

342 Apartments, Clare Cousins
Photos: Shannon McGrath

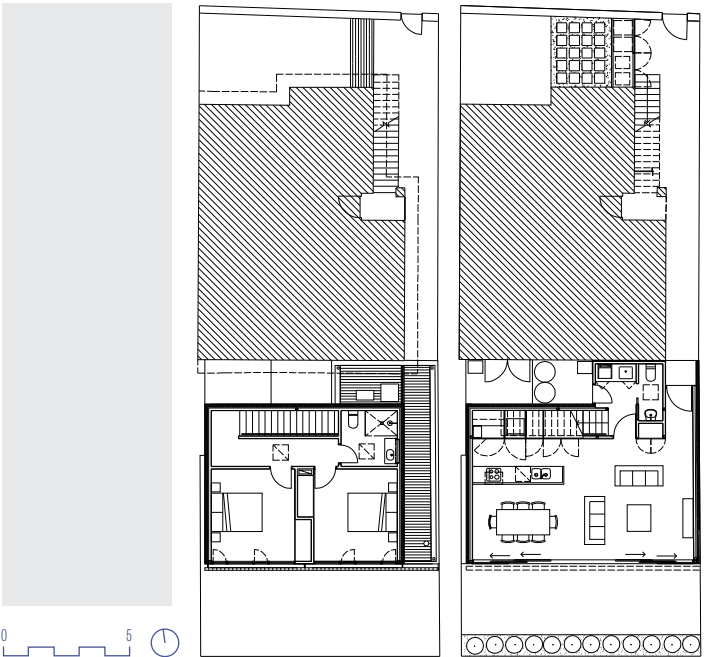
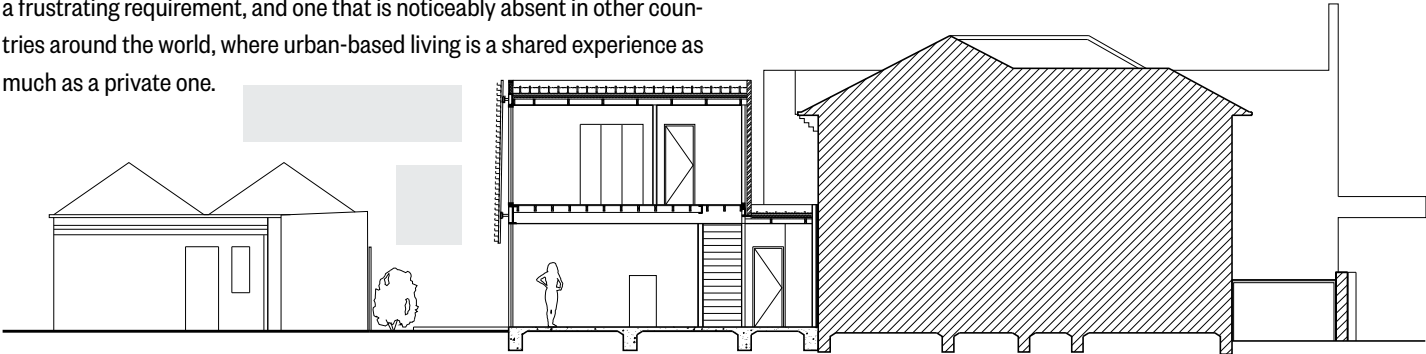
APARTMENT
BUILDING EXTENSIONS
ARE FAR LESS COMMON THAN HOUSE EXTENSIONS.

More complex ownership models, such as strata titling with body corporates, often make collective change difficult. Here, in inner-urban Prahran, Melbourne, a rich and elegant two-level apartment has been created between two existing inter-war apartments. In some ways it is very much a house—living space downstairs and bedrooms on the first floor—but the real success is its transformation from an unused service yard with no vehicle access. The two existing apartments, facing the main road, have been renovated, one being converted from a medical suite back into a residence.



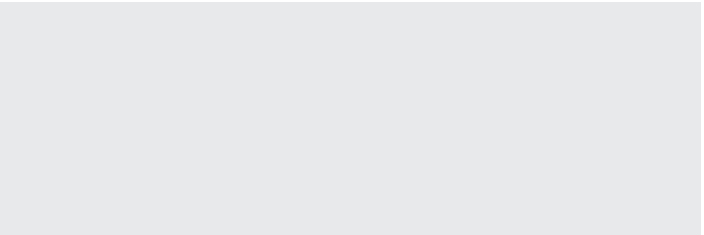
The new house provides a rear façade to the existing building, celebrating its role as a screen through the use of striped red and white lines. Red has such a strong and dynamic character it is a wonder it's not used more. This project is not just about colour, however, as the screen works at a number of levels. Suspended above head height on the ground floor, the screen continues all the way past the first floor and its floor-to-ceiling glazing to the top of the parapet. It's made of horizontally folded purlins that reduce solar gain but also, critically, screen the view from upper-level windows onto neighbouring properties.

The requirement to protect neighbours from being overlooked is a relatively recent phenomenon. Many of the blocks of flats built before and after the Second World War, which provided so much important housing, directly overlook the gardens of houses and other flats or apartments. Now planning authorities dictate a variety of methods to block views from new dwellings into neighbouring gardens. The architect here has decided to use this restriction as a generator for the design—a positive view of what is often seen as a frustrating requirement, and one that is noticeably absent in other countries around the world, where urban-based living is a shared experience as much as a private one.



102 342 Apartments Clare Cousins Prahran, VIC Australia

The internal planning of this house is brutally efficient and clean, with no wasted space. The living space downstairs opens to the courtyard through triple-glazed sliding doors at each end, creating an even square of indoor and outdoor space. The solid back inside wall is filled with servicing and a concealed staircase, behind slick grey cupboard doors. The two bedrooms on the upper level look out to the rear face of the screen, and are decorated internally by its vivacious giant grille.



“VIVID COLOUR WAS UTILISED TO HIGHLIGHT THE ARCHITECTURAL FEATURE OF THIS RESIDENTIAL PROJECT; A VERTICAL SCREEN DEFINING THE THRESHOLD BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE.”
—CLARE COUSINS



THE NEED TO SCREEN VIEWS INTO NEIGHBOURING PROPERTIES HAS BEEN EMBRACED AS A DESIGN FEATURE, RATHER THAN AS A COMPROISING RESTRICTION.

Site area — 236m² Dwellings on block — 3 Average dwelling area — 120m² Residents — 3 Area per person — 40m²