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Dream Home

All decked out

A clever extension brings the outdoors inside, writes **Jane Burton Taylor**.



Family connection ... Ken and Madi Morrison with children Finn, 10, Zoe, 8, and Liv, 5, enjoy the new room that links house and garden. Photos: Marco Del Grande

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When Madi and Ken Morrison bought a terrace on a double block in Petersham seven years ago, they knew they would eventually need to renovate. They had two small children at the time and the terrace did not work for them. The living spaces were disorganised and there was no link to the backyard that had originally drawn them to the house.

"The kitchen was remote from the living area and the orientation was to the neighbour," Ken says. "The house did not orientate at all to the garden."

"We knew we would have to do something to create more functional living spaces and we wanted to create a really lovely garden that was part of the place," Madi says. "But the question was: how do we blow out the back and connect to the garden without blowing the budget and be a bit eco?"

"That is when we gave Caroline a call," Ken says. Architect Caroline Pidcock is Madi's cousin and has a practice that focuses on sustainable design. Because the back of the terrace faces west, Pidcock had the skills to deal with the tricky orientation and make the house as green as possible.

TWEAKING THE PLANS
 "The original brief was to provide better living spaces downstairs: to connect them with the

AIM
 To make a more family-oriented home that let in more natural light and connected us to the garden.

TIME FRAME
 Six months to design, 10 in council and five to build.

FAVOURITE FEATURE
Him: Sitting in there looking at the garden.
Her: Being able to work in the kitchen and be connected with people.

GREEN POINTS

- ▶ A ceiling fan to cool in summer and bring hot air down in winter.
- ▶ Louvres for cross-ventilation and to vent hot air.
- ▶ Low E glass.
- ▶ Retention of existing house.

garden and add a garage at the side and for an extra bedroom upstairs," Pidcock says.

Her first design included the additional bedroom but after a reality check on the budget, the Morrisons decided to drop it.

Doing this meant they retained the existing bathroom and laundry on the ground floor and built only on that level, cutting the cost. It improved the proposed living space, too, allowing it an unusually high ceiling.

(In the first design, the extra bedroom sat above the new space. If this had been done, the ceiling of the living space would have been much lower, level with the existing ceiling over the kitchen, which has rooms above it.)

A NEW LIVING SPACE
 The new open-plan living space combines a galley kitchen and island bench with timber cabinetry concealing food preparation at one end - Madi says that was deliberate - and a breakfast bar at the other.

The ceiling steps up dramatically over the new adjoining living space, which is designed with a big opening on to a back deck and a mix of fixed and louvre windows on three sides, giving it the relaxed feel of sitting within the garden. It is a room that really extends the house, Ken says.

"One of the things I love about the high ceiling is the higher level of light," he says.

- ▶ Kitchen and entire ground floor in plantation timber.
- ▶ Native garden.
- ▶ Water tanks.
- ▶ Low voc paints.
- ▶ Photovoltaic cells.
- ▶ Gas-boosted solar hot water.
- ▶ Vergola.
- ▶ Internal doors to isolate rooms for heating.

INSIDER'S TIP
 Make it a unique space, not just an extra room.

ARCHITECT
 Caroline Pidcock of Pidcock Architecture and Sustainability, 9357 1366.

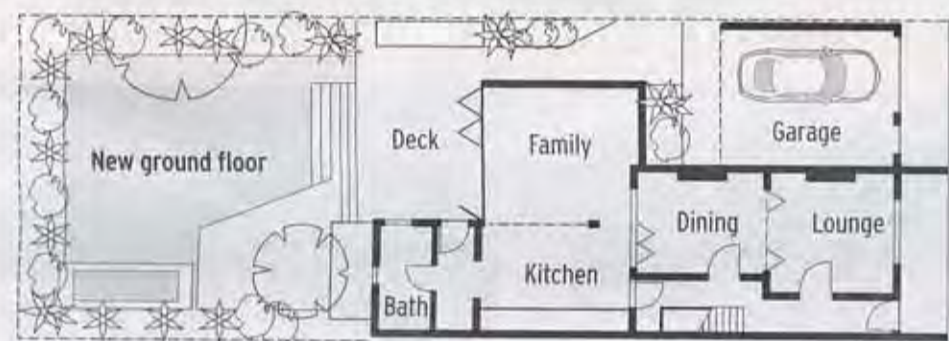
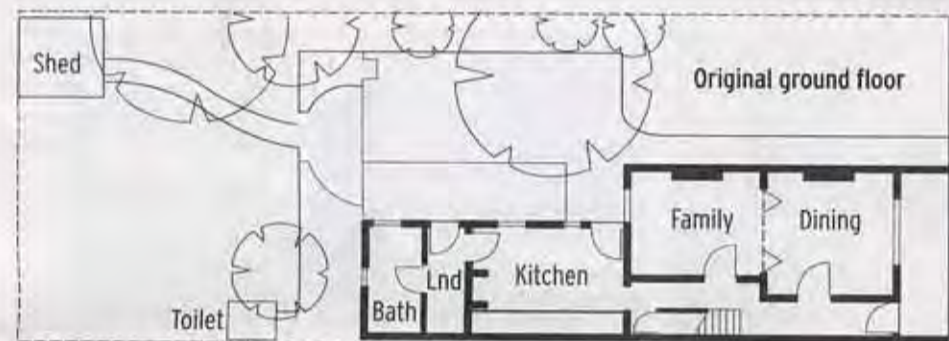
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
 Nicola Cameron of Pepo Landscape, 9349 1220.



SEE THE DREAM ONLINE
Take a tour of the Morrison's renovation in Petersham from Saturday afternoon. Go to domain.com.au/video



Window seat ... Liv Morrison with Pepper the cat.



"And the louvre windows mean we can catch the breezes going through on a hot day. On a cold day, you can close them and they stop the heat going out."

To deal with the hot orientation of the back, Pidcock opened the space to a deep deck shaded by a pergola, essentially a pergola but with moveable blades to adapt to shifts in weather and time of day and year.

"The pergola is expensive but it is worthwhile," Pidcock says. "By having this wide and covered deck space, we were able to keep the heat off the western facade."

"The operable roof means we can get shade and ventilation at the same time, and in winter we can open it up and get sun deep into the living room. Fixed shading is not as adaptable."

The result is another space the family can use, rain, hail or shine. Madi says that when they first moved in, by then with three young children, it rained for a month. She set up a few easels on the deck and the two eldest painted happily the whole time. "It was such a contrast to the way it used to be," she says.

THE DECK

Pidcock also designed the deck to step around the house and a 100-year-old lime tree, down to the level of the backyard. It has created more places for the children to play - they have set up a miniature dining table under the tree - and links the house physically and visually with the garden.

"This deck gives you usable space in the garden," Pidcock says. "It is almost an amphitheatre space."

Ken also appreciates the deck as almost another room.

"Now the barbie is under cover and after work in summer, if we want to cook out here we can," he says. "It is much better from a lifestyle point of view."

"We've had some great parties," Madi says. "We had our 40th here."

COST	\$
▶ Preliminaries	22,000
▶ Demolition	4950
▶ Excavation	2475
▶ Concrete (incl formwork + steel)	7810
▶ Masonry	3675
▶ Structural steel	11,000
▶ Carpentry	21,550
▶ Windows and doors	18,000
▶ Tiling	11,250
▶ Roofing (including pergola)	29,700
▶ Painting	19,800
▶ Joinery	65,000
▶ Internal linings	5715
▶ Electrical	11,000
▶ Plumbing	19,450
▶ Solar hot water service	3200
▶ Solar panels	3960
▶ Landscaping	10,000
▶ Replacement of existing floor	8200
▶ Subfloor ventilation	700
▶ Architect	58,425
▶ Engineer	5000
▶ Total	342,860

Now the family, including two newly acquired Burmese cats, spends most of its time in this new living space. Though the parents do say that the glass bi-folds Pidcock installed between the new and old living spaces gives them flexibility to keep an eye on their children, the new room and deck it opens to are really the new heart of the house.

"When you live in the inner city, you want a calming feature about the house," Ken says. "For us, this is it. This beautiful room."



You can't put a price on ... houses

There is an increasing trend for properties to be listed with a vague price or, worse, none at all. When quizzing the agent, the standard response is "we won't know the price until we get some buyer feedback". As a first-home buyer scrimping and saving, I find this incredibly frustrating. Have agents lost the art of accurate valuation or is this just another trick in their kit bag?

James M, North Strathfield

It's true. No one knows how to price anything at the moment. This is not so much trickery as a moving market, which makes it hard to price property. Just check out the many agents displaying comparable sales results at the open inspections of late. Confusing things further is Sydney's two-speed property market, whereby high-end property is being priced down as quickly as affordable stock is marked up. These agents are just trying to avoid being accused of underquoting, or overquoting, as the case may be. And yet, the vendor's agency agreement states an agreed price range and that's the information you want. If agents won't give you a rough idea, tell them you'll call back after they've assessed interest from their Monday ring-around. If they can't divulge anything by then, tell them you won't be pursuing any interest in the property. But leave your number because they'll ring back once they recall this is a buyer's market.

We have been trying to sell our house for three months and now the agent seems more

interested in getting us to drop the price than find a buyer. We don't want to see out the next month with this agent and just want to list with another agent instead. Is that fair?

Robert, Cromer

Fair? Just? What does it matter when neither is really relevant in the realm of contract law. The fact is you signed with that agent and signing a new contract with another agency won't nullify the previous one. But it will entitle two agents to the sales commission if it sells. Is that what you had in mind? If not, either negotiate an early end to the first agreement or see out the full four months, then re-list with another agent. Be warned, though - a new agent might prove just as unsuccessful if you won't drop the price.

Appraisals: clean up for the real estate agent or leave the house in its usual shabby state?

Jacqueline, Chatswood

Apparently, the fact that I argue in favour of a big clean-up is testament to my own OCD tendencies. Obsessive-compulsive nature aside, some of us (or just me) just want to do right by our beloved pile (for whom a disappointing appraisal will be taken personally). Still, agents insist there is no need, that they can see through the layers of everyday life to a home's true value, which comes down to number of bedrooms, bathrooms, floor plan, location and land size. Who knew?

Send your questions to Lucy at macken.lucy@gmail.com.

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