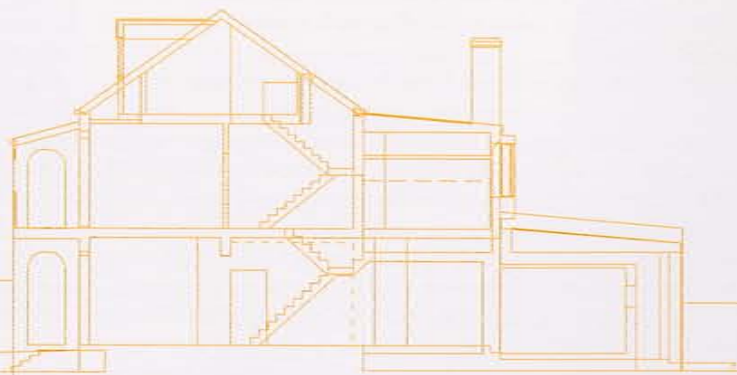




# REWORKED TERRACE

THE VAGARIES AND DISCREPANCIES INHERENT IN THE EXISTING OLD BUILDING WERE DISCOVERED AND OVERCOME IN THIS PAINSTAKING (BUT ULTIMATELY HIGHLY REWARDING) RENOVATION AND EXTENSION BY SYDNEY-BASED FIRM SAM CRAWFORD ARCHITECTS.





**THE OLD ADAGE** “they don’t built them like they used to” usually implies that modern buildings are in no way as solid or as carefully constructed as their older counterparts. But, as anyone who has ever lived in or worked on a Victorian terrace house, worker’s cottage or even a freestanding Federation house will know, the opposite meaning is sometimes much closer to the truth.

To put it bluntly, old houses are all too often completely out of whack. Such was the case with this typical two-storey Victorian terrace house in a busy-but-leafy street in Sydney’s Woollahra. Two years ago the new owners called upon architect Sam Crawford to completely renovate it. Their immediate plans were to lease it out for the short-term, then, once the children had left their larger house a few suburbs further to the east, move in and make it their city *pied-a-terre*.

“Most terrace houses were built by developers and that’s why they dressed them up with cast-iron frills, because the rest is pretty basic,” says Sam. “The clients didn’t want to get a detailed survey done, but I’m so glad we did. We discovered that none of the boundary walls were wholly on their property and they weren’t parallel to any of the boundaries either, so there was lots of rebuilding of bits of walls and negotiating with the neighbours. It was actually more expensive than it would have been to build a new house, because the builders had to constantly deal with original fabric that wasn’t square or true.”

This meant that a substantial portion of the budget had to be spent on hidden items such as repairing unsound walls, rerouting both the sewer and the stormwater, and rewiring. The house also had to be shored up with three sets of steel portals, two of them two storeys tall.

“Once you start pulling out internal walls in a terrace house it’s possible that the whole row will fall over like a pack of cards if others are renovating in the street and there’s an earthquake,” says Sam. “So the current building code says you have to insert steel portals. Unfortunately, with all this, not only is it the cost, but so much of your time as an architect gets taken up dealing with unseen services and structural problems.”

The new owners had purchased the house with an existing DA which they didn’t like. However, they prudently decided to commission Sam to work with what he could, and file any changes as a Section 96 modification, thus saving time in terms of council approval. “The DA established the shell of the building, including the footprint of the new extension,” explains Sam. “So we replanned the internal spaces.”

The front door opens to one side of what was, and still is, the formal living room. Gone is the passageway ahead to an original staircase. In fact, the only remaining original fabric is the building’s front facade and verandah, and its “hidden” boundary walls. Everything else – fireplaces, joinery, floorboards and the muddle of pokey rooms and lean-tos at the back – has been stripped away.

A bank of storage cupboards now greets the visitor, and the wall between the formal living and dining rooms has been reduced to little more than a nib. Behind the built-in storage, filling the space where the hallway once was, is a laundry concealed behind a sliding door.

“The original plan had the laundry out the back, but it made the family room much narrower,” says Sam. “Admittedly it is odd having a laundry off the dining room, but you can close it off and you don’t hear it. We also figured that it was unlikely that you’d be doing your washing when you’ve got friends over for dinner,” he adds with a laugh.

The wall between the dining room and kitchen still stands but now has two large openings cut into it on either side. The position of these openings becomes obvious on stepping through one into the kitchen. A huge island bench fits between them, and continues in a rush of pale reconstituted stone towards the rear family room, which is set down a few steps. The island bench, its kickplates set well back, appears to defy gravity and hover just above floor level. On one side is the kitchen proper, on the other is a passageway leading to the new single-run staircase and a discreetly positioned powder room.

“The client wanted the kitchen to feel like a Woollahra café,” says Sam. “She wanted a big island bench for communal seating, but at the last minute more storage space was required and so the seating idea was lost to a certain degree as we inserted cupboards under the bench. However, if you’re entertaining, the bench still means you can keep people out of the kitchen.”

The kitchen and, more particularly, the adjoining family room now form the main focus of the house. The latter, its floor paved in creamy French limestone, stretches across the entire width of the block. On one side, a grid of book and display shelves fills the wall, with a built-in, cantilevered credenza of purpose-built drawers for videos and compact discs below it. Between the two elements a slash of magenta paint enlivens the otherwise muted colour scheme.

Light floods in through the glass doors and windows that constitute the room’s rear face, and also washes down the internal walls courtesy of slot skylights running around the perimeter of the ceiling. “Our main preoccupation with the family room was to introduce as much light as we could without making it too glarey or too hot, hence the skylights that also make the room feel a lot bigger than it is,” says Sam. “Even when it’s furnished, this feels like a large room with high ceilings and that was another reason for dropping the floor level – that, and wanting to get the family room on the same level as the garden.”

Upstairs are two bedrooms, the original second bedroom between the other two sacrificed to create space for an ensuite bathroom for the front bedroom and a roomy main bathroom. Where the front bedroom opens onto a traditional balcony, complete with cast-iron lace, the rear room now has a large bank of east-facing windows, with a built-in window seat to allow dreamy contemplation of the intimate view over neighbouring rooftops and back gardens.

Another flight of stairs leads up to the attic bedroom, which was created by the previous owners. Two new west-facing dormers were added to flood this room with light and allow cross-ventilation to naturally cool the space, and part of the room was hived off for another ensuite bathroom. It’s the perfect eyrie for a guest.

“The client didn’t want a radical departure from the terrace house model so basically there is nothing *that* different about the layout of the rooms, apart from the detailing,” says Sam. “With a terrace house, the main issue is light, or the lack of it, and so the chief feature of this renovation is really the new family room extension.”

The family room is undoubtedly the house’s salient feature, but there’s much more to the renovation. A clever reworking of each room has maximised all the internal spaces and enhanced the way the house works. Behind its traditional facade, its newly squared-off walls now enclose a light and airy succession of spaces that are well suited to contemporary living. **JRB**



**THIS PAGE:** The huge island bench in the kitchen divides the kitchen proper from the stairs and powder room.  
**PREVIOUS PAGES:** The bank of joinery in the family room is enlivened by a strip of magenta.





## INTERIORS

### ARCHITECT/INTERIORS

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### PRACTICE PROFILE

Specialises in new residential projects, interiors, and residential alterations and additions.

### PROJECT TEAM

Jonathan Moore (project architect),  
Sam Crawford

### BUILDER

AS & KB Constructions

### CONSULTANTS

**Engineer** Tony Russo, Geof  
Ninnes Fong and Partners  
**Landscaping** Precinct Landscapes,  
with Sam Crawford Architects

### PRODUCTS

**External walls** Painted Dulux 'Carriage', detail in Dulux 'Pale Earth' **Internal walls** Plasterboard, painted; family and kitchen – Dulux 'Antique White USA'; living and dining – Dulux 'Raw Cotton'; stair wall – Aalto 'Sour Grapes' **Windows and doors** Windoor **Flooring** Family and courtyard – Pazotti 'Pietra' limestone; living and dining – Sydney Flooring blackbutt, t & g; bedrooms – Tuffmaster 'Linden' **Lighting** Norman and Quaine standard lamp; Mondo Luce 'Cube' light **Kitchen** Smeg appliances; Clarke sink; Blanco mixer; Smartstone benchtops **Bathroom** Pazotti glass mosaic tiles; Caroma sanitaryware; Madinoz accessories **Heating** Spadheat underfloor heating **Furniture** Spence and Lyda sofa, bed, grasshopper chair and ottoman; FY2K Finn Juhl side table; **Accessories** Spence and Lyda moulded ply wine rack; Planet Furniture 'Stainsborough' throw **Artworks** Painting – *Blue Rhythm* by Celia Gullet; Charcoal – *Conversations with Clouds* by Jennifer Keeler-Milne; Etchings – by Luke Sciberras **Joinery** Designed by architect, built by Euroform Joinery

### TIME SCHEDULE

Design, documentation  
6 months  
Approval 3 months  
Construction 10 months

PHOTOGRAPHY  
Eric Sierins

**RIGHT: The family room floor level drops a couple of steps to align with outdoor paving.**



- 1 Entry
- 2 Lounge
- 3 Dining
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Family
- 6 Garden
- 7 Bedroom
- 8 Balcony

