



AN ARTICULATE FOCUS ON MATERIALITY AND A GENUINE RESPECT FOR THE HISTORY OF A SPACE

A versatile family space is the focal point of the new addition.

IN INNER WESTERN SYDNEY, SAM CRAWFORD ARCHITECTS HAS CREATED A TEXTURED AND AUTHENTIC FAMILY HOME THAT SEEKS OUT THE ELEMENTS AND ILLUMINATES THE SPIRITS.



It is as though Sam Crawford's residences craft themselves from their surrounding materials and form. They don't conform to the pervasive 'Sydney Minimalism' but instead are thoughtful musings on materiality and site. Consider his elemental and textured Bundeena Beach House and the geometric, sculptural addition of Wave House. Crawford's latest project in a leafy inner west suburb of Sydney is no different. It's as if the building has reconfigured itself with its own raw materials to correspond with its surroundings and its own history.

The dark brick Federation facade of Smee Schoff House is accented by painted black details, but on the whole is unremarkable; the

facade is really only the prologue to a deceptively simple interior. And this is by no means a criticism. In fact, stringent (but hollow) heritage conservation guidelines prevented any dramatic changes from being made to the front of the house. I also suspect Crawford is not in the game for showmanship – his is an articulate focus on materiality and a genuine respect for the history of a space, rather than a quest for the ideal monument to ego. Placed throughout the house are hints at this acknowledgement of history, as recycled materials from demolished parts of the original house create the handrail of the stair, the benchtop of the study, the monolithic brick wall at the rear.

Walking from the entrance through the narrow corridor, the sun-drenched rear of the house is the obvious destination. Winter sun pervades the space through the large steel-framed windows placed at almost every opportunity.

"An ongoing preoccupation of ours is getting winter sun into spaces. As this house effectively faces south and overshadows itself, we have carved out a courtyard and given the new spaces very high ceilings and windows to capture the winter sun," Crawford says.

To add to the house's unfavourable orientation, it is also hemmed in on all sides by imposing brick neighbours. Much like a sapling in a forest, Crawford's building has grown taller to capture more sun, with a higher ceiling and windows placed in the upper reaches to ensure that it is not left in the shade of its domineering neighbours. In typical Sam Crawford style, the resulting openings provide flexible indoor/outdoor spaces, easily transforming the space from enclosed music room to breezy entertaining space.

Prior to renovation the rear of the house, which extended to the back fence, accommodated a sauna, swimming pool and laundry – the horror of which is not expressed on Crawford's poker face but rather the client's constant iterations of 'appalling'. Needless to say it was demolished, its poky rooms now replaced by sprawling open-plan spaces, with high ceilings grounded by exposed wooden beams reincarnated from a previous life as telegraph poles.

Besides the re-use of materials, there are myriad other sustainable considerations in the house: buried beneath a small square carving in the central courtyard is a custom-designed 10,000L water tank; natural sunlight vetoes the need for artificial lighting during the day; solar tubes perch on the roof of the dining/living room, glowing at night like an extraterrestrial visitation.

A walk through the residence reveals other little gems. The ensuite/walk-in wardrobe area evades claustrophobia through subtle concepts like a frosted glass sliding door separating the robe and ensuite, high cupboards which store much more than the eye can see,

and steel-framed windows that draw light in from the central courtyard. A large mirror forms part of the sliding door that divides the space from the bedroom, which has the double benefit of being a compact solution while (paradoxically) making the walk-in space appear bigger. Another surprise comes in the form of the stairway to the loft study. Nestled next to the ensuite, they together appear, on the plan, somewhat like a geometrical yin yang.

The renovation to Smee Schoff House on first glance seems a subtle intervention, but is instead a thorough overhaul that uses materials from the existing site. It is a testament to a thoughtful architecture that reveals itself slowly and suggests an organic evolution rather than a heavy-handed intervention, despite the complexity and depth of its alteration. **Nicole Thomas**



An elevated kitchen amplifies the sense of space.



High windows capture year-round sunlight in this difficult orientation.



Outdoor spaces are inter-connected with the indoors.



Salvaged brick connects the new addition to the house's history.



High ceilings are emphasised with recycled timber beams.



**ARCHITECT
STATEMENT**

“As with so many of our projects, the design flows from a fruitful collaboration with our clients. After working through several distinct solutions it was clear that this response to the site and brief was the right one for them; a result of rigorous discussion of their needs together with their well-developed trust in the design process. They seemed intuitively to know when to push and when to stand back.

“Key constraints included questionable council requirements around streetscape and heritage conservation, the need to maintain privacy and sunlight to neighbouring properties, multiple poorly designed and poorly built alterations to the existing cottage, winter solar access to the necessarily south-facing living areas and views to the park. The brief also included an atypical requirement for an eat-in kitchen and a melded dining/lounge/music room.

“Our clients have a remarkable art collection and their own unique style, which contributed to the industrial/craft aesthetic of the new work. Recycled bricks are used extensively for environmental and aesthetic reasons. Timbers recycled from demolished portions of the building and our client’s cherished Scandinavian hand-painted ceramic tiles are incorporated into new joinery work. A screen of plywood, laser cut in a pattern derived from the Scandinavian tiles separates the kitchen and dining rooms.

“The design sits on a clear continuum in our work, of pushing for maximum thermal comfort with minimal ongoing energy use. Substantial thermal mass is provided via exposed concrete slab floors and double-brick or reverse brick veneer wall construction, coupled with solar-powered, gas-boosted hydronic underfloor heating, contributing to ongoing and long-term energy savings. A central courtyard, separating the old and new, provides winter sun to otherwise south-facing living areas.

“The construction team from Buildability, led by foreman Matt Raap, were a major factor in the success of the project.”

Sam Crawford



A new internal courtyard separates old/private and new/communal and introduces sunlight to the back of the house.



More than meets the eye

As seamless and sympathetic as the alteration may appear, essentially the project required a complete re-configuration of the spaces. Structurally, the rear of the house was demolished, with the new design stretching beyond its original boundaries and shifting slightly to the south-east. The introduction of a courtyard between the communal and private zones provides the opportunity to drench the spaces in natural light but also expands the entertaining space as needed. The sitting room and exposed stair is now the ensuite/walk-in wardrobe space. The placement of the stair now discreetly branches off the corridor and nestles imperceptibly next to the ensuite.

The extension at the rear is an open plan space with spanning ceilings. Placing the kitchen slightly higher than the living zones separates the space, but also, as Crawford points out, emphasises its spatial generosity: "It's a bit like when standing in a field - you're not really aware of how big the space is. As soon as you enclose space, however, it feels larger, like a cathedral does. Through changing the dimensions within a space by raising the floor level in one portion, it can be made to feel larger, even though you are in effect dividing it."



Heritage restrictions required the retention of the Federation facade.



A compact ensuite is separated from the wardrobe via a frosted glass screen.



The walk-in-wardrobe maximises storage solutions.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRETT BOARDMAN

KEY MATERIAL INFORMATION

- BATHROOM** Pozzi Ginori 500 Series 9 wall basin, Parisi Bathware Envy MKII PN 100 (back-to-wall toilet), Grohe Eurosmart basin and shower mixer, Grohe modern rainshower head, honed Bianco limestone from Onsite Supply & Design, handmade olive tiles from Onsite Supply & Design
- BENCHES** Recycled blackbutt timber with natural finish from Synteko
- DECKING** Mixed red Australian hardwoods from Harper Timber
- DOORS** Steel-framed glazed in Porters Paints' Aniseed from Skyrange Windows
- FLOORING** Polished concrete
- KITCHEN** Stainless steel bench and timbers from original structure, Grohe Eurosmart kitchen mixer, handmade square tiles in bronze from Onsite Supply & Design, antique Scandinavian tiles
- SCREEN** AA grade Ecoply plywood with laser cut custom design by Sam Crawford Architects
- LIGHTING** Mega Bulb by Sofie Refer from Great Dane, Zero Parette surface mount wall upright in white from LPA Lighting, Audrey recessed downlight in ceiling in stainless steel from LPA Lighting, Spike Spot Metal Halide in Copper from Hunza, Step Light Square Louvre in Copper from Hunza, Euro Wall Spot in Copper from Hunza
- PAINT FINISHES** Bianca from Porters Paints on internal walls, Rubble from Porters Paints on external walls, Vanilla Bean from Porters Paints on painted timberwork, Aniseed from Porters Paints on steelwork, Redbank from Porters Paints on neighbouring wall in courtyard

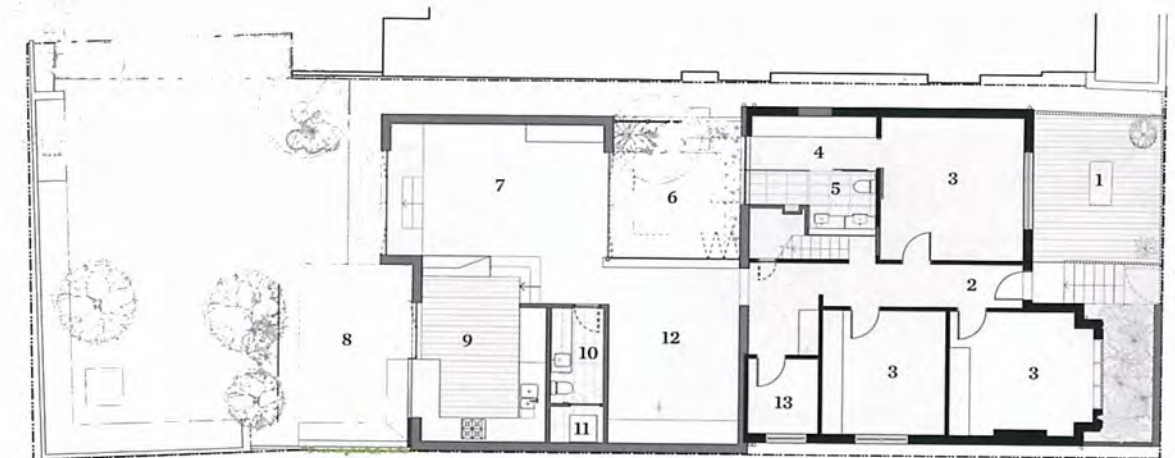
- PAVING** Mixed recycled face brick from The Brick Pit, Basalto Cobble on front entry from Cinajus
- ROOF** Lysaght Trimdeck from BHP Steel
- SHADING** Issey Issiroll 85 sun-screen with motorised cables in black from Issey Sunshades Systems
- WALLS** Mixed recycled face brick from The Brick Pit
- WATER TANK** Custom designed 10,000L concrete block tank below central courtyard, Solar hydronic heating system 2 x 16/100 evacuated solar tubes from Greenland Systems Solar Hot Water

PROJECT TEAM AND DETAILS

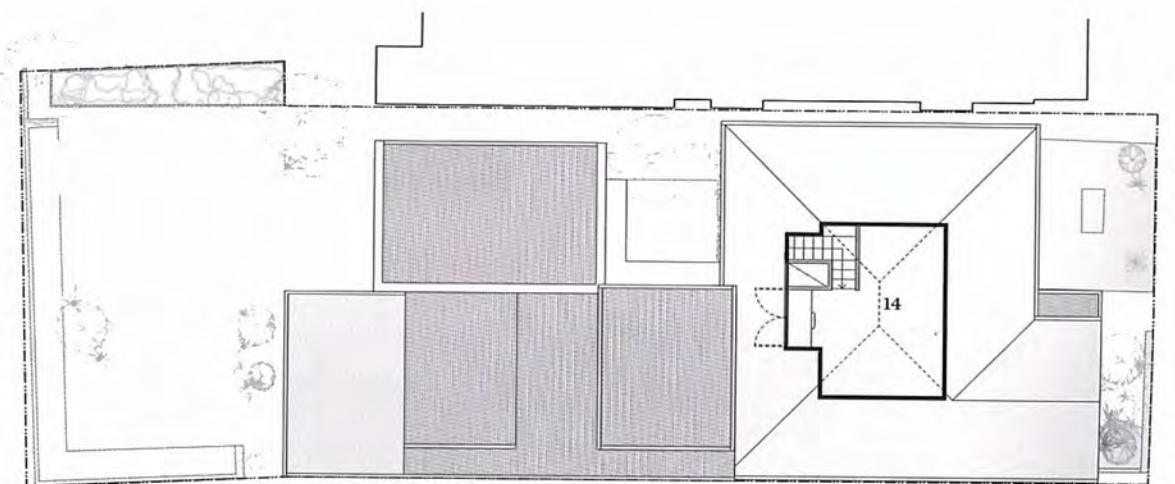
- PROJECT TEAM** Sam Crawford, Karen Erdos, Lionel Teh
- LANDSCAPE** Spirit Level
- STRUCTURAL ENGINEER** Northrop Consulting Engineers
- QUANTITY SURVEYOR** QS Plus
- HYDRAULIC ENGINEER** Northrop Consulting Engineers
- LAND SURVEYOR** Hill and Bloom Consulting Surveyors
- CONSTRUCTION** Buildability Constructions
- DESIGN AND DOCUMENTATION** 24 months
- CONSTRUCTION** 9 months
- FLOOR AREA** 196sqm



- FLOOR PLANS**
- 1 Front terrace
 - 2 Entry
 - 3 Bedroom
 - 4 Walk-in robe
 - 5 Ensuite
 - 6 Courtyard
 - 7 Dining/living room
 - 8 Covered outdoor living
 - 9 Kitchen
 - 10 Laundry
 - 11 Plant room
 - 12 Sitting room
 - 13 Bathroom (existing)
 - 14 Study



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR