

Renovation rescue

The right renovation can turn ugly into elegant but the devil is in the detail. Story by **Emma Portelli**

The words “renovator’s delight” are often used to describe ugly houses that need a lot of work, but when it actually comes time to renovate the process is rarely delightful. According to local architect Dion Seminara the only way to describe the 1930s Queenslander one Hawthorne couple called him in to rejuvenate was “ugly”. The house had been relocated to the subdivided property five years before and the couple had already attempted to add an ensuite to the main bedroom, but the tradesperson had botched the job. And Seminara was soon to find out this wasn’t the owners’ only experience with dodgy workmanship.

When the house was placed on the small block, the owners had requested the house to be raised to legal height. Their goal was to completely change the traditional Queenslander layout to split the living area and kitchen from one level to join the laundry and a powder room on the ground floor with the garage, while the four bedrooms, a

thickness of the slab and an additional support beam that had to be added under the first floor. We had to raise the house an extra 300mm. If you are raising a house, it’s a good idea to have a surveyor check the height,” Seminara advises. Not only was an extra \$10,000 required to raise the house the extra height but a storage area that had been added to the back of the garage

had to be rebuilt, further adding to the cost.

The block itself created another challenge for Seminara. The house faces east, has a limited backyard and there’s a three-storey unit block directly across the road. Seminara designed the living areas to flow out through bifold doors onto a courtyard



A partially covered courtyard provides a sheltered entertaining area

on the street side, giving the area privacy through fencing and landscaping. The courtyard is also set partially under the first floor of the house and a large awning covers the rest to provide further privacy and a large sheltered entertainment area. Seminara used timber bifold doors to connect the courtyard to the living areas so no space is wasted. “The advantage of the timber bifold doors is that you can run tracks on the outside of a wall beyond the door opening. The doors can then slide all the way down and stack against an external wall of the courtyard, so they’re right out of the way and the deck area is freed up,” he explains.

Seminara aims to maximise space in all his designs and one of his favourite ways to do this in a living room is by pushing out a section of the wall for an entertainment unit. “It massively increases the floor area of that room so the television unit is tucked away and not within the line of the room,” he says. He’s done the same in this house and increased ventilation by including long lines of louvres either side of the pushed out section. “We’ve used louvres in the living and kitchen area because it has a

“We’ve used louvres in the living and kitchen area because it has a north-east aspect and therefore catches the breezes

playroom, main bathroom and ensuite were to take over the first floor. It wasn’t until Seminara started measuring up the ground floor that he discovered the house hadn’t been raised high enough to allow the main living areas to be moved to the ground floor.

“The house had been raised to the bare minimum. It didn’t take into account the flow of the land. It didn’t allow for the

Right: The ground floor has been utilised to maximise living space in this now contemporary Queenslander

Below: A section of the living room wall has been "pushed out" to accommodate the entertainment unit



north-east aspect and therefore catches the breezes. There are also windows and doors on the other side to suck the air through for cross ventilation," he says.

In keeping with a traditional Queenslander, timber flooring is used in the main living areas, laid on batons rather than the concrete slab. "It doesn't feel like a timber floor when you set it straight onto concrete. By putting it on batons you get a bit of a spring," he explains. Timber has also been used in the newly-built internal stairs so the original first-floor space blends with the new downstairs area.

Blending new with old is an important part of renovating Queenslanders and Seminara took care to do this not just inside, but outside as well. Instead of using

weatherboard from top to bottom on all sides of the house, he's mixed it up with fibre cement sheeting and batons on the lower floor to give the house balance. He's also used shading additions similar to the large awning over the courtyard to provide shelter from the sun and rain, and to add a depth of field to the house and prevent it from looking like a box.

The external stairs, which are traditional in Queenslanders, have been replaced with a ground floor entry. In some cases, Seminara says removing the external stairs from a Queenslander can make it feel clumsy, but in this instance balance was created through the large awning. Plus, the new entry gives the living areas more privacy. "When you open the front door

you don't see through the guts of the house," Seminara says. Rather, you come into a wide hallway that leads down to the living room, with the dining room tucked around the corner.

While the appearance and layout of the house has drastically changed, Seminara has taken care to ensure none of the additions feel foreign. The house retains the traditional feel of a Queenslander, but has a modern twist that prevents it from feeling outdated. "For us it's about mixing old materials with new materials to bring together a house that's balanced," he says. The real reward, however, is turning an ugly duckling into a beautiful swan.

