

home

Sieghan O'Brien



Starting over

It was slated to be a knockdown but with a design makeover this house is now a knockout.

IS ANYTHING from the '80s worth salvaging? Can remnants from this era, such as "Choose Life" T-shirts, fluorescent socks or Duran Duran, be revived into more agreeable forms for the 21st century? And what about houses from this decade? What do you do with mission brown paint, exposed overhead beams, exposed brickwork and copious slate floors?

The owners of this home thought it was beyond help. But there's something about watching a house revive from drinky bush bungalow to a family home (they have five kids) which pulls at the heartstrings. Plus, this handsome house was infinitely more appealing than Duran Duran.

"We considered knocking it down and starting over again but decided to work within the parameters of what we had," the owner explains.

"When we first bought this place in 1979, it was a bush bungalow. We've since had work done, so this wasn't our first renovation, we used the same builder in 1986. He was so good we got him back again."

Design team Cullen Feng (Joe Cullen and Michelle Feng) also considered the demolition option but not

long enough to do any damage. "Admittedly, when we first looked at it, it was a bit overwhelming because of the combination of materials, but we peeled it back and gave the house room to breathe while retaining a sense of continuity," says architect Cullen.

Built in various stages in the late '70s and '80s, this home in a leafy North Shore suburb is an example of the Sydney School design movement, a style featuring organic materials and integration with bushland.

Homes from this period were characterised by generous relationships between the internal and external living spaces and usually came with angle internal wood panelling, slate floors and massive sliding doors.

"Though the house was fine, it was tired. It was time to streamline and update," the owner says.

For an unassuming pair, Cullen Feng has kicked some serious goals since setting up shop in 1996.

Cullen Feng (in association with Neil Burley) designed the recently unveiled Anishou showroom in Melbourne and Ghara hair salon in Darlinghurst and was responsible for the interior refurbishment of the



Sydney Antique Centre – along with a plethora of other projects around town. Cullen was the design architect for the much lauded Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston.

But Cullen Feng didn't redesign this house entirely, just the main bedroom, lounge area, bathroom, kitchen plus minor works throughout.

"We wanted the refurbishment areas, scattered throughout the house, to sit happily within the existing house," the owner says.

"The architects managed to meld them together and the separate bits don't look stuck on, it's so well integrated."

The bedroom and lounge area bear no resemblance to their former selves. Gone is the clumsy shelving, excessive wood panelling and heavy-curtained look.

The heavy timber beams have disappeared thanks to a suspended ceiling, which also allows for recessed aluminium profile lighting and stereo speakers.

A ceiling fan in the lounge area is a feature. Freshly painted plasterboard has covered, and transformed, the dark walls and ceiling.

The custom-designed benchtop joinery includes a day bed, low book shelves, and a snazzy entertainment unit, which houses a TV that swivels so it can be viewed from all angles. The unit also doubles as a desk and the TV screen as a computer monitor.

Feng says: "The clients wanted to house an entertainment system within a built-in that would also act as a screen between the bed and lounge areas."

"The TV needed to be viewed from either side. This was achieved using a console that can be folded down parallel to the lounge side also creates a study area."

In the bathroom a full-length timber bench opposite the vanity is perfect for storage. Sandblasted glass doors hide the shower and toilet.

A glimmering wall of glass tiles behind the vanity is illuminated by lighting recessed under mirrored cabinets.

"The clients wanted a contemporary bathroom with a WC and shower as separate compartments off the main area," Feng says.



"The main area was required to house the vanity and a bench seat with storage underneath while making the bathroom as spacious as possible."

Downstairs, there is no evidence of the original kitchen. While the stone floor was kept for continuity, the kitchen was entirely redesigned. There are

brushbox benchtops and a servery, ample drawers, Smeg stainless-steel appliances and concealed lighting. This kitchen is a chef's nirvana.

While it might be difficult to revive Duran Duran, this house was definitely worth the effort.

1 Painted plasterboard and a suspended ceiling replaced excessive wood panelling and timber beams, while an entertainment unit screens the bedroom from the lounge.

2 A servery links the kitchen to the downstairs dining area.

3 Aside from the original slate floor, kept for continuity, the kitchen was totally redesigned. Brushbox benches, stainless

steel appliances and concealed lighting bring it up to date.

4 The re-planned bathroom has storage areas under the timber bench and behind mirrored cabinets. The toilet and shower lie behind sandblasted glass doors.

5 Some areas of the house were left untouched. The architects managed to meld the old and the new together.

THE AIM
To refurbish, refigure and update the house.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE?
Approximately three months.

WHAT THE ARCHITECT WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY
Not start in October. It's too difficult with Christmas in between.

FEATURES ARCHITECT IS HAPPIEST WITH
The entertainment unit is a hit and we love the ample drawers in the kitchen, which has maximum storage space.

INSIDER TIPS
Use an established builder with good tradesmen. It's certainly well worth getting an architect.

BUILDER
David O'Brien, WP, O'Brien & Co, 8479 4965, 0418 607 596.

JOINER
Robert Carr, CO Speciality Joinery, 9673 1932.

Photos: Jennifer Soto