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THE BEST OF *both worlds*

Looking for a house on Sydney's lower North Shore that they could renovate as a family home, the one Karen and Alastair found had history – and character too.

STORY BY GABRIELLE BAXTER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY POTTER
STYLING BY KIRSTIN RANDL-KATALINIC

The spacious, ultramodern kitchen is part of the new two-storey wing Karen and Alastair built behind their California bungalow.



The cosy window corner in the kitchen is Karen's favourite spot – it has space for a computer and a seat where the kids like to sit and talk to her when she's cooking.



“We’d done a minor renovation on the kitchen in our previous place,” says Karen, so they felt they were ready to take on a bigger project.

What they finally came upon, four years ago, was a California bungalow, the style of which was one of the more inspired concepts we imported from the US early last century. However, the Americans had already borrowed the idea from Britain earlier – in the late 1800s – based on the principles of traditional craftsmanship using simple forms and natural materials inherent in the Arts and Crafts Movement, which originated there. The rustic-looking single-storey structures this produced suited the American terrain brilliantly, and they were soon being replicated here in large numbers – for the same reason.

“We were thrilled to find it,” Karen says – despite the fact that, obviously, the renovation would be extensive, to put it mildly. The style of the California bungalow features sloping roofs with eaves, gabled windows and a front porch or verandah and, today, they still have a homeliness that is practical and welcoming – and much sought-after, as she attests.

MAKEOVER MAGIC

Over a period of several decades, an apparent succession of former owners had wreaked havoc over several decades in and around the classic building the couple had taken on, bricking up the porch, ripping out original timber windows, bricking up the porch – and even painting it yellow! So, first, they set about restoring it to its former glory. Simultaneously, however, first a ’50s-vintage

ABOVE: The window wall has plenty of storage both above and below the stainless-steel work-surface around the sink and cooktop – and even a lovely view for the ‘chief-chef-’n-bottle-washer’.



Kitchen Essentials

Joinery: Portelli Joinery

Benchtops: stainless steel under the window;

island bench: Basaltina

Tap: Methven gooseneck

Stove and microwave: Miele

Dishwasher: Bosch

Fridge/freezer: Fisher & Paykel

Lights: Tom Dixon copper pendants from Dedec

Flooring: Victorian ash, stained dark to match original floorboards

Paint: doors – black; walls – Dulux Brume, quarter strength; ceilings & trims – Dulux Vivid White

Architect: Clare Carter at Contemporary Architecture

Builder: Grant Precians at GKP Builders



lean-to garage and a two-storey extension added behind the house in the '60s had to be demolished.

And, this is where the story really starts because it was as if they were working in a time warp almost a century apart! As important as the restoration was in the project, one advantage they had was that the kitchen and bathrooms could incorporate the very best of today's technology. Indeed, looking at these pages, no-one would imagine that this superb kitchen is linked – by only a short corridor – to a house built in the 1920s!

SHADES OF THE PAST

Upstairs in the modern two-storey wing Karen and Alastair rebuilt at the back, there are three bedrooms, a bathroom and a playroom for the children, with an open-plan living area below, and – although the structure is utterly modern – it's very much in keeping with the old house.

"We didn't want to tack a new 'glass box' onto it," Karen explains. "We just needed to link the front and the back so that it flowed when you went from one to the other." This was accomplished by replicating the original architectural details in the new part – like the three-metre ceiling height – as well as the



skirting boards, timber floors – skirting boards and even the 1920s architraves around the doors.

The kitchen décor is understated and streamlined throughout, allowing the beautiful Victorian ash floor to take centre-stage as a feature. The couple stained it dark to match the original floorboards they found in the old house – brilliantly preserved for decades under fitted carpet. ■

TOP RIGHT: They laid a Victorian ash floor throughout, stained dark to match the original boards they had found intact in the house – under the old carpet.

