

*Dream Home*

# A foot in each camp

Roughing it on site helped these owners embrace the past while turning a modest 1870s cottage into a modern marvel, writes Stephen Crafti.



Forging a link ... (above left Crissy Tomarelli and husband Matthew Hagan with Architect Tom Wills in their renovated Balmain home; and the timber boardwalk linking both decks. Photos: Steven Siewert

**T**his Balmain house was originally little more than two rooms. The one-bedroom timber cottage, built circa 1870, had a lean-to kitchen and a bathroom outdoors. "The bathroom was quite substantial, given the size of the house and the site (about 180 square metres). And it was the only space that had been renovated," says architect Tom Wills, the director of TW Architects. "The word quaint didn't really apply," Wills adds, recalling the rudimentary house he first inspected.

Bought by owner and builder Matthew Hagan and his partner Crissy Tomarelli, the brief to TW Architects was to upgrade the existing dwelling and provide open-plan living spaces, three bedrooms as well as indoor bathrooms. "They were keen to maximise the northern aspect as well as leafy views over the neighbourhood," Wills says. "We knew we'd obtain glimpses of the North Sydney skyline if we added a second storey."

Rather than make immediate changes, Hagan and Tomarelli "camped" in the cottage for more than a year. "It was quite primitive but it gave us time to think about exactly what we wanted," Hagan says. One trip to the Italian town of Lucca provided some inspiration for the couple, after staying in a farmhouse with exposed timber ceilings.

"As a builder, I'm normally putting plaster on ceilings," Hagan says. "The exposed timber added warmth and character."

**Discoveries**

As the renovation proceeded, original timber panels in the hallway were uncovered.

**Aim**

To transform a 19th-century cottage into a home for the 21st century.

**How long**

Four months to design and obtain council approval and four months to build.

**Favourite features**

The patina of the original timber boards.

**Green points**

- ▶ Cross-ventilation with the inclusion of louvred windows.
- ▶ External shading.
- ▶ Use of low-impact building materials.

**COSTS**

Bathrooms.....	\$40,000
Laundry in ground floor bathroom...	\$5000
New wing including materials.....	\$160,000
Doors and windows.....	\$40,000
Lights and electrical.....	\$15,000
Glazing.....	\$10,000
Plumbing.....	\$10,000
Kitchen and joinery in living areas...	\$60,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$340,000</b>

Concealed by masonite that had been applied in the 1970s, the original timber was exposed to reveal its worn patina. "We didn't try and patch it up. We just added an oil finish for lustre," Hagan says.

TW Architects converted the front two rooms, one originally used as a living area, into two bedrooms. And in keeping with the brief, the bathroom was brought indoors. The kitchen was removed and replaced by a two-storey addition. The glazed timber and masonry extension includes a living area and a new kitchen and informal dining area, defined by a change in level.

"It's not a large house, so I wanted to be able to see the place from the front door to the back fence," Hagan says. The kitchen is relatively simple. Featuring MDF joinery, it has large, deep drawers and cupboards to conceal the fridge and pantry. And unlike many kitchens, which conceal everything,

- ▶ Use of low-energy light fittings and appliances.

**Insider's tip**

Use skilled professionals for all aspects of the project, from painting and joinery to builders.

**Architect**

TW Architects can be contacted on 9555 8087.

**Builder**

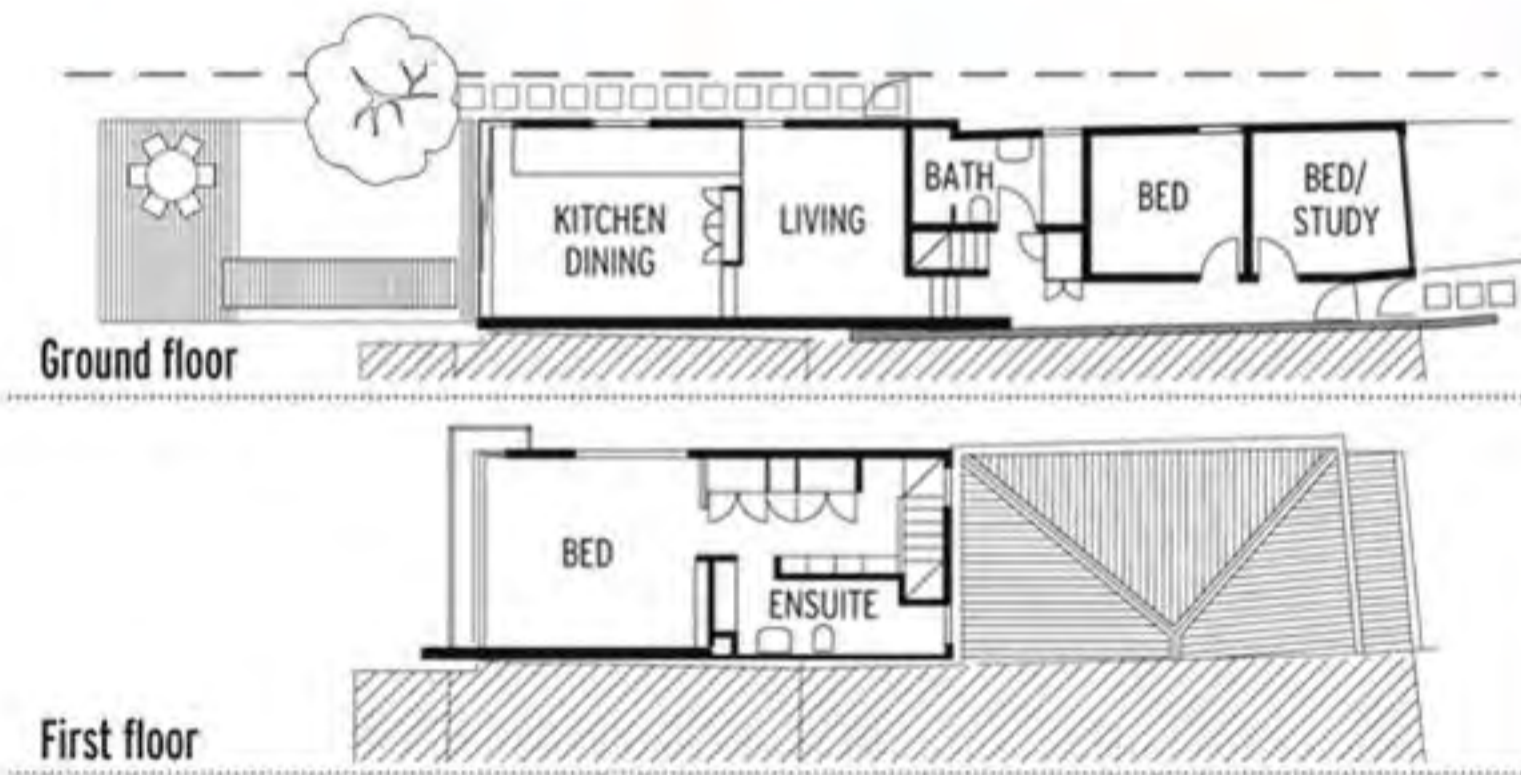
Hagan Built - 9555 2218.

**Joiner**

Fitzpatrick Joinery - 0414 290 059.



Basic instinct ... (top and above) the exposed frames and shelves of the kitchen. Photo: Steven Siewert



Hagan and Tomarelli were keen to have open timber shelves to display crockery, utensils and objects. "It's a contemporary kitchen but it's not the slick minimal design you often see today," Hagan says. To provide maximum storage, TW Architects included a double-sided credenza between the kitchen and living areas.

On the living room side, this unit features open shelves and for the dining area provides storage for crockery. According to Hagan, one

one way the budget (\$340,000) was achieved was by incorporating the right joinery.

"We used deep and fewer drawers. It saved on the cost of fittings."

**Links**

Timber and glass doors were created to link the living areas with the north-facing garden. And TW Architects also designed a timber boardwalk, linking two timber decks.

"Crissy loves cooking," Hagan explains. "The kitchen and the outdoors are the core of the design."

Tucked behind the house's original pitched corrugated roof is the first floor. This area contains the main bedroom, en suite and walk-in dressing area. Complete with a large picture window, this bedroom enjoys views over the leafy surrounding Balmain streets and beyond. And to ensure privacy, as well as protection from harsher sunlight, the architects included an external steel screen, complete with canvas awning.

"We could have added a glass box, all white," Hagan says. But like Wills, he was keen to reflect on the history of the cottage, as well as its immediate surrounds. In keeping with that, the timber ceiling in the living areas features steel beams, painted a deep blue, like the kitchen joinery.

"This area is known for its maritime history. It seemed appropriate to acknowledge this in some way," Wills says. "In a sense, it's still a cottage, just a lot more spacious and comfortable."

