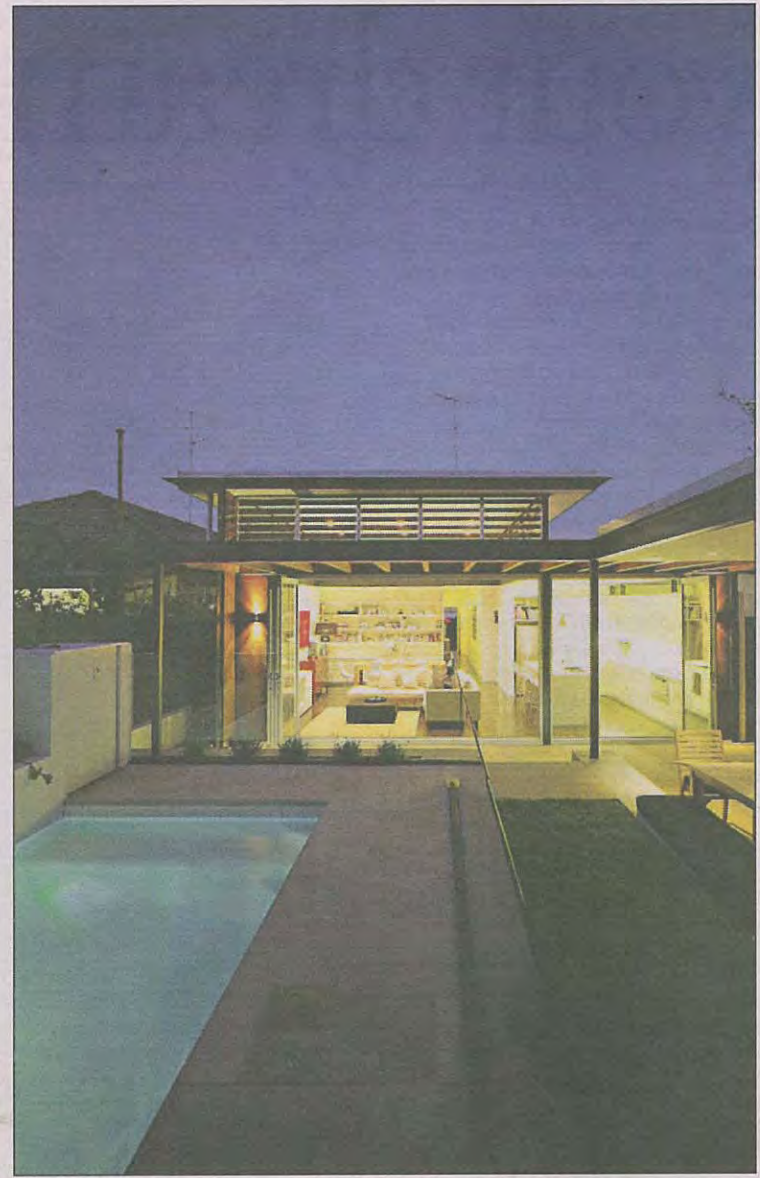


## Dream Home

## Long-distance romance

Love is being away from the stress of renovating, writes **Judy Barouch**.



Bright idea ... (from left) glass and wooden louvres let light in or block it out of the main living area; the contemporary pavilion living area has a 4.5-metre-high ceiling. Photos: Brett Boardman

Almost everything to do with this house was decided long distance. During a stint living in Hong Kong, Samantha and James Lambert began searching Sydney real estate websites.

When they spied a three-bedroom, inter-war bungalow in Waverley, they asked their parents to check it out. On receiving the thumbs up, they then requested architect Sam Crawford carry out an inspection.

"We'd seen one of Sam's houses featured in the *Domain* [*Houses Inside and Out*] book and we wanted something similar," Samantha says. "So we looked at Sam's website, liked his work and went from there."

The couple bought the house and rented it out for three years while they planned renovations with the intention of returning when work was completed. The idea was to reconfigure the disordered front of the house and open up the back for themselves and their daughters, Olivia, 2, and Sophie, 4.

"James drew Sam a sketch of the alterations to the layout that we were envisaging," Samantha says. "Decisions were made by email, phone calls and at those times when we came back home on holidays."

Crawford adds that the couple gave him a lot of trust and their feedback was constructive. "We wanted to keep the integrity of the bungalow but contemporise it without hiding the original house," he says. "The front door had been pushed forward [by previous owners], making the facade dull and flat. In order to give some depth, another space at the front was created by adding a narrow verandah. This provides a waiting spot for visitors."

**WELCOMING**

On approach to the house, the eye is drawn to an expansive steel-framed screen with western red cedar slats. The screen shades the veranda and protects the bedroom behind it from the eastern sun.

"The steel beams are exposed to contrast, not mimic, the language of the existing house," Crawford says.

Once inside the front door, there's a small study on the right. "This would originally have been a veranda which had been closed in," he says. "We changed the aluminium-framed windows to timber-framed sliders."

The study leads to a walk-in wardrobe and en suite for the main bedroom that follows.

**THE AIM**

A home with open-plan living, outdoor space and lots of storage – a welcome change from the apartments the Lamberts had lived in for 10 years in London and Hong Kong.

**TIME FRAME**

About 2½ years (there was a break in between).

**OWNERS' FAVOURITE FEATURES**

The family room with its bi-fold doors, highlight windows and high ceiling. "I spend so much time there with the kids and it's sunny all day and in summer we get a lovely breeze," Samantha says.

**INSIDER'S TIPS**

▶ Be organised and don't keep changing your mind. We researched fittings and fixtures and had firm ideas, for example, on what taps and lights we wanted.

▶ For a dark floor without dust and dirt showing up, use 75 per cent black Japan and 25 per cent walnut stain.

**GREEN POINTS**

- ▶ Most of the existing building was retained to minimise building waste.
- ▶ No airconditioning: high-level louvred windows provide ventilation and let hot air out. Plus they provide much natural light.
- ▶ Reverse brick-veneer and concrete slab on ground provides thermal mass with moderate temperature year round.
- ▶ Twenty-six 77-litre tanks along the southern side of the house. (Due to the presence of rock close to the ground surface, burying them would have been prohibitively expensive.)
- ▶ Recycled blackbutt floors.
- ▶ Ample thermal insulation, energy-efficient light fittings and water-saving sanitary and tap fittings.

**ARCHITECT**

Sam Crawford Architects: Project team Sam Crawford, Nic Tang, Karen Erdos, 9280 3555.

**BUILDER**

H2H, 9315 8031.

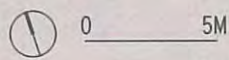




Child's play ... (clockwise from above) Samantha Lambert with Sophie, 4, and Olivia, 2; a simple narrow veranda adds space to the front of the house; clerestory windows allow light in above the kitchen's floating cupboards. Photo: Dallas Kilponen



Floor plan



These were created from an existing bedroom, while the spacious new main bedroom was previously a living room.

Across the hall, a front bedroom was retained for both girls, with the dining room behind it converted to a playroom/bedroom.

"You had to dog-leg through the side of the dining room to reach the kitchen, which was in a lean-to at the back," Crawford says. Now, the central hallway - which has gained a skylight - continues on to a contemporary pavilion containing a dining and living area topped with a lofty 4.5-metre-high ceiling. A new kitchen is tucked to one side.

**LIGHT**

Banks of louvred clerestory windows stretch around the perimeter of the living area. On the northern and southern sides, the louvres are glass, while facing the eastern and western aspects, the louvres are timber to cut out harsh sunlight while still allowing in cooling sea breezes.

"Having a tall wall on one side of the living area, with high level windows above, means you allow in northern sun without overlooking the neighbours," Crawford says. Similarly, there's a fixed highlight slot window above the kitchen's floating cupboards.

"It borrows a view of the neighbour's trees and brings in southern light. If you get light from just one direction it can be very glary. The light coming in from that window softens the light in the living area and gives the sense of a greater amount of space," Crawford says, adding that the slatted pergola at the back cuts down the western sun.

Bi-fold doors extend the full width of the back of the house, opening to a garden designed for family entertaining. The Lamberts are delighted with the

| ▶ COSTS                            | \$             |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| ▶ Preliminaries                    | 102,500        |
| ▶ Demolition                       | 19,700         |
| ▶ Excavation and site preparation  | 33,600         |
| ▶ Concrete                         | 22,000         |
| ▶ Structural steel                 | 54,700         |
| ▶ Carpentry                        | 63,900         |
| ▶ Joinery                          | 68,600         |
| ▶ Plastering                       | 10,600         |
| ▶ Insulation                       | 3,300          |
| ▶ Cement rendering                 | 11,000         |
| ▶ Roofing (including plumbing)     | 19,100         |
| ▶ Painting                         | 15,200         |
| ▶ Waterproofing                    | 875            |
| ▶ Plumbing                         | 24,600         |
| ▶ Brickwork and blockwork          | 26,900         |
| ▶ Tiling                           | 8,800          |
| ▶ Electrical services              | 24,400         |
| ▶ Landscaping, ext. works and pool | 116,200        |
| ▶ Windows and doors                | 35,300         |
| ▶ Builder                          | 102,842        |
| ▶ Architect                        | 97,000         |
| ▶ Consultants                      | 16,000         |
| <b>▶ TOTAL</b>                     | <b>958,220</b> |

transformation. "The layout ended up being virtually like the sketch James gave Sam, only the kitchen was moved slightly," Samantha says. "We received emails and progress photos and because we weren't visiting the site every day, the process was stress-free. It couldn't have turned out better even had it not been undertaken long distance."



Driving deals without a licence

You wrote recently about unlicensed selling agents. Do the same licensing rules apply to buyer's agents? I know of a person on the northern beaches who approaches buyers at open houses purporting to be a buyer's agent but is unlicensed (and yet still sends a bill on settlement).

Greg, Collaroy

I hope none of those buyers paid one cent to that con. Even if he/she did a ripper of a deal negotiating a sale on their behalf, the same licensing rules apply to buyer's agents as they do to their sales counterparts. Namely, no commission may be paid to any property agent without a licence. We can all check with the Office of Fair Trading (fairtrading.nsw.gov.au) to see whether an agent is equipped to take our money. And while it is legal to prospect for clients at an open inspection, it's a bad look and you have to wonder why a sales agent would allow it.

Do I need the council's approval to install a rainwater tank?

Ingrid, Chatswood

No. Rainwater tanks are referred to as an "exempt development", according to the state's Department of Planning. As always, there are exceptions. I could itemise them here but how many of us are planning to install a tank of more than 10,000 litres in a foreshore area that covers the facade in a heritage conservation area? For those who might, check out the State Environmental Planning Policy 2008 clauses 2.63 and 2.64 for more details. For everyone else, go for it.

I think the current sales methods asking for "offers over" and "expressions of interest" are unethical because buyers have no idea what - if any - other buyers are willing to pay. Who knows whether you are bidding against another buyer or not? These agents should put these properties to auction. Who can I complain to, or should I just accept that this is the unfortunate status quo?

Anthony, Epping

Oh, you can complain, Anthony, and again the Office of Fair Trading is your best audience for that but that doesn't mean anything will be done. Given that the status quo is unlikely to change until vendors as a whole rise together to demand a fairer, less-competitive sale process, your best bet is to accept things as they are. Of course, that doesn't leave you powerless. To avoid just such a silent auction, one well-dressed buyer's agent recommends a little legwork first to find out what similar houses in the neighbourhood have sold for in the past three months. Thus armed, put your best and reasonable (as opposed to your best but unreasonable) offer in writing. When the agent comes back to say there are better offers, ask what those counter offers are before bidding yourself up. If none is forthcoming, the agent may be calling your bluff. If you enjoy a bit of sport, why not then put a deadline on your offer, after which time any subsequent offer will be for less.

Send your questions to Lucy at [macken.lucy@gmail.com](mailto:macken.lucy@gmail.com).