

HOUSES

THE RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

ISSUE 51
\$10.95

BLISSFUL COUNTRY LIVING
+ HOT INTERIORS
TIGHT CITY SITES



rural retreats Higgs, C + C, Suters, O'Brien/Coy and Yiontis/Shepherd
urban insertions Stanic Harding, Carter Williamson, Gibson
great interiors SJB, Campbell living by the water Crawford,
Johannsen, Form Follows Function + NEW BOOKS

LANDSCAPING • CON BASTIRAS IN PROFILE



With this project, Melbourne architectural practice Matt Gibson A + D has added to its growing oeuvre of cleverly planned, compact houses that make the most of limited space. This one combines a spacious living room with a pocket-sized outdoor living area that's perfect for summer entertaining.

SMALL AND SMART





ONE SENSES THAT ARCHITECT Matt Gibson is the kind of guy who can be relied on to get the last remaining skerrick of toothpaste from the end of the tube. If this little house in Melbourne's inner east is any evidence, then he is well versed at extracting the most out of very little. On a plot measuring just 5.5 metres by 20 metres, the renovation and extension belies its tight confines and seems to expand space in a manner that confounds the eye.

Matt has given the front of the house a lick of paint, an overall tidy-up and has planted a row of Japanese maples to increase the street appeal. But it is inside the front door that the magic really begins – and it's not *all* done with mirrors. The entrance comprises a short hallway, with a Tasmanian oak floor finished in a black-walnut brushed stain that looks similar to a japanned finish. This dark floor anchors the space, drawing the visitor's eye downwards and along to the end of the hall. Here, a floor-to-ceiling pivoting door is made from timber cut to the same width as the floorboards, finished in the same stain ... an effective strategy that serves to visually extend the passage well beyond its actual length.

When the pivot door is open, the view from the entrance carries right to the back of the property – again visually expanding one's perception of space. Matt has added a storage unit above the eye-line in the hall, conscripting every available bit of space into service. This commodious bulkhead also compresses the height between the original part of the house and the new addition. The pivoting door forms an aperture that divides the traditional, compartmentalized older volume from the more open extension, producing a sort of spatial exhalation as one moves through. (A peep inside the two front bedrooms suggests they have remained largely unaltered, save for extensive joinery and warm, incandescent lighting in the cupboard pelmets.)

The rear extension has been configured as an orthogonal insertion set within a larger volume. If you walk through the pivot door and turn to the left, you find the kitchen embedded within a discrete pod tucked into the corner of the volume – the pod is a services core that houses the bathroom as well. This strategy, essentially backing the kitchen and bathroom against each other, serves to minimize any wasted space and streamlines the plumbing program. The overall feeling is of a friendly, vibrant brand of minimalism, reinforcing Matt's edict of maximum impact with little fuss. The front of the kitchen bench is furnished with articulated mirrors and the short passage to the bathroom is also mirrored to visually double the volume. A woven stainless steel wine display is suspended from the ceiling – a charming focal point and handy piece of storage. The panelled cabinetry in the kitchen hides various appliances, reducing visual clutter.

The bathroom, detailed in warm, creamy stone, features a cantilevered

cabinet with concealed lighting washing over the floor, and more mirrored detailing underneath and above the joinery. There is also a long skylight angled into the ceiling to bring natural light in during the day and add a deeper visual distraction at night.

From the kitchen, the visitor steps down into the rear volume, home to a banquette seat and fireplace. Matt had this room excavated from the backyard of the original house to maximize its dimensions and create an even flow from inside to out. The materials palette through the house is restrained, and the living area echoes the warmth of the stone in the bathroom. The architect has engineered an intriguing cantilevered table that is actually mounted into the floor in the living area. The table is constructed from a timber top with two tubular steel legs that slide into two covered holes in the living area floor. This not only enables the table to cantilever, reducing its contact with the floor, but it also dictates the location of the table and responds to how the architect sees the space best used. Additionally, this ingenious table can be removed from the slots in the living area and installed in two slots in the backyard, adding flexibility where it might not have otherwise existed ... and reminding us that Matt Gibson is a master at extracting the best from tiny outdoor spaces.

The fireplace punctuates the banquette seat that runs from inside the living area and continues out into the small backyard. Retractable, full-height sliding doors delineate the two spaces and expand the living area when the weather is clement. Running parallel to the sliding doors is a row of halogen downlights tinted in a soft pinkish yellow. The client is a fan of Philippe Starck and he liked the idea of a diaphanous white metallic curtain that could be drawn along the row, to billow with the summer zephyrs (a theatrical touch reminiscent of the pizzazz of the famous French designer). The banquette is uplit in the rear yard, creating a dramatic demarcation to the rear, rendered brick wall. The yard faces north and provides the perfect place for a cleansing ale and convivial debrief of the day's happenings.

When you stand in the garden and look back into the living area, you notice that the cube that houses the kitchen and bathroom actually cantilevers into the room and forms a large, mounted bookshelf. Matt defines and defies space with these cantilevers and by orchestrating changes in floor and ceiling levels. He plays with geometric elements that inject interest and intrigue, distracting the visitor's eye from the limitations of the site.

Matt Gibson has achieved a lot in this house (even making space under the kitchen floor for the client's surfboards). A blend of floating objects, surface continuities and material variations means the place looks larger than it is. A thaumaturge capable of conjuring space from thin air, he has pulled another rabbit out of his hat. CHRISTOPHER MOORE

"The architect plays with geometric elements that inject interest and intrigue

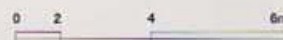
PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT:

A pod housing the bathroom and kitchen cantilevers into the living space. RIGHT: Mirrored

surfaces in the bathroom and kitchen expand the compact space. THESE PAGES, RIGHT:

The kitchen's clean lines accommodate clever storage spaces. FAR RIGHT: An angled skylight and concealed lighting add drama to the bathroom.

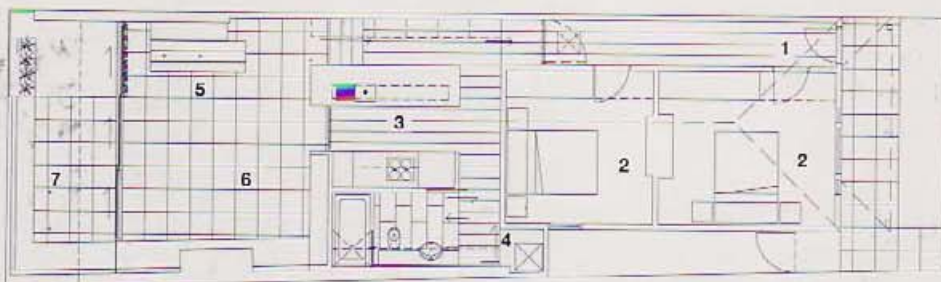
FOLLOWING PAGES, ABOVE: Street facade. BELOW: Sliding glass doors join the house with the rear yard.



- 1 Entry
- 2 Bedroom
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Laundry
- 5 Dining
- 6 Living
- 7 Terrace



distracting the visitor's eye from the limitations of the site."



Floor plan



ARCHITECT

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PRACTICE PROFILE

Practice is engaged in various project types including residential, hotel fitouts, hospitality and retail.

PROJECT TEAM

Matt Gibson, Anna Maritz,
 Paul Evans

BUILDER

Sherbrooke Constructions

CONSULTANTS

Engineer Don Moore and Associates

Landscaping client

Interiors, lighting

Matt Gibson A + D

Joinery Stylecraft Joinery

PRODUCTS

Roofing Colorbond Custom Orb in 'Slate Grey'; Lysaght Kip-Lok

External walls Existing - Bristol 'Beaux Beige' with black gloss enamel detailing; new - Dulux AcraTex render in 'Antique White USA' **Internal walls** Plasterboard, Dulux 'Antique White USA'

Windows Black powdercoated, top hung sliding panels

Doors Pivot door, clad in floorboards;

Dorma hardware; concealed in-cavity slider, finished in ebony veneer; William Russell 'Victorian Cricket Bat' entry door

Flooring Tasmanian oak, finished in Watty 'Black' and 'Walnut' mix; Hycraft Corston 'Loather' carpet; Serle Marmi 'Bianco' porcelain tiles;

Rietmans 'Limestone' tiles

Lighting Louis Poulsen 'TH Snowball' pendant; Mason designer fittings

Kitchen Smeg appliances; Fisher & Paykel fridge; Abet Laminati joinery; oiled zinc splashback; Reccodesign tapware

Bathroom Reccodesign accessories; Pozzi Lavabi pan

Heating Jetmaster fireplace; radiated heat

External Rietmans 'Limestone' tiles

Other Designed Blinds blinds; Saker Fabrics curtain in 'Mokum Organizer'; Eco Concepts Portsea limestone chimney



PHOTOGRAPHY
 John Wheatley