

# Fine tuning

Home honours design tradition and the city's musical past

When Brisbane couple Biba and Fletcher bought a Queenslander in Highgate Hill, they immediately recognised the house's potential for extension, but only later did they discover its role in the city's cultural history.

After speaking with Paul Hotston of Phorm Architecture & Design, they found that The Go-Betweens singer-songwriter Grant McLennan once lived at the property. McLennan and music partner Robert Forster played guitar together on the terrace of a detached two-storey flat at the back of the site, a fact recorded in a remembrance penned by Robert after Grant died in 2006.

Paul had done the ensuite and kitchen renovation for the home's previous owners and designed plans for further work at the house.

When Biba and Fletcher saw Paul's designs, they found them perfectly matched with their own ideas for the home.

"I remember when I first saw the house and we imagined a deck outside – with a barbecue and awning – then when we saw the design (Phorm had done), it was better than we imagined," Fletcher says.

Their refurbishments included alterations below and to the rear of the original house. A new bathroom and laundry was built downstairs, connecting to the house proper by an internal staircase. This meant the old bathroom upstairs could be removed to allow the sitting room to open directly on to the veranda.

An extension was built at the back of the house, which they called the "in-between room". It connects the house and the detached two-storey flat in the corner of the site to make a large, informal living space.

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"It really is in its natural state when it's opened. That's the way we approached it," Paul says.

Large bi-fold doors and high-level louvres ensure that when you are inside you have the feeling of being in the garden.

"I love sitting on the step; I love hanging my feet over the edge," Fletcher says. "If I am watering the garden, Biba sometimes sits on the ledge or at the table and we can have a conversation ... we use the garden a lot more now."

The house retains its white weatherboard walls, but the new room is a contemporary counterpoint to the heritage home. Clear-finish walls and ceilings and a generous amount of glazing contrast with the formal spaces of the house.

One of the most dramatic elements of the new room is the plywood ceiling, which takes its shape from the diagonal valley of the roof above. For Biba and Fletcher, the space provides a more generous place that can be used for dining, living and play. It has also brought positive changes to family life.

"First of all, we eat every meal at the table, which we didn't do before. We sit here for ages and we talk as a family. It's an easy space that adults and children can use," Biba says.

Connecting the old two-storey flat to the house has also made the flat more useable.



SPACE AGE ... A rear extension adds room to move. PHOTOGRAPHS • Christopher Frederick Jones

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DESIGN SPEAKS: OUR HOUSES, architects Paul Hotston and James Russell on working with clients to create homes that reflect the way we live. Sun, Mar 23, 2pm, \$25, State Library of Queensland, South Bank. ourhouses2014-1.eventbrite.com.au