

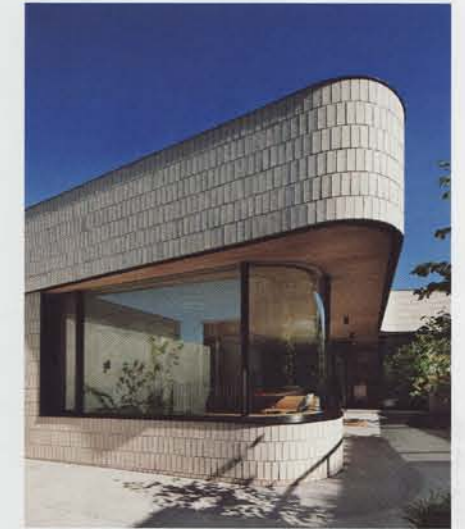
EBB and FLOW

Text by Luo Jingmei
Photography by Shannon McGrath

When it came to renovating her own home, architect Clare Cousins considered calm, comfort and a sweeping dose of creativity.

SINEWY SHELTER:
A curved screen at the studio's façade provides privacy and shade

Architect Clare Cousins is no stranger to the design scene in Melbourne, Australia. Since the inception of her eponymous firm in 2005, she has been dotting the Victorian urban landscape with her designs.



← **EXTENDED WAVE:**
The eaves extend beyond the window to protect the glass from the elements

↑ **STRONG LOOP:**
The façade bricks were laid in a staggered soldier course to better fit the façade's curves

From the ceiling of black plastic chains of *Mocha*, an accessory shop in Chadstone, to the copper concertina cladding and aquamarine interiors of the *Page Street House*, Cousins brings a dynamism and sensuality into her work. Her keen attempt at engaging users has also resulted in projects like the *Aesop* store in Canberra – it features interactive product dispenser cases on its façade – and the *Parents' Retreat*, a colourful, spirited play environment for kids in the *Melbourne Central* shopping mall. Not least, the firm has also provided pro-bono design and documentation services for victims of the *Black Saturday* bushfires (via the *Bushfire Home Services*) with their highly adaptable and cost-effective *Hinge House*.

So when it came to the renovation of her own home in Prahran, Melbourne, it's not surprising that Cousins has applied her signature explorative approach. "We wanted a home that suits family life, with comfortable spaces to be together with friends, while at other times, allow for people to have their own space," says Cousins, who stays here with her two young daughters and husband Ben – the latter owns a commercial construction company *Maben Group* that constructed the house. "The project is about testing ideas about living for now and in the future."

For Cousins, this not only meant extending the house, but also creating meaningful and flexible spaces. For inspiration, she looked to the sinewy curves of Finnish architect *Alvar Aalto's* glassware for *Iittala*.

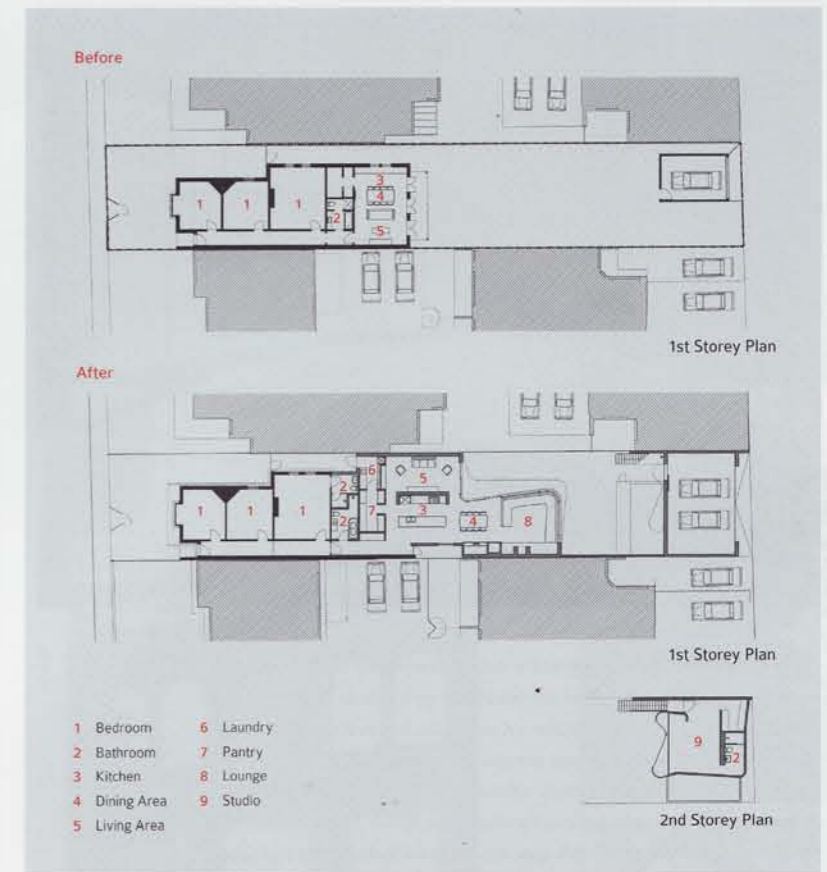
The result is nothing like its original shell, not that one can imagine from the existing, street-facing Edwardian façade. The



“THE PROJECT IS ABOUT TESTING IDEAS ABOUT LIVING FOR NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.”

Internally, the spatial changes Cousins implemented have created a fluidity reminiscent of the exterior forms. Instead of a typical, linear organisation, an open-plan kitchen stands as the connecting core between the newly expanded living room and new lounge area. The latter, conceived as “a second living zone”, includes a built-in study and small bar, concealed behind a sliding perforated metal screen.

Already, the adaptability Cousins has planned for has worked out well. “The lounge area is open and surrounded by the garden. It’s a great space during the day while the other [living room] is cosier and [nice to hang out in] at night. The lounge is also used as the children’s playroom as they can play while being nearby and the mess is screened [from the living room] by the kitchen volume.”



cluster of bedrooms near the street was retained while throughout, communal spaces were rearranged and stretched backwards in an amorphous extension containing a new dining and lounge area.

Facing this, Cousins built a new garage at the rear (vehicular access is via the back lane). Perched above it is a studio covered by a billowing timber screen “conceived as a windowless sculptural form” that hovers over a new swimming pool.

While these articulations create a sense of movement and dialogue within the site, they are not altogether ambiguous. “The house extension curves to maximise its northern orientation...to bring in plenty of light...and to visually incorporate the native landscaping. The timber batten cladding [of the studio] also addresses practical issues such as western solar shading and privacy from neighbours,” explains Cousins. “[also] wanted the studio to have a sculptural quality as it is the primary view from the house.”

Contributing to the tactile quality of the home is the carefully considered material palette: staggered bricks for the curved façade of the main house, warm unfinished cedar for the ribbed timber battens of the studio and an innovative mixture of materials that bring the outside in.

“Materials typically used externally – such as face bricks and off form concrete [at the fireplace] – have been used internally. The timber-clad ceilings extend [outside] to the [edge of] the eaves; the polished concrete floor continues to the outdoor courtyard and glazed brickwork walls in the kitchen work in lieu of traditional tiles,” Cousins shares.

↑
NEAT NOOKS:
At the communal area, perforated metal screen conceals a small bar and study desk

→
ROOM WITH A VIEW:
The new lounge looks to the pool and the studio’s billowing façade



←
BIG PICTURE:
An open-planned interior makes the best of views and light

SPACE
Home



"I currently use the desk behind the sliding screen when I work from home. It has been positioned so that in the future, our girls can do their homework there," she lets on. "The studio space is also flexible. It is now a guest bedroom, but [can later] be a study, a teenage hangout or a granny flat."

"Our residential projects must ultimately be a reflection of our client. A home should be a calm and comfortable space, however this doesn't limit creativity," she offers of the firm's approach. From the looks of the *Brick* house, it's clear that this manifesto has been suitably applied to her abode as well. ♦
clarecousins.com.au

↑
SOOTHING TACTILITY:
The studio-guestroom features a calm palette of timber and concrete

→
LIGHT LAYERS:
The screening language continues into the bathroom joinery



↓ **BRICK HOUSE**

Architects Clare Cousins Architecture
Project Team Clare Cousins, Michael McManus, Sarah Lake, Ranae Brown, Tara Ward
Builder Maben Group
Civil and Structural Engineers Brown Consulting
Building Surveyor Davis Langdon
Landscape Consultant Eckersley Garden Architecture

Time to Complete 10 months
Total Floor Area House: 205sqm, Garage + Studio: 95sqm

Clare Cousins Architecture
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Furniture Contemporary Leathers custom-made leather sofa in lounge and Sinclair bed in studio from Temperature Design. In lounge, Patchwork vintage Hepsy rug from Loom Rugs. In dining, No. B9 Le Corbusier dining chairs from

Thonet. Egg cup stool in lounge and Slab end, sand blasted pine dining table from Mark Tuckey. Kitchen bar counter Mass Production Albert stools from Luke Furniture. In studio, sofa is vintage Hans Wegner, sofa from Ikea, pouf from Country Road, Dandelion rug from Armadillo.

Artwork In kitchen, painting by Minnie Pwerle.

Lighting Generally throughout. Beama ceiling downlight and external staircase Mini Arcade wall light from Masson For Light. In lounge, Vira Potencia wall lamp from Space Furniture Australia. In studio, bedside lamp is vintage planet light.

Finishes Generally throughout, concrete floors, double brick walls and steel and timber roof structure. Swimming pool fence and external staircase balustrade is galvanised steel. External façade Cedar cladding from Cedar Sales. External Crevole brick cladding from PGH.

External Paulownia timber lining boards and screen from Glosswood. Black anodised aluminium doors and steel window frames with Ferreko from Dulux. Swimming pool render from Quartzon. Kitchen wall charcoal glazed brick from Euora Clay. Lounge, dining, studio and bathroom floor is white polished concrete with white quartz aggregate from Mentone Premix. In lounge, fireplace parapet is grey concrete. Dining and bathroom joinery is powder-coated perforated screen and American oak. Kitchen counter Calcutta marble from The Marble House. Bathroom 50x200 gloss ceramic tile from Signorino Tile Gallery.

Fixed & Fitted Professional Series kitchen sink from Oliveri. Oven from Bertazzoni. Kitchen hood from Qasair. Dornbracht kitchen and bathroom basin mixers from Mary Noall. Bathroom Pozzi Ginori 500 series 1000 wall basin and stand from Reece.

Armadillo (61 2) 9698 4043 armadillo-co.com, Bertazzoni bertazzoni.com, Cedar Sales (61 7) 3281 4222 cedarsales.com.au, Country Road countryroad.com, Euora Clay (61 3) 5795 3078 glazedbricks.com.au, Glosswood (61 8) 9497 4610 glosswood.com.au, Ikea ikea.com, Loom Rugs (61 3) 9510 3040 loomrugs.com, Luke Furniture (65 3) 9533 7644 luke.com.au, Mark Tuckey marktuckey.com.au, Mary Noall (65 3) 9690 1327 marynoall.com.au, Masson For Light (65 3) 9437 0001 massonforlight.com.au, Mentone Premix mentonepremix.com.au, Oliveri oliverisinks.com, Pgh Clay pghclay.com.au, Qasair (61 3) 9482 7088 qasair.com.au, Quartzon (61 3) 9311 9225 quartzon.com.au, Reece (61 13) 9274 0000 reece.com.au, Signorino Tile Gallery (61 3) 9427 9100 signorino.com.au, Temperature Design temperaturedesign.com.au, Thonet thonet.com.au