

# Ease the squeeze

Turning a narrow Paddington terrace into a family home required some innovation and lateral thinking.

**The House** Paddington  
Completed 2003  
Cost \$350,000  
Architect Cullen Feng, 9310 4365  
Structural engineers MPN Group, 9929 7144, and BSB Pty Ltd, 9529 5188  
Joinery Gernax Interiors, 9796 2955, and de Gabrielle Kitchens, 9831 4777  
Steelwork Stainless Aluminium Steel, 9630 0767  
Landscape architect Daniel Baffsky, 360°, 9212 2204  
**The Aim** To maximise the space available, creating a functional house with clean lines.

**T**he dangers in buying real estate sight unseen are obvious, but the owners of this Paddington terrace house didn't have much choice. "We were living overseas at the time so we sent along my mother," explains Caleb Jarvis. "We trust her judgement implicitly."

Although the house was originally bought as an investment, the Jarvises decided that they would live in it when they returned to Australia. While still overseas they contacted John Cullen and Michelle Feng of Cullen Feng, an architectural duo who had designed a cafe for Caleb's sister.

"We hoped the house would be ready to move back into when we returned to Australia," says Alison Jarvis. "However that didn't happen, so we decided to live in it for a while as it was, which was fantastic as we realised we wanted to change a few things."

Several of the changes were influential in terms of how the new house now works. Although space-efficient, the existing staircase was deemed to be too narrow and steep to be safe and so had to be rebuilt. With a child on the way, the need to make the outdoor space an extension of the living area became a pressing concern, and another use had to be found for the front formal room which was rarely used because of its proximity to the street.

Twelve months after demolition began, the couple moved back into their newly renovated two-bedroom, two-bathroom house with their daughter, Milla. Now, 18 months later, the growing family (since joined by a son, Jasper) is moving out again while a third bedroom is being created in the attic.



**Perspective** ... long vistas and ziggurat-style garden boxes enhance the sense of spaciousness.  
Photos: Murray Fredericks

"Our one regret was that we didn't do the attic bedroom at the time of the building," Caleb says. "Now we have a second child we definitely need that third bedroom, so building starts in about a fortnight's time."

## OPTICAL ILLUSIONS

Instead of the conventional layout of two formal rooms at the front of the terrace, there is now a compact home office followed by a guest bathroom. At the end of the entry hall four steps lead down to an open-plan kitchen, dining and living space that opens out to a long, elevated deck.

"Compacting those areas at the front of the house means you have a vista all the way from the front door to the back of the deck," explains Cullen. "This makes the living space feel large even though it's really quite narrow."

"Because the site is so narrow [3.5 metres] and long we tried to maximise the height and emphasise the length to compensate," explains Feng. "That's why the hall steps down to a living area with 3.2 metre-high ceilings."

## ELEVATED DECK

Because of the slope of the block, up from the street, the original courtyard garden and off-street parking area, with access from the back lane, were reached via two flights of steps.

Cullen Feng came up with the idea of raising the outdoor space to the same level as the new living area, and tucking a garage, storage space and a laundry underneath.

The deck adjoining the rear of the house is clad in hardwood decking, with the remaining area paved. Two planter beds, their sides clad in stepped timber planks, ziggurat-style, are filled with colourful foliage plants.

"The outdoor deck is our extended living room and kitchen," Caleb says.



## JOINERY

Because of the house's small size, there was a need to provide streamlined solutions to storage problems.

"We've been fortunate to be able to design practically everything in the house so that there's a comprehensive consistency," Cullen says. Constructed in MDF (medium-density fibreboard) with a satin polyurethane finish, the joinery features a recurring motif of circular holes which also have the practical purpose of providing ventilation while functioning as the handles.

Another feature of the joinery is that both the living room credenza and the bathroom cabinetry are cantilevered from the wall, adding to the sense of spaciousness.