Touches of sweet harmony

Bringing the old and the new together is both a challenge and an opportunity. **Paul McGillick** looks at a conservation house in the **Sydney** suburb of Randwick where **Studio Internationale** has forged an elegant solution.
The clients had seen a house in Clovelly designed by Rita Qasabian and Christina Markham of Studio Internationale which was up for sale. They loved the house, but not the location. So, they rang and asked whether, if they found the right place, Rita and Christina would do something for them. “We had some wonderful communication,” Christina recalls, “and when I got off the phone I said to Rita, ‘We have to work with these people – they’re really lovely’.”

Almost two years passed, during which time the clients had found a bungalow in North Randwick, close to Centennial Park. They had been living in it for a year and now had a second young child. They were open to any suggestions, mindful that the bungalow was in a conservation area which meant that any additions had to be consistent with the existing streetscape. It was also clear that any new work would need to be an addition to the rear because it was a long, narrow rectangular site. This way the pitched roof of the existing bungalow would screen any rear addition from the street.

Christina observes that an architect often learns more about their clients from what they don’t say, rather than what they do say. In this case, she infers that her clients preferred quality over quantity, “and we wanted it to be an expression of that”. She also observes that they are very calm people and like harmony.
Having been to the house and met the clients, I would also suggest that their Chinese descent generates this ethos. We take our shoes off at the entry where they had originally wanted a water feature with koi. Although this didn’t make the budget cut at the end, there is instead a small, tranquil, welcoming courtyard garden whose pebbles, bamboo and large totemic stone immediately conjure a Buddhist mood of harmony.

Rita comments that bungalows are typically “rather heavy buildings” and not well-articulated, “so we knew we had to create something lighter, finer”.

Eventually, the brief resolved into a renovation of the front portion of the existing house and the addition of an open-plan living, dining kitchen along with a pool and what turned out to be an extremely discreet garage. Driving the design was the aim to clearly separate the public from the private, and the parents’ domain from the children’s.

Hence, the existing bungalow (consisting of three bedrooms and a sunroom) has become the children’s domain. The existing internal structure and pressed metal ceilings are retained, but otherwise the bungalow has been totally renovated with the addition of new wet areas.

This ‘private’ area is linked by the glass entry space to the expansive volume of the ‘public’ area. This, in turn, is screened off from the new private spaces upstairs in the addition by a long joinery wall which hides the stairs until you reach the threshold to the rear garden.

Embodied in the planning is a strategy of surprise. Entry to the house is now down a side path to the unexpected glazed place of arrival with its tranquil garden. Then a left turn throws up an even more exhilarating surprise with the grand living/dining space and its uninterrupted prospect out to the garden.

This space is drenched in western light. The reason only becomes apparent when we reach the fully glazed, double-height sliding doors because the upper level – a sitting room and entertainment space – is set back as a mezzanine, creating a beautiful volume dramatised by a full-height curtain which can be drawn across.

This is indeed a highly refined house and crucial to this refinement is Studio Internationale’s use of the Swiss-made Vitrocsa glazing system for the two enormous guillotine windows at the entry end and the enormous sliding glass doors leading out to the garden.

With this system the glass itself is the supporting structure, while the sleek 17mm...
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frames simply act as a sealing element. The windows draw in northern light and create a breezeway, while the sliding doors create an uninterrupted connection to the outside garden.

Facing west, the afternoon sun is addressed by a louvred roof which covers the ‘outdoor room’ of the extended living area. This highly functional element also provides an external expression of the aesthetic found inside the house. Supporting this is the equally refined motorised blind which provides added protection from the western sun.

To me, this whole project is a definition of architectural refinement – namely, a harmony of structure, finishes, detailing, furnishings and fittings. And it is a common refinement which harmonises the old house and the new, rather than any attempt to re-invent and extend the aesthetic of the original Californian bungalow style. The interplay of finishes and light – both natural light and the Louis Poulsen pendants – lends a mood of gentle informality to the addition, while the contrast of light and dark between the old and the new wings seems absolutely right. After all, the best marriages are between opposites, creating a harmony which like-on-like can never really achieve. This house, indeed, embodies Shakespeare’s “Touches of sweet harmony”.

**DROP BOX**

**ARCHITECT & INTERIOR DESIGN** Studio Internationale
**PROJECT DIRECTOR** Christine Marham
**PROJECT TEAM** Christine Marham, Jon Giannetti, Jeremy Uneger and Anika Hazlewood
**BUILDING PROJECT**
**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER** Partnership Architects
**SURVEYOR** Project Surveyors
**GEO-TECHNICAL & WASTE WATER CONSULTANT** Martens & Associates
**LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR** Yates Garden Design

**STUDY**

**DROP BOX**

**Furniture**
- Entry Copper Box Frontal 640cm from Corporate Culture
- Illuminating Capsule Rippled Sugarsack 66x66cm from I.G. & Co, New York
- Ego Chair and self-framed mirror from Ego Design, Pariss
- Metal Chair and self-framed mirror from Cochrane Signature, Melbourne
- Cochrane Signature Mirror from Dines Furniture, Union Road, Malvern East and Windmill Furniture, Collingwood
- Art Deco mirror from Malvern East
- Collection of plastic chairs from Koda Design
- Original 68 chair from Corporate Culture

**Lighting**
- All the room’s exits are equipped with concealed LED lights from Light Project
- Throughout the house, ceiling and wall recessed LED lights from Light Project
- External lightings from Lumiline Lighting and Luminaire Lighting
- External lights from Light Project
- Exterior lights from Light Project
- Exterior lights from Light Project
- Exterior lights from Light Project

**Flooring**
- All underlay from Ke-Zu
- Standard flooring from Dedece
- Outdoor floors include Artisanal Floors and the original floor from Schots

**Accessories**
- Bespoke drop curtains from Avena Design
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The residents have selected simple and refined pieces to complement their home. Here they discuss their favourite pieces and what makes them work:

A feature of the home is the large windows and sliding glass system from Vitrocsa that was chosen to maximise sun light throughout the home and that also allowed a seamless connection from our living space to the outdoors. The Vitrocsa glazing systems offer such possibilities and we love its minimal and refined design which conveys visual lightness and adds a very different dimension within our internal living space. In the bathroom the oval shaped Apaiser bath was chosen as we preferred to contrast the square dimensions in the bathroom and the simple organic contours give a relaxed look with elegance. It is also functional with its compact form that fits well within our required dimensions. Again, functionality is key and one of the Paola Lenti outdoor set was a drawcard and was obviously mainly chosen for its elegance, light weight and comfort. For the finishing touches we found this wonderful platter from Ondene and love its generous proportion, beautiful texture and the tone of clay work. In the bedroom we chose the small artwork on the bedside table for its focus on an everyday object with simplicity and clarity. Its pared back composition induces a sense of calm which is in line with the tone in the bedroom.

Paola Lenti

Italian designer Paola Lenti started her textile-based company specialising in the production of indoor and outdoor furniture and rugs in 1994, and since that time has been creating unique pieces from durable, signature materials. The company remains one of the few independent family owned companies in the Italian furniture industry and often works in partnership with technical companies from automotive and medical fields to produce innovative textiles. These materials are then reinterpreted for use in furniture, such as in the Baia Sunlounge.