

Rear vision

Catherine Nikas-Boulos meets an avid entertainer with a delicate approach to updating. Photos **John Fotiadis**.



Having lived in the inner city most of her adult life, Mary Lynne Pidcock wasn't looking to veer too far away from her comfort zone. But a chance drive through Earlwood, just beyond the inner-west border, saw her stumble across a post-World War I red-brick cottage with an Open For Inspection sign – she remembers being sold on the property the minute she stepped inside.

It was brimming with features characteristic of the era, including generous double bedrooms, ornate ceilings and leadlight windows.

But if she needed any further encouragement, she found it in the enclosed sunroom – magnificent, with uninterrupted views of the city, including the Anzac and Harbour bridges, to Chatwood and North Sydney on the left, and Bondi on the right.

"On a clear day you can see all the way to the Blue Mountains," says Mary.

Mary says the home's original footprint was

just perfect and she never contemplated modifying it, but she also wanted the house to be an expression of who she was, and enlisted the help of her niece, architect Caroline Pidcock, to give it a modern touch.

"I like the old house as it is, it's a very balanced design and I want to honour that," she says.

"I didn't want to be pushing walls out, and you can stand in the garden or in several corners of the house and see through to the city.

"A lot of thought has gone into the original design, but the idea was to open up the back and have one continuous entertainment area from the kitchen to the garage.

"The most important thing about working with Caroline is that she knows who I am and knows how I live.

"I entertain a lot so the kitchen has to be the centre of my home, so we made the kitchen indoor/outdoor. And I didn't want a big house."

Mary wanted the living spaces to be intimate enough for when she was home alone, but capable of accommodating large numbers of people when she was entertaining.

"That was the basis of the design," she says

The house originally featured a three-car garage, but Mary says her "little car" didn't need all that space.

So she used the footprint of the garage, which goes back to the boundary ("I would never have been able to do that if I had knocked it down"), and transformed half of the space into a guest room downstairs and a sewing room above that, accessed by a loft ladder.

This new living space is connected to the main house by a Colorbond parabolic roof.

The curved roof proved a challenge for the two builders, even though they had 60 years experience between them, as every single beam had a different compact angle. One builder





resorted to calling his father, a master joiner living in England, to confirm he was reading the plans correctly.

The curve affords a view through to the trees on the other side, and features a triangle opening that allows the north sun to flood through. In winter, when the sun is low, light streams in through the louvre windows, which also allow cooling breezes into the interior all year round.

"With all the louvres I never need any airconditioning, the air is always moving, and I never have to turn a light on anywhere in the

house (during the day) which is quite remarkable. I've always lived in a terrace house, and one thing about them is that they are dark in many parts, so I'm grateful this home is very airy, open and light."

As per Mary's request, the new kitchen, which in the original house was tucked away in a corner space, takes centre stage. The kitchen's original space has now been allocated to the study.

A laundry has been incorporated into the kitchen space, with a front-loader washing machine and a dryer cleverly tucked away behind one of the cupboards.

Regrowth eucalypt and plantation timber in a blackbutt finish, produced from Mary's family's Big River Timbers in Grafton, was used for the flooring. The hardwood timber was also used for one of the kitchen cupboards, providing a warm

contrast to the otherwise white laminate joinery.

The bathroom was re-worked, with aqua mosaic tiles on the floor and white ceiling-height wall tiles.

Mary, an avid swimmer, says she didn't consciously set out to achieve the pool effect, but is happy with the result, particularly as this room has a distant view out to Bondi.

Designer deck

The only area to be re-worked at the front of the house was the sunroom. Given its spectacular views, it was opened up to allow thoroughfare and had a deck added.

In this room now sits Mary's grandmother's bed, and Mary spends much time lying there watching planes flying to and from Sydney Airport. "They're like fireflies, you can't hear →26



A Connecting indoor and outdoor spaces
B The original house
C High ceilings are a feature
D Mary Lynne Pidcock
E Blue and white combine with cool effect in the new bathroom
F Building the curved roof was a challenge
G The sunroom opens up to stunning city views

