

# HOUSES

THE RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

ISSUE 45  
\$10.95

small site saw

## BATHROOM UPDATE

*Inarc in profile*

### *small sites*

Lane, White Box  
Di Mase, EAT

### *cool renovations*

Carter Williamson  
ERA, Gibson, T01

### *living with art*

Carabott Holt

### *remote retreats*

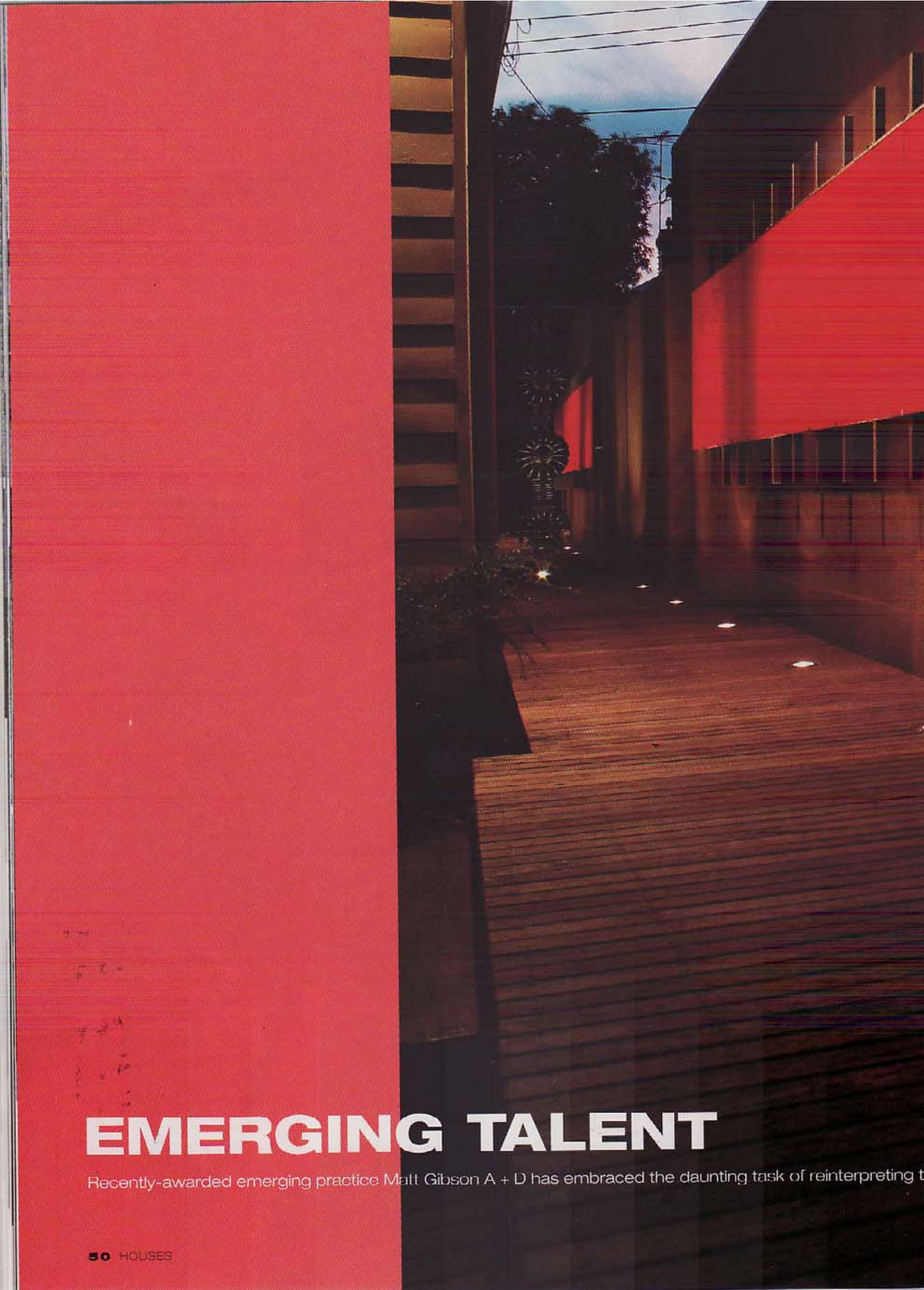
Tanner  
Studio Internationale

### *award winners*

Cox Humphries Moss  
Townsend  
Bligh Graham

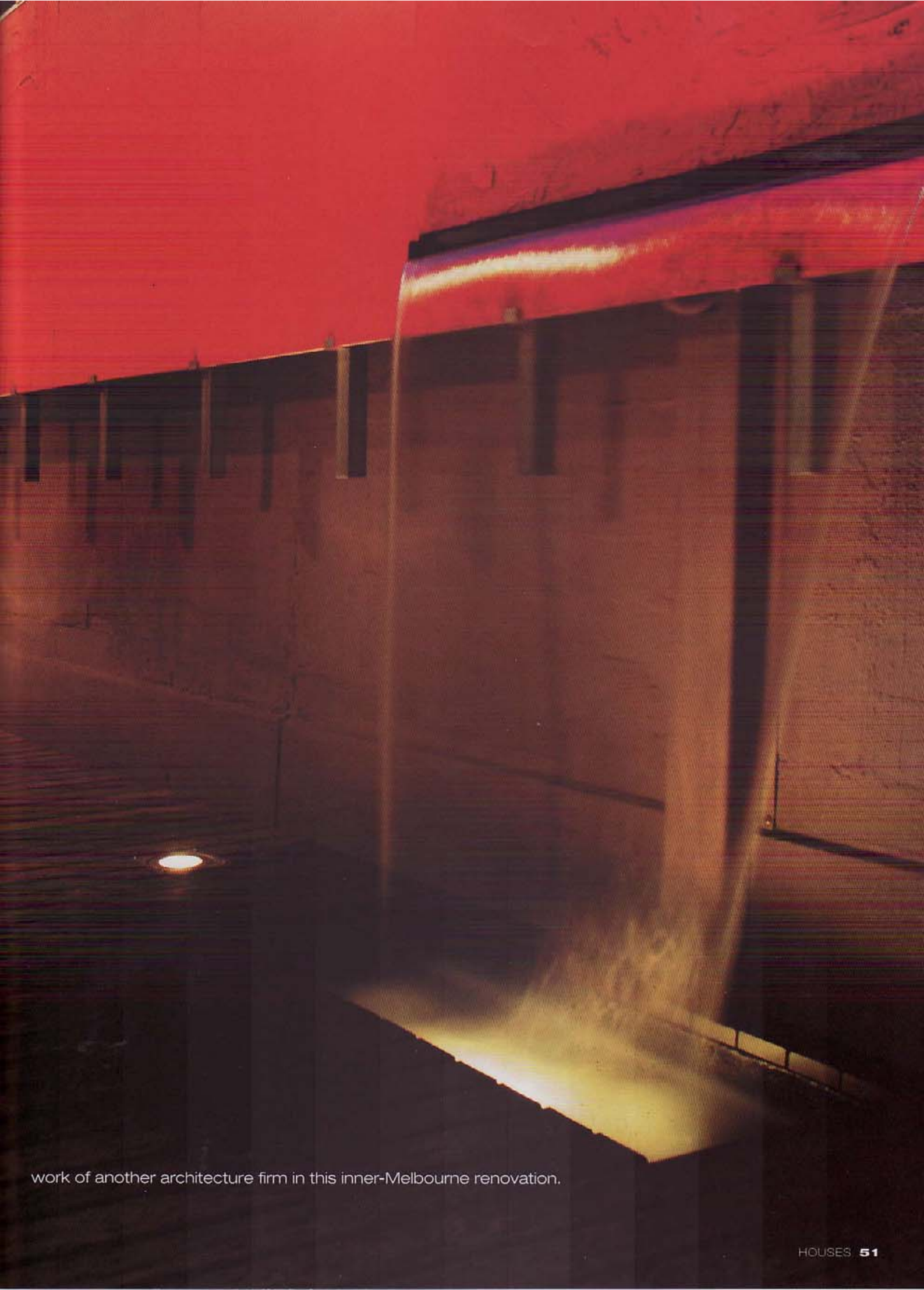


SERENE MODERN SPACES



# EMERGING TALENT

Recently-awarded emerging practice Matt Gibson A + D has embraced the daunting task of reinterpreting t



work of another architecture firm in this inner-Melbourne renovation.



**THESE PAGES, OPPOSITE:**  
A timber walkway leads from the lounge to connect it to the front and rear gardens. Embedded lights show the way.  
**PREVIOUS PAGES:** A massive painting by Anna Gibson has been hung on the perimeter wall and fitted with its own water feature.

**THE UNASSUMING, UTILITARIAN FACADE** of this Victorian cottage belies what's inside – an uplifting unification of art, nature and architecture, a clever embellishment of space and a rewarding juxtaposition of modern and period signatures.

As is the case with most inner-city residences with working class roots, this humble Clifton Hill abode is the classic child's drawing of a house – two windows either side of a central front door and a jaunty "eyebrow" verandah above. Stand in the street and the house appears as a virtual replica of its neighbours ... a no-frills porch, a low picket fence and a short front path that leads inside to a central passage with the standard complement of formal rooms either side. Or so it seems standing at the door. Step beyond and it's a different story.

The project was an inheritance of a sort for Melbourne architect Matt Gibson. His brief was to extend the good work of colleagues who had transformed the living area and courtyard garden at the back more than a decade previously. This involved revamping two bedrooms and an unused living space, to bring the front section of the house into line with the more contemporary rear. While the task seemed quite straightforward, augmenting someone else's work was never going to be easy. After all, personal styles differ, and the freedom to express new ideas is potentially constrained by the need to fit with existing architecture.

Not that any of this bothered Matt, who positively embraced the chance to develop solutions to the myriad practical problems that plague such period homes. He thought big and he thought small – from complete wall treatments to finely-detailed bespoke furniture. Integral to the scheme is the creative connection between inside and outside via the existing side alley, that ubiquitous slither of space so often overlooked as a dingy no-go area. Matt conceived it as a gallery walk, featuring a lively combo of contemporary artworks by emerging artist Anna Gibson and established sculptor Kevin Maritz, augmented by a mirrored wall and some multi-level decking.

Particularly enticing is the way each new architectural element in the house becomes apparent as you travel from front gate to back fence. Something different reveals itself with every step. A prelude to this narrative is the line of sleek lamps along the front porch, angled to silhouette the timber fretwork and weatherboards of the facade. After this, there are plot twists aplenty.

Enter the main bedroom and study (respectively left and right of the wide hall) and Matt's design vision asserts itself immediately. The joinery in these rooms does far more than provide storage space where there was none. It creates an exciting modern hybrid of old and new, combining a Victorian sense of proportion with a twenty-first-century aesthetic. Large white doors delineated by brushed aluminium insets occupy wall space around and above the entrances to these rooms, keeping a discreet distance from floor and ceiling. Warm light plays subtly across the ceiling, emphasising its 3.6 metre height and the contrast between the curved existing cornices and the straight-edged aluminium of the joinery. Rather than impose, these cupboards bring both rooms alive. Sections of wall have been retained beneath the bulkheads to provide hanging space for artworks.

In contemporising aspects of this home, a happy coincidence is that the original utilitarianism seems almost modern in its simplicity. "Victorian houses lend themselves well to modern inclusions, whereas other period styles like Edwardian are sometimes a bit too decorative,"

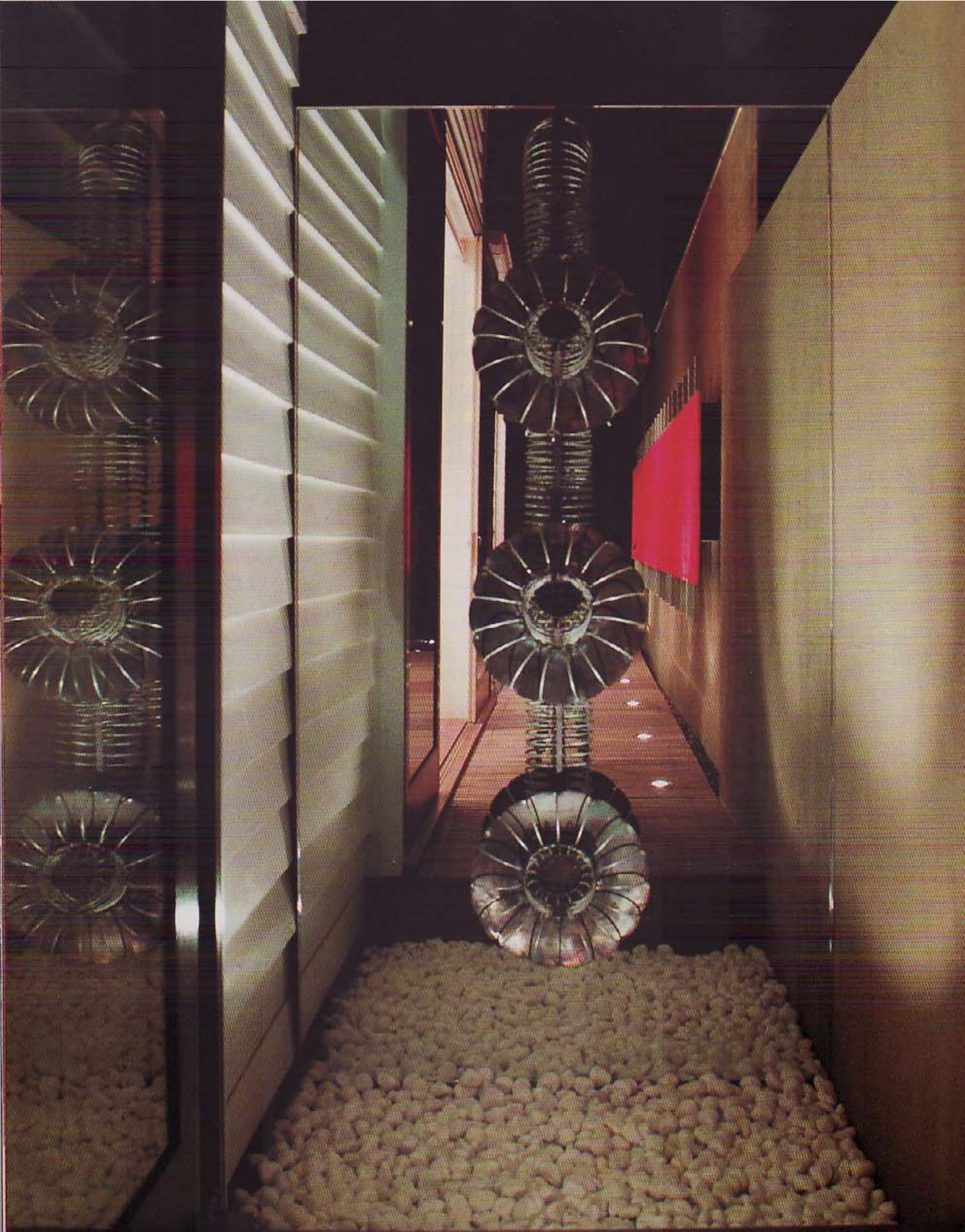
Matt says, indicating the original fireplace in the study which sports almost no embellishment at all. In basic black, it is framed within an equally unadorned hearth and mantle. It makes the perfect partner for the smooth plane of suspended shelving and cupboards above the door and the room's single item of furniture, a large corner desk designed by Matt himself. The desk's return is made of Symonite, a composite of metal and resin panelling often used as exterior cladding. "In these situations you rarely see anything but the face of the product, but the texture and construction of the exposed edge looks great in joinery," he says, explaining his interest in furniture making. "When you're younger you often have to cut your teeth on smaller projects before going on to bigger things, and I enjoy including furniture as part of that." Symonite is also used in the lounge, this time as a broad plane of cupboards that floats in front of the existing chimney to create overlapping geometric planes and unify the two architectural eras.

If there is a dominating design achievement in this project it is surely encapsulated in the lounge and its brilliant marriage with the outdoors. Large glazed sliding doors have replaced the north-facing window to the side alley and the floorboards were redone to match those in the hallway. The existing unused fireplace and unsightly cupboards were replaced by a concrete bench seat and hearth, with two-pack lacquer cupboards beneath and metallic joinery overhead.

A central part of the brief was to unify the new work with the existing extension. This was partly resolved by using compatible finishes such as Dulux 'Antique White' on all the walls. But only when you step onto the new garden walk outside the lounge does the full intent of Matt's design become apparent. This side deck is raised flush with the sill and floor level of the lounge to create a seamless link between indoors and outdoors. At the far end it folds down to connect with the existing deck outside the rear living room – a level drop that doubles as a bench seat for an external table. The expressed timber sliders of the lounge also complement those used at the back of the house.

But against the diverse media of art, water and illusion employed to wonderful effect in the same outdoor space, such stuff is mere detail. Catching your eye outside the lounge is a frameless mirror delineating the front and back yards – a trompe l'oeil that is partially disguised by Kevin Maritz's rusty floral sculpture hanging from the top. Bolted to the adjacent boundary wall and extending the nine metres parallel to the walk is a vibrant red painting by Anna Gibson. Matt knows plenty about this piece because the artist happens to be his sister. "Anna originally conceived this as an internal work but was happy for us to use it here because its linearity provides a wonderful visual link between the two living spaces," he says. "It was actually painted with a broom rather than a brush, inspired by one of her favourite Spanish artists who uses a similar method."

Water spilling from a long slit near the end of the painting further enhances the ambience of the surrounding native garden and the melodic sound of its sluicing can be heard in both living areas. It's an elegant aural segue that underlines the fresh, youthful approach that Matt has taken with this project. Keep an ear out for Matt in the near future – he's one of a number of Melbourne architects who are making their mark in this competitive city. The judges of the Best Emerging Practice Award at the 2005 Interior Design Awards have already seen fit to hand him a gong. Watch this space! **ANDREW BLOCK**





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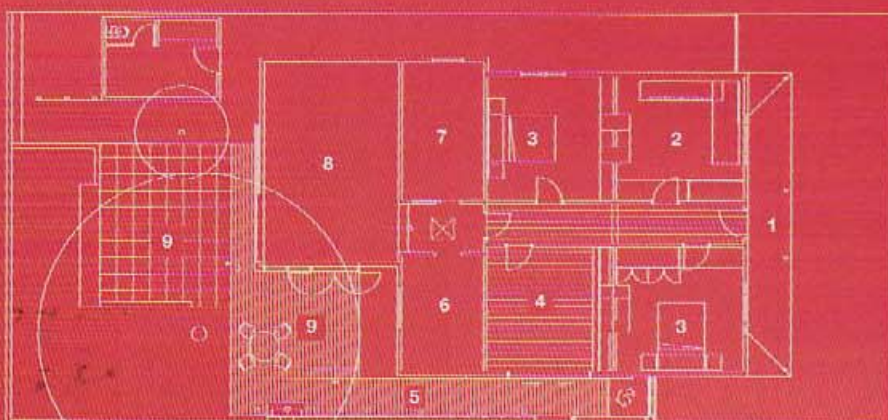
**PRACTICE PROFILE**  
 Emerging practice engaged in residential, hospitality and retail architectural and interior design projects.

**PROJECT TEAM**  
 Matt Gibson, Anna Gibson,  
 Kevin Maritz

**BUILDER**  
 James + Matthew Building  
 Services

**CONSULTANTS**  
**Engineer** Don Moore Associates  
**Landscaping** By client  
**Interiors, lighting** Matt Gibson  
 A + D  
**Joinery** Muggleton + Tloper  
**Artwork** Anna Gibson  
**Sculpture** Kevin Maritz

**PRODUCTS**  
**External walls** Weatherboards, painted Dulux 'Sand White'; rendered f/c sheet, painted in Murobond 'Wood' **Internal walls** Plasterboard, painted 'Antique White USA', 'Chalk USA', Aalto 'Chicana' **Doors** Expressed cedar framed doors, painted Dulux 'Black Forrest'; Contor Architectural hardware **Flooring** Existing Baltic pine boards taken back and resanded; clear polyurethane; Godfrey Hirst Sussex carpet, 'Antique Oak' **Lighting** Incandescent strip lighting; iv downlights; Custom Lighting stainless steel dock uplights; Farnco up/down external wall lights **Joinery** Bedrooms – robes in 2-pack sprayed lacquer finish, 'Antique White USA'; brushed aluminium shadowlines; living – poured concrete banquette top and fire hearth; 2-pack sprayed lacquer finish, 'Antique White USA'; Symonite faced top storage unit **External elements** Jarrah decking; Dimensions Australia floor discant waterfall; white pebble river rocks **Other** Artwork by Anna Gibson; sculpture by Kevin Maritz



- 1 Entry
- 2 Office
- 3 Bedroom
- 4 Lounge
- 5 Gallery walk
- 6 Existing bedroom
- 7 Existing kitchen
- 8 Existing living
- 9 Outdoor living



**TIME SCHEDULE**  
**Design, documentation**  
 3 months  
**Construction** 7 months

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
 John Wheatley

**THIS PAGE:** The lounge opens out to the gallery-style walkway on the side of the house. **OPPOSITE:** A Kevin Maritz sculpture is reflected in a mirrored garden wall.