



Amazing design on Sunday

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Family opts for quality over quantity

In Sydney (more often than not) renovating a home to accommodate a growing family comes at the expense of, surely, that which children need most – a patch of grass, garden or courtyard; permanent piece of the outdoors in which to play.

As house sizes continue to impinge on garden footprints, it's heartening to visit alterations and additions, or new-builds, cleverly designed to ensure improvements to the former don't come at the expense of the latter. A recent alteration in the city's inner west by architect Christopher Polly for a young family of five (three of them under nine) is a perfect example.

Brief

Owners Kate and Warrick wanted to renovate a freestanding, double-fronted, double-brick, hip-roofed 1910 Federation home in Petersham. Housing three bedrooms, a bathroom and living space, the existing building should be respected while transformed into a four-bedroom, two-bathroom home, with two living spaces for themselves and their three active boys.

The new home should be light and airy, with open connected spaces and a strong relationship to



Unfurled House by Christopher Polly Architect was shortlisted for an Australian Institute of Architects' 2016 NSW Architecture Award.

the garden. It should reflect their desire for “quality space, not quantity”, with no expansion of the house's footprint or loss of garden, and no negative impact on neighbours.

Challenges

The sloping site ran west to east, with a garden and quiet street at the front and generous garden at the rear. A block of units to the east and heavy two-storey northern neighbour posed privacy issues, with the latter also inhibiting access to northern light.

Any renovation needed to mitigate a discrepancy in the scale of neighbouring homes – balancing the two-storey neighbour with a

single-storey cottage to the south. While the home was in great condition, rear additions over four levels were poorly planned.

Response

The original front four rooms (three bedrooms and a living space) were refreshed, with only one ceiling replaced; the rear lean-tos demolished; and a new split-level, two-storey contemporary addition crafted and sensitively stitched to the original over the existing footprint.

Joining both and providing access to all areas: a landing or “service zone” runs north to south to introduce light and air into the centre of the home (and borrowed

light throughout), via a north-facing courtyard. A new children's bathroom and laundry were placed on the landing's southern elevation (compact yet designed with a verticality, suggesting space). A master suite and study were positioned upstairs around a curvaceous void, with living spaces downstairs level with the garden.

“The new build has a sectional split-level relationship to the original house that harnesses the fall of the site to the rear, allowing the cellular front plan to unfurl into a series of connected interior spaces that expand to its setting. The walls play with folds and cranks – giving it a very generous feel spatially.”

Polly's design is a beautiful one using devices to introduce light, air, indoor-outdoor connectivity and a sense of generosity to spaces while maintaining privacy. And every inch of garden.

Unfurled House is one of a handful of homes to be shortlisted for an Australian Institute of Architects' 2016 NSW Architecture Award, to be announced in early July.

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