

TRADE SECRET

When it came to designing her own home, architect Clare Cousins stuck to her core component of work. The resulting design and build offers a tantalising look into the architect's practice, a glimpse of constraints loosened and ideas tested.

WORDS Claire Watkins PHOTOGRAPHY Shannon McGrath

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There's always a sense of intrigue when having a peek inside an architect's own home – a feeling that you're going to come across some hidden secret and discover how these professionals appear to create beautiful works of art so seamlessly.

Often their own houses are more simple than we'd ever imagine, as if at the end of a long day immersed in the intricate details of their client's homes they'd like nothing more than to come home and enjoy something far less elaborate.

And then, you'll come across a home that is the perfect blend of both worlds – where the relaxed Scandinavian style of beautifully carved wood pieces sits against a white backdrop, and where a uniquely curved roofline and vertical external timber battens make you look twice.

Situated in Prahran, one of Melbourne's oldest areas, the house's charming original Edwardian facade was retained by Clare,

who removed a small 1980s addition, and extended to create a single-storey family home. The new extension offers a meandering expanse of glass and brick that engages with the garden beyond.

Driven by occupant use, function of space, and the need for privacy for the house and garden, the new extension forms three distinct zones, while a series of bedrooms takes over the original building. A flexible space, otherwise known as the studio, was designed to sit above the separate garage at the rear of the site, catering to the needs of the young family and forming a double-storey mass that also helped to screen the three sets of three-storey flats that surround the private open space.



01-02 The rear facade allows multiple rooms to have direct access to the courtyard. Inside, built-in leather seating in the living room opens up to a glazed brick fireplace.

03 The stark white bathroom features custom storage and allows the owners the flexibility of adding accessories of any colour.

04 Splashes of colour and soft, warm furnishings create a relaxing setting in the master bedroom in the original Edwardian house.

“With the studio as the main view from the new house, we wanted to avoid the typical ‘box on top’ look, as well as solve issues of western orientation and overlooking of neighbouring gardens,” says owner and architect Clare. It’s here that a curved screen of vertical timber battens surrounds the first-floor exterior and in turn encourages the outdoor space to wrap around the home’s living spaces. The battens float above the pool and brickwork underneath, and cast varying shadow patterns across the courtyard throughout the day, while their billowing effect allows clearance for the studio windows to swing open for natural ventilation.

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05 The light, open dining area has a view of the kitchen and pantry beyond, keeping the home cook in the loop with the family's activities.

06 Against the boundary of this space, the bar and study niches are discreetly tucked away behind an ornate, sliding, perforated white screen.

The rear face is a continuous white brick surface that undulates over soft corners that maximise the glazed outlook. "Inside, we saved the living area from becoming a thoroughfare by incorporating a light tan, leather, U-shaped, built-in couch," explains Clare. Following the line of the curving glass, it offers the perfect intimate space for the family to gather in front of the central fireplace.

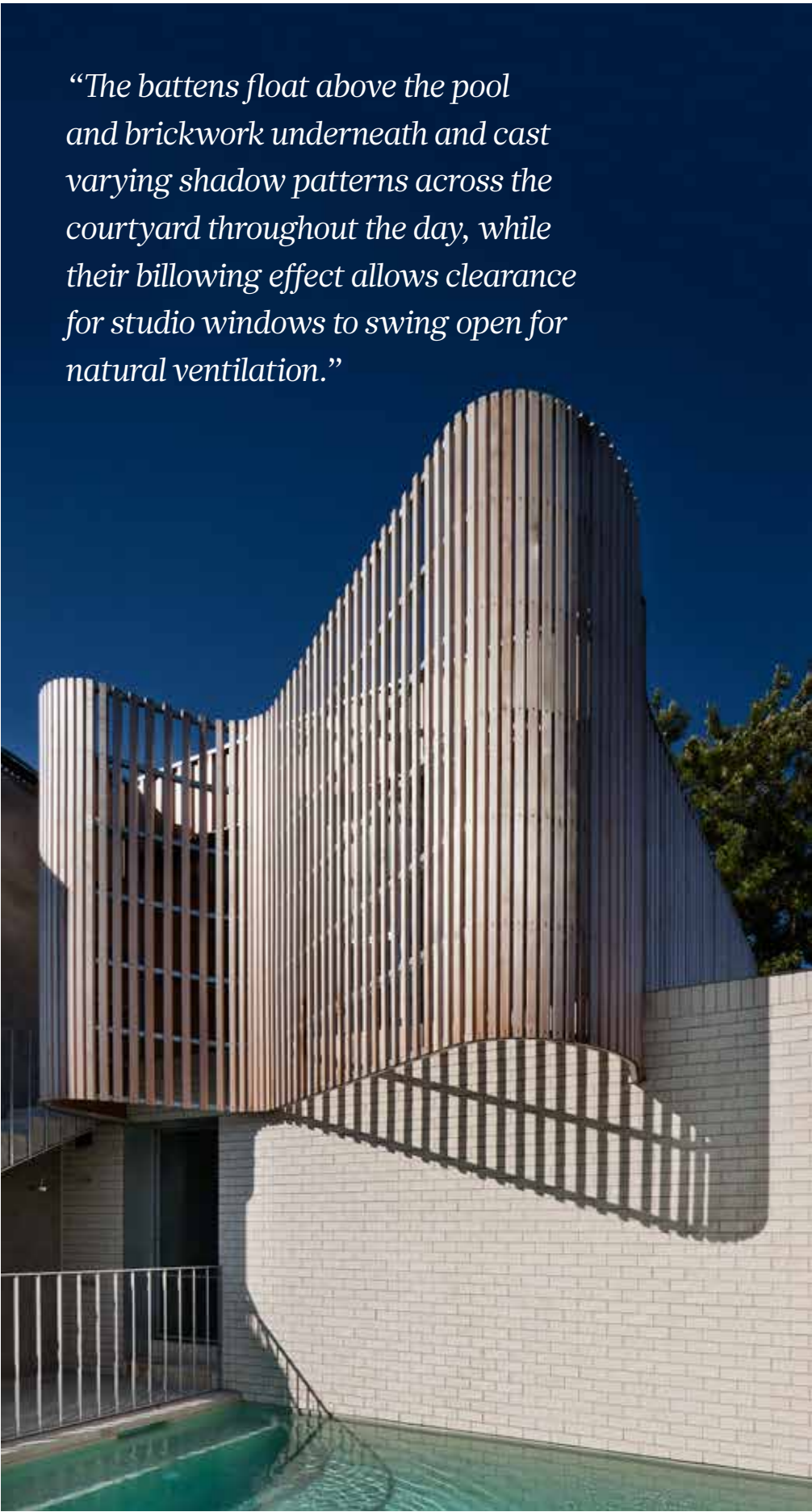


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The subtle transition between old and new parts of the house is only visible from the inside at the junction of the two hallways. The kitchen is centrally located in the new extension at the end of the hallway, where a charcoal-glazed brick wall acts as a stunning screen separating the playroom behind. "We wanted the living areas to be about seeing and not seeing, keeping everything in close proximity, but still providing spaces to retreat to," says Clare. The unique brick wall means no doors were required to separate the kitchen and playroom, yet any mess is still kept out of sight. In addition, a perforated sliding screen in the dining and kitchen spaces offers just a glimpse of the generous study nook and bar niche beyond, again affording the area a clean, streamlined look and feel.

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“The battens float above the pool and brickwork underneath and cast varying shadow patterns across the courtyard throughout the day, while their billowing effect allows clearance for studio windows to swing open for natural ventilation.”



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“Sustainable principles were imperative in the design process, and we incorporated elements such as passive solar design at the conceptual stage of the project,” says Clare. Two 5000 litre water tanks were installed underground – one collecting rainwater for use on the vegie garden and plunge pool, the other holding treated grey water to irrigate the garden and flush toilets. A solar hot water system was also included, along with external shading, double glazing and the strategic use of eaves. The timber battens on the west-facing windows of the studio also provide effective sun screening, and durable, easily accessible materials were used throughout.

The material selection reflects Clare’s keen interest in exploring the use of innovative raw materials. Materials that age well over time and require minimal maintenance were important, while those typically used externally, such as face bricks and off-form concrete, were used internally. Timber-clad ceilings extend as the eaves finish, polished concrete flooring flows from inside to the outdoor courtyard, and glazed brickwork walls in the kitchen offer a truly unique take on the traditional tile look. 

07-08 The flexibility of the studio space above the garage, which is accessed by external stairs, allows for various uses depending on the occupant. It is surrounded by a fluid curved screen of timber battens that welcome both light and ventilation while providing privacy.



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DESIGN FILE

Architect and home owner Clare Cousins talks about the materials used in the design of her family home, and her favourite parts of it.

What is your favourite feature of the home?
We really enjoy the social nature of the built-in seating in the living room. It works equally well for gatherings as when it is just the four of us stretching out.

What was the inspiration behind the materials that were selected?
Robust materials and ones that are readily available are utilised in our projects. Glazed bricks, concrete and natural timbers were chosen here in particular to withstand the knocks and bumps that come with the territory of a family home.

Where do you find your inspiration?
In films, art, books and through speaking and collaborating with other creative people.

What are some of your favourite materials to work with at the moment?
Recycled brick, leather, solid timber and concrete are materials that we use regularly.

CONTACTS

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09-10 Behind the rounded, charcoal-glazed brick wall framing the kitchen joinery is a cosy playroom and second sitting room with direct access to the rear yard through glazed sliding doors.



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