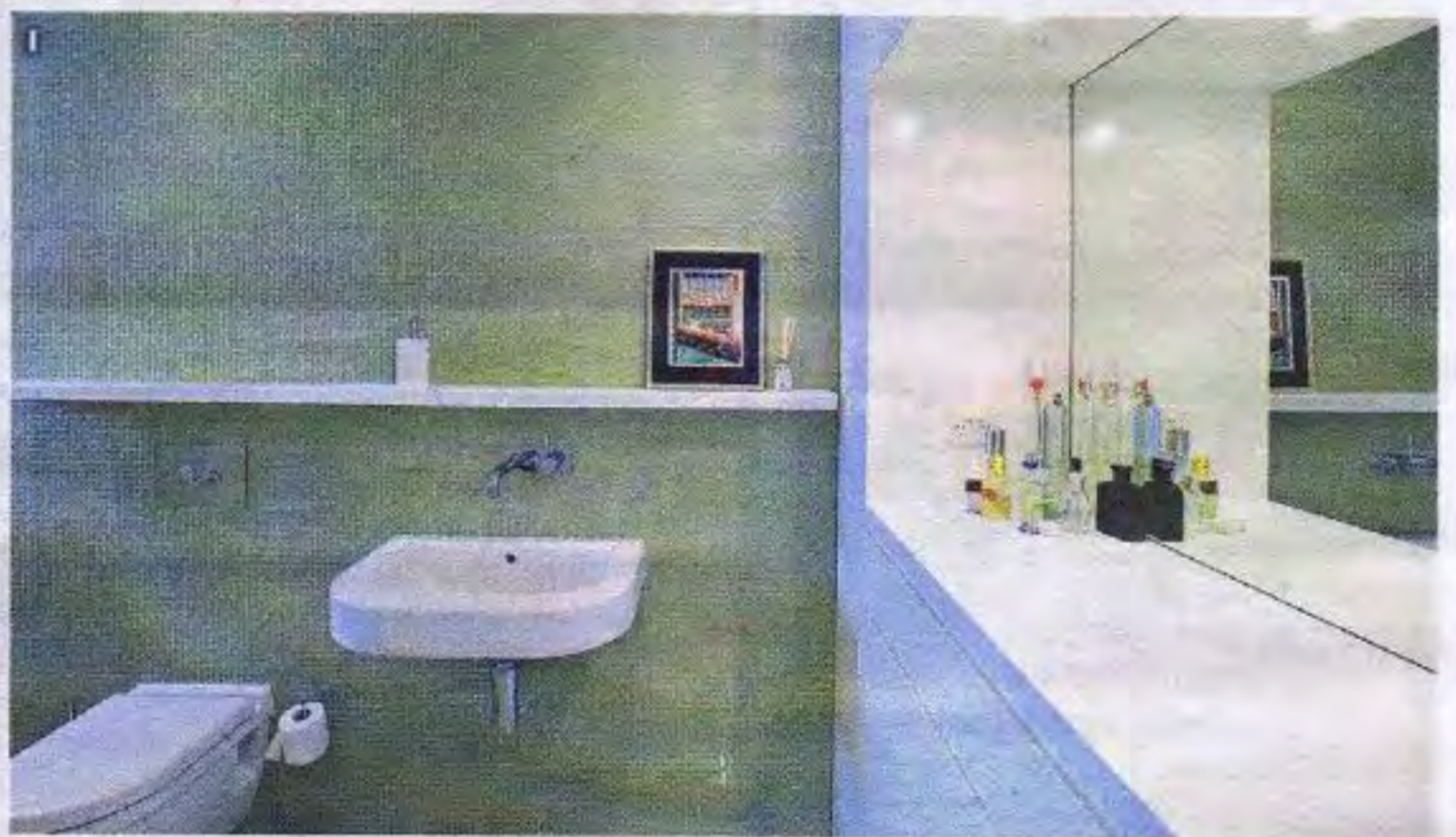
After going back and forth a few times with their wishlist, Matt left Tom to get on with the business of design.

Italian influence

Central to the ground-floor design was the inclusion of an exposed timber ceiling, reinforced with steel beams, an idea that Matt and Crissy had fallen in love with during a trip to Italy. The ceiling runs the length of the living space, which includes a living room and the kitchen and dining space facing on to the rear yard.

"They spend a lot of time in the kitchen and entertaining so the kitchen and dining area is open to the garden and the living room is set further back," Tom says.

Although the new upper level is not visible from the street, council requested the height of the house be reduced slightly. This meant Matt and Tom working to make the floor clearances as low as possible without compromising on the design.



Photos: John Fotiadis

E The spacious main bedroom **F** A timber boardwalk links inside and out as well as providing casual seating **G** Original weatherboards have been retained in the hall **H** Integrated appliances give the kitchen a seamless look **I** Simple lines hide storage solutions in the bathroom

Having such a good understanding of how the other worked meant that the collaboration continued throughout the impressive four-month project. "Working closely with the architect allowed us to make decisions on the run," Matt says. "Tom can do a sketch, I can agree on it and have it approved within 48 hours. Often, it can take two or three weeks." Tom agrees. "It is about trust and teamwork and that is what gets a good result," he says. And after living in the community for a couple of years, Matt says even the neighbours were on side when they understood what they were in for. "Telling the neighbours [that] the more help they gave us, the quicker we will be finished helped a lot," he says. Now that they know they have a builder in the street, Crissy says half the neighbours have had Matt come by to do small jobs. The final budget came to just under \$350,000, which Matt says does not include the cost of his own time.

However, they were careful to prioritise their needs and allocate money accordingly. "The joiner suggested two deep drawers rather than three smaller ones so we save on runner costs and get the same space. That saved about \$1000," Tom says. Letting everyone do what they do best has more than paid off for Matt and Crissy who even had a dining table custom made. Matt and one of his apprentices turned timber from the family farm into an heirloom. Tom says when you are prepared to trust the people hired to do the job, it pays you back in spades. "You have people on site who can value add and they become part of the process. You want them to have a sense pride because it is their handiwork," he says. ■

Robyn Willis
MORE INFORMATION
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Tom Wills Architects 9555 8087, twarchitects.com.au

GET THE LOOK

BASIN PLAYER ... The owners were working to a tight budget but that does not mean they compromised on finishes. After shopping around, Crissy and Matt settled on a good looking basin at a fraction of the cost of a European brand. For a similar basin, look at the Pro A Wall Hung Basin from Laufen. It is 450mm wide and priced at \$285 is available through Cass Bros.
MORE INFORMATION
Cass Bros 8999 7277, cassbrothers.com.au



CAFE SOCIETY ... Small spaces need a light touch so when it came to outdoor furniture, Crissy and Matt went with something classic. The Bistro folding chair is made in France from lacquered steel and is available in a range of colours. They are priced at \$150 each from The Urban Balcony.
MORE INFORMATION
The Urban Balcony 8021 6456, urbanbalcony.com.au