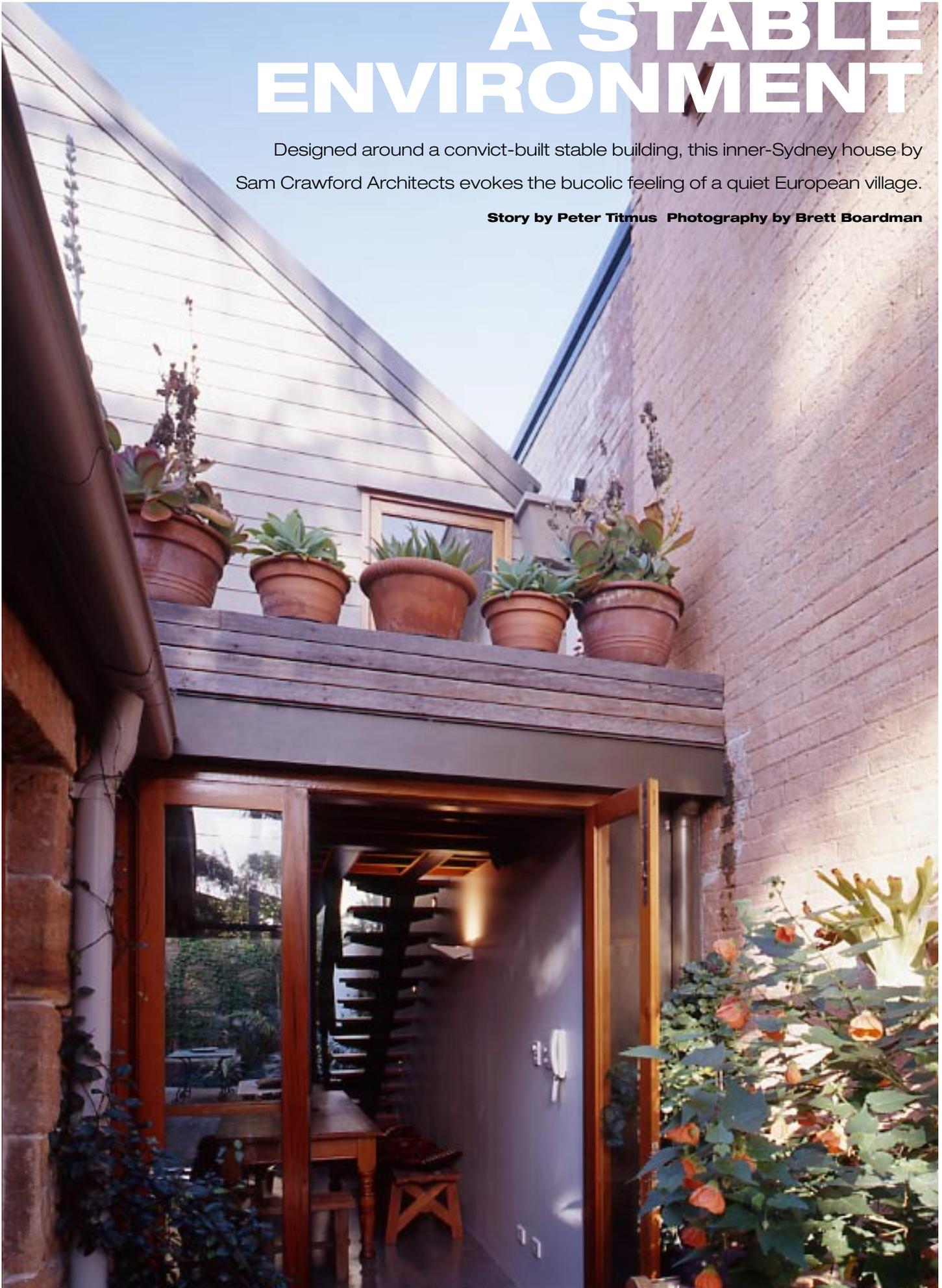


A STABLE ENVIRONMENT

Designed around a convict-built stable building, this inner-Sydney house by Sam Crawford Architects evokes the bucolic feeling of a quiet European village.

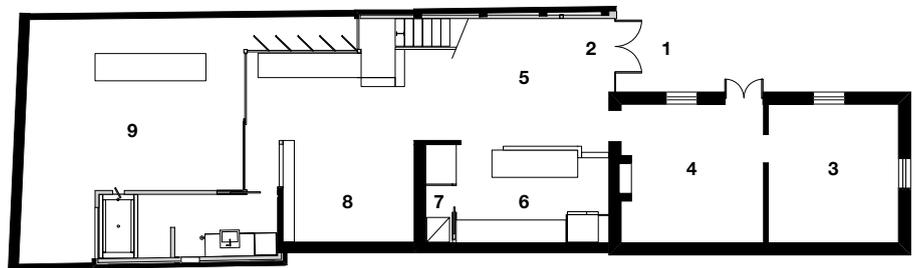
Story by Peter Titmus Photography by Brett Boardman





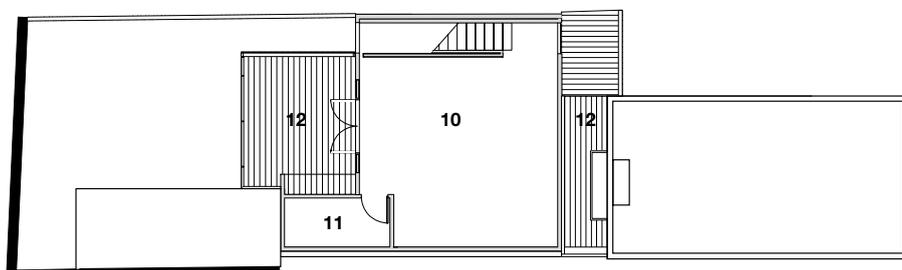


- 1 Entry courtyard
- 2 Entry
- 3 Existing bedroom
- 4 Library
- 5 Dining
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Laundry
- 8 Living
- 9 Courtyard
- 10 Study/mezzanine
- 11 Store
- 12 Deck



Ground level





Upper level

PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT: The timber-clad rear addition includes a new attic level for the owner's model train collection. Building upwards was a necessity on this tight urban site. **RIGHT:** A narrow entry courtyard stretches beside the repaired two-room sandstone cottage, which is thought to be part of convict-built stables dating from the 1820s. **THESE PAGES, LEFT:** The low attic floor, with timber joists expressed, recalls the character of the original cottage. The owners' passion for cooking is evident in the kitchen's generous size. **RIGHT:** The owners spend a lot of time in the dining area, where light pours past recycled ironbark stair treads.

THE SITE FOR THIS HOUSE sits tucked into a fragmented pocket of Sydney's inner city, an undefined territory between Oxford Street shopfronts and the march of Paddington's genteel terraces. Here, pavements lose their kerbing. Property plots interweave in irregular geometries of forgotten logic, and streets appear to dissolve into an unruly mix of industrial relic, neglected heritage and community planting. Among this urban confusion, it is almost unsurprising to find intact a remarkable convict-built stables building from the early nineteenth century. Uncovering and adding to this cottage is the challenge of this project, which unfolds as an eclectic assemblage of house and garden.

Meeting architect Sam Crawford and the owners in their new house, it becomes clear that the project is a true collaboration. Council approvals had already been obtained before Sam was brought in to help the owners resolve their design. "I don't think I would have ever designed the space as it is, but I actually love the way it works," explains Sam. "Angelo and Danielle really loved having the original cottage as their bedroom and loved the library space. The project began from there."

The plan of the house is peculiar. It is as if retention of the diminutive two-room cottage has freed the design from convention. The planning of the addition does not suffer from the ruthless logic of a developer with an eye to resale. Instead of multiple bedrooms and ensuites, the house now contains just one bedroom, a library, a home office and, upstairs, an extraordinary scale train collection. The architect has designed a house faithful to the owners' character and the way they would like to live.

Hidden from the street, the stables house is visible only through a screen of potted magnolias, palms and an assortment of abandoned backyard shrubs, which have colonized the road. "The neighbours started planting out there twenty years ago. Originally it was to be only one metre but now it extends past our property." The building's rough sandstone walls and gable roof seem comfortable in their cottage garden setting. This fortuitous street planting in turn appears to set the strategy for the house beyond.

As you enter through the street wall, a lush outdoor room serves as a vestibule. Released entirely from patchy render, the sandstone blocks of the original walls have been exposed to create a landscape wall matched by new stone paving. Carved lines through the soft rock are apparent where conduit was recently chased through the wall. Timber-framed windows and doors to the bedroom and library are set deep under its massive stone lintels. Another set of glazed doors opens directly to a dining space. The multiple openings off this garden space immediately lend the house a sense of bucolic informality – more European village than grungy inner city.

The plan essentially stretches a number of rooms – bedroom, kitchen, laundry, bathroom – along its southern wall, to allow a looser, lighter living space along the north. A second courtyard at the rear of the house

is visible across the dining table from the entry. This gesture makes the dining space feel transparent, like a room in a garden. The owners spend most of their day here. Morning sun falls in the entry court and down the open stair from above; in the afternoon, light fills the back garden and reflects off its walls. Height is compressed, lending intimacy while drawing attention to the light and planting beyond. A terrazzo floor suppresses the threshold between inside and out, drawing the garden in.

In the new work, the ceiling structure is exposed. Its spacing is carefully calibrated, subtly marking out zones within the space. A rich dressed ironbark was chosen for the structural timbers, to complement the original palette of timber and sandstone. At the junction with the old, the ceiling is spaced off the sandstone walls, and a skylight picks out their texture. It is a blustery winter afternoon when I visit the house but, inside, its thick walls, warmed by a fireplace in the library, radiate heat through the space. Aided by modern floor heating and a warm light reflecting from the timber, it is a welcoming refuge.

By stretching the house along the property's southern spine, the owners are able to inhabit the length of the site. Tucked along the courtyard and extended almost to the rear boundary is the bathroom. At its end, a large window frames an intimate pocket of verdant garden, while a timber shutter pivots to allow glimpses of the court, admitting shafts of northern sun. Sam collaborated with landscape architects 360 Degrees in designing the courtyard spaces, a mix of cobblestones, water features and broad-leafed planting that creates the calm of a tropical resort.

In a more conventional plan, a master bedroom suite may have been placed in the new upstairs loft extension. This was, in fact, considered for an earlier design. "It would have made sense, but we really wanted to live in the old downstairs cottage," the owners explain. The new loft, designed to echo the proportions of the original cottage roof, instead houses an astonishing miniature European countryside. Complete with mountain range, tiny chalets and villages, the owners' expanding model train set has a curious resonance with the assemblage and scale of this house. The loft is shared with a home office, while a robe occupies a space initially planned for a master bedroom ensuite. Views from a new deck across a landscape of sculptural rooftop ventilators are a reminder of the city's proximity.

The history of the place has clearly captured the imagination of the owners. The new work has added to the romance of inhabiting the original structure. Freed from the encumbrance of previous unsympathetic building additions, its heritage enhances the experience of the house. Conversation turns to familiar theories of the cottage's possible colonial past – a time of servants and large estates hidden beneath the shops and terraces, and connections with Paddington's more famous Juniper Hall. "And, you know, we did actually find a horseshoe during construction," Sam adds. H

OPPOSITE: Timber and concrete (the latter from the floor of a previous 1980s addition) feature heavily, complementing the existing sandstone. With crisp edges and careful detailing, a new sense of precision has been introduced to a site with multiple layers of history. Recycled spotted gum floorboards add another story.







ARCHITECT

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PRACTICE PROFILE

A young practice focused on residential and community projects, with extensive experience in heritage conservation, interior design and furniture design.

PROJECT TEAM

Sam Crawford, Miles Heine

BUILDER

Liam Flood, To the Mill

CONSULTANTS

Engineer

Dynamic Structural Engineering

Landscaping 360°

Lighting Sam Crawford Architects, Pulvin Composite

Joinery Designed by Sam Crawford Architects, made by Form

Heritage

Matthew Darwon Design Studio

PRODUCTS

Roofing Colorbond External walls

Existing sandstone; cavity masonry; timber weatherboards Internal walls Existing sandstone Windows

Skydome skylight Flooring Honed,

polished and sealed concrete slab; terrazzo; recycled spotted gum floorboards; recycled ironbark stair treads Lighting Low-voltage downlights; wall-mounted adjustable uplights; spike-mounted spotlights

Kitchen

Grey ironbark veneer, pale rimu veneer and mirror to island bench; reconstituted stone island benchtop; Maytag refrigerator; Smeg oven/stove; Qasair rangehood; Bosch dishwasher; Oliveri sink; Hansa tapware

Bathroom

Ironbark veneer to cabinet; Accent tapware; Scarabeo basin; Duravit toilet suite; Candana bath; Rogerseller accessories Climate control Underfloor heating to slab;

natural ventilation External elements

Randomly broken sandstone slabs;

granite cobblestone paving Other

Ceiling of recycled ironbark floor joists and recycled blackbutt; rear wall bench of reconstituted stone; window seat of rendered brick, timber frame and plywood

SITE AREA

158 m²

FLOOR AREA

137 m²

TIME SCHEDULE

Design, documentation 6 months

Construction 7 months

LEFT: The new spaces are narrow but open in nature, with strong connections to the leafy outdoor areas. Light exaggerates the rough texture of the stone walls.