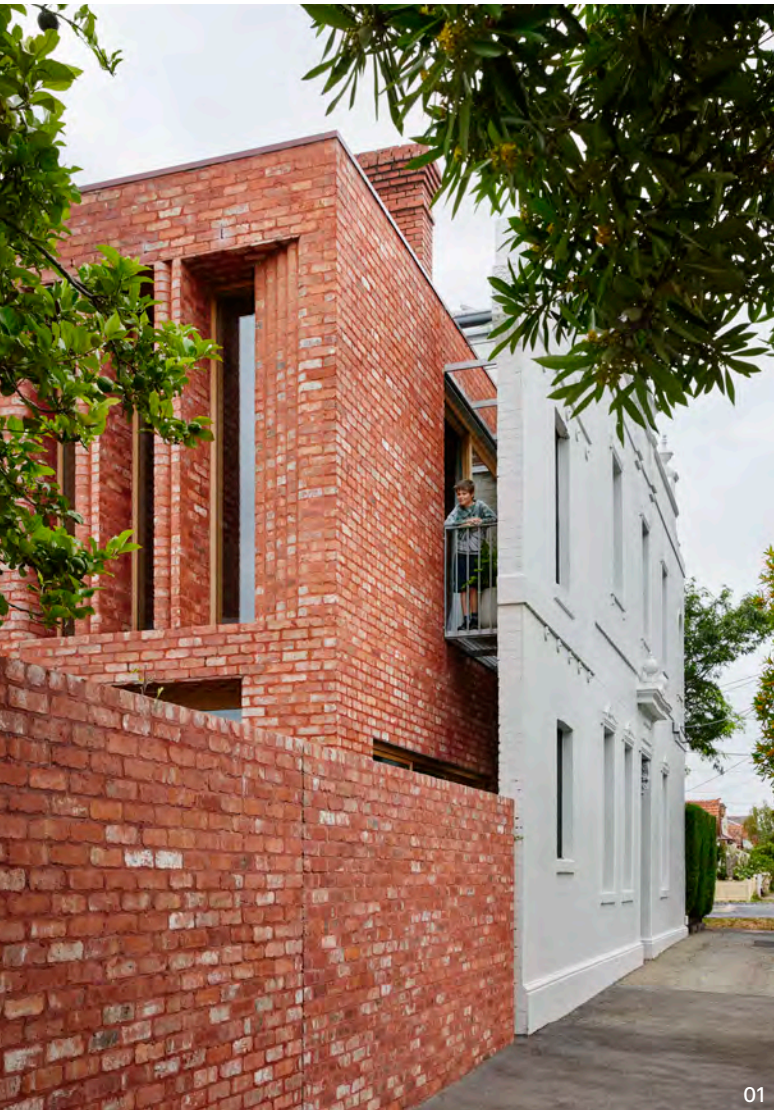


FITZROY NORTH
TERRACE
BY CLARE
COUSINS
ARCHITECTS



01



02

Freed from the confines of its Victorian-era order, an end terrace in Melbourne is respectfully reprogrammed to suit contemporary family life.

Words by Thomas Essex-Plath
Photography by Tess Kelly

Clare Cousins Architects has renovated a slightly peculiar house on a Fitzroy North corner. From the street, the existing house might first appear to be a perfectly typical Melburnian terrace – decorous, but unremarkably familiar. Its quirks become evident, however, on locating the entry. In place of the usual front garden and entrance at the narrow front of the terrace is a high, dense hedge, almost comical in its impenetrability. The entry sits around the corner instead, in the middle of the long side facade.

This long facade is an odd one. It is carefully composed and more-or-less balanced around a centred doorway, in an attempt to lend it the formality and propriety expected of an entry facade. Yet, despite these efforts, it isn't quite able to avoid appearing somewhat ad hoc. At one end, it suddenly transitions into the recognizable side profile of a terrace, with the distinctive curving and stepping parapets, finials and blank balcony side window. In this slightly awkward duality – “Am I a front or a side facade?” – the house juggles a charming ambiguity often found within our ordinary heritage building stock.

It is also at this enigmatic front-ish-but-also-side-ish facade that the interventions made by Clare Cousins Architects are first evident. The renovation to the rear pulls away from the existing facade, which is left standing almost independently and reading as a partly dislocated, ornamented, delicate plane shielding a heavy mass – heightening its already existing peculiarities. The visible ends of the ties that stabilize this original facade look almost patera-like, tidily positioned along the mouldings in a way that seems plausibly intentional but unconventional – perfectly appropriate for this off-kilter composition.

The contrasting materiality of the red-brick addition emphasizes the break between old and new, and is immediately recognizable as the material language of



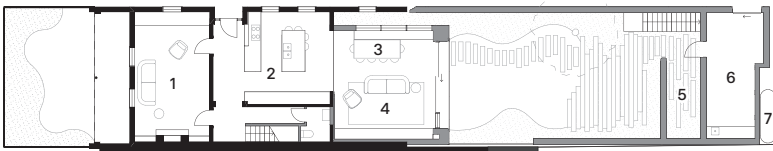
01 The new building is sleeved into the shell of the existing house.

02 A skin of recycled brick is materially resonant yet tonally distinct from the retained building.

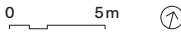
03 The project preserved as much building fabric as possible, while still permitting internal reorganization.



First floor 1:400



Ground floor 1:400



- 1 Lounge
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Dining
- 4 Living
- 5 Services
- 6 Utility
- 7 Tank
- 8 Bedroom
- 9 Laundry
- 10 Desk
- 11 Store
- 12 Balcony
- 13 Terrace

Fitzroy North Terrace is built on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin nation.	 Melbourne, Vic	 Alteration + addition	 5 Family	 4	 2 + 1 powder room	 M ² Site 291 m ² House 261 m ² Terrace 28 m ²	 Design 13 m Build 17 m
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surrounding single-storey dwellings. The form, however, is uniquely its own: an incredibly robust (perhaps even fortified) language of simple geometries, narrow openings and deep thresholds.

Though these external alterations are pleasingly dramatic, the modifications to the interior are comparatively modest. Prior to the renovation, the house had four bedrooms, a kitchen and two living rooms – and it still does. The only additional provisions are a small room with a toilet on the ground floor, and an ensuite on the upper floor. In other words, the project is not about “building more” but about reorganization. This is often the case in renovations of nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century houses. Residents find these houses generous in scale but inappropriate in the relationships between rooms. As a result, alterations made within this house index some significant changes in domestic life in the 100 years since the original house was built.

The reconfigurations of the upper floor leave the house, at the large scale, rather unchanged – it remains a series of bedrooms and bathrooms off a corridor. At a smaller scale, however, these alterations import a kind of hierarchy that did not exist when the house was first built: the definition of a “master suite” (now, less problematically, often termed the “main suite”), made qualitatively different from other bedrooms by the provision of an ensuite bathroom exclusively for this bedroom’s occupants. This configuration, ubiquitous and unquestioned in contemporary Australian housing, ossifies the hierarchies of the nuclear family. It replaces a subtler order that once defined the principal bedroom simply by virtue of its size and position. Perhaps this disposition served it more appropriately over the past century, when it hosted not only nuclear families, but also households of boarders, lodgers and sharing friends, as well as “indisposed women” in its brief moment as St Michael’s Hospital during its first decades.

At the ground floor, reconfigurations consist of an exchange in position between the kitchen and rear living room. This is, again, a near ubiquitous alteration in older houses. It expresses a contemporary desire to grant living rooms prime lighting and outlook, and to bring kitchens into the heart of the home. However, it also manifests our changing relation to the garden. Typically, outdoor spaces are no longer productive domains or sites of intensive domestic labour and, thus, the kitchen and other utilities have been unanchored from them. Instead, gardens have become picturesque compositions, as is the case at this house – even complete with a folly-like structure at the garden’s end, aping the gestures of the house in miniature. Echoes of gardens past are present, however, in the inclusion of a productive roof garden and utility room within this folly-cum-shed.

Like all good responses to heritage houses, Clare Cousin Architects’ Fitzroy North Terrace is not merely an act of preserving, akin to pickling a specimen or applying a new layer of varnish and then appending something alien to it. Instead, it revels in elaborating, heightening, echoing, counter-pointing, dramatizing and reframing the fabric as found, thereby continuing the narrative that has accreted in our heritage building stock. ©

Products
Roofing: Lysaght Trimdek
External walls: Recycled red brick; existing rendered brick
Internal walls: Silvertop ash
Windows: Silvertop ash timber frames; existing frames refitted with double glazing
Flooring: Brick tiles by Robertson’s Building Products in ‘Ash Grey’; terrazzo tiles from Fibonacci in ‘Flannel Flower’; Locker galvanized steel Gridwalk
Lighting: Innermost Drop pendant; Trizo 21 Austere wall lamp; Pierre and Charlotte W Hydro wall lamp
Kitchen: Granite from Gladstones in ‘Ash White’; Mini Iriede tiles from Academy Tiles; Miele induction cooktop and wall ovens; Astra Walker mixer in ‘Charcoal Bronze’
Bathroom: Carrara marble from CDK Stone; Astra Walker bath mixer in ‘Charcoal Bronze’; Kaldewei bath
Heating and cooling: Delonghi tubular steel radiator panels
External elements: Beauford Sandstone paving by Eco Outdoor
Other: Jordan Nook sofa; Laker A-Joint table; Mubu Lonis bed; Grazia and Co Iva stools

04 Bracing that supports the heritage facade has been turned into a terrace on the first floor.

05 A pragmatic replanning of first-floor rooms has made space for a family bathroom where there was once a small bedroom.



04

The project is not about “building more” but instead about reorganization.



05



06



07



Section 1:400

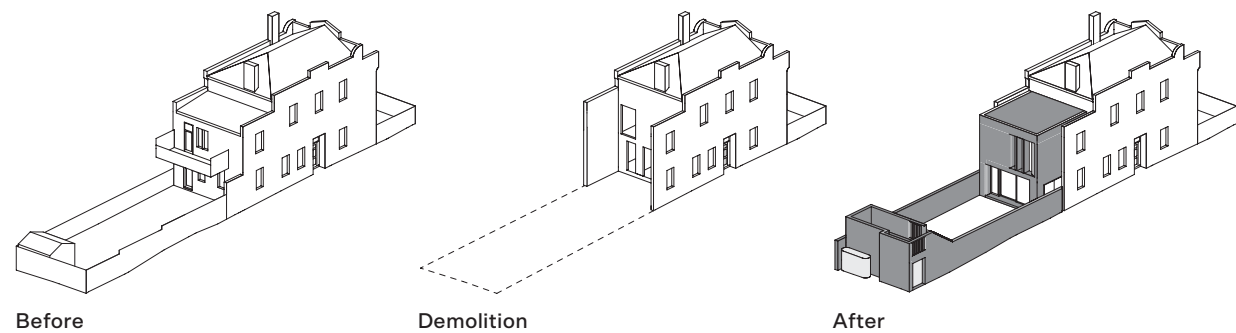
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06 Free-flowing internal spaces open onto the garden by Eckersley Garden Architecture.

07 The kitchen occupies the centre of the plan, freeing up the garden edge for living and dining.



08



Before

Demolition

After

Axonometric (not to scale)



09

08 A utility space at the rear of the site is directly accessed from the side street.

09 Bullnose details in the brickwork are a contemporary take on heritage details.

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Builder Frank (Victoria)
Engineer Co-Struct
Landscaping Eckersley Garden Architecture