



Breaking with tradition



Renovating a poky old home was an exciting journey for all involved

>> Words Louise Surette >> Photography Mark Taylor

Sometimes you may hear a story about the tensions of renovating. But as homeowner Charis James and builder Paul Grossi wander through her newly renovated home together, it is clear that they were both equally passionate about the project, and actually enjoyed the journey.

Charis, an interior designer, had worked with Paul on projects before, but never on her own home. "I called him and said 'guess what, I bought a house,'" Charis says. "Paul and I work really well together and I trust him completely in his decision making."

Paul and his company, Grossi Construction, certainly had their work cut out for them. The Edwardian home in Hawthorn came complete with an old outdoor toilet, stables, chicken pens and an '80s renovation, which had left the home quite dark and poky. The inside would be gutted, with only

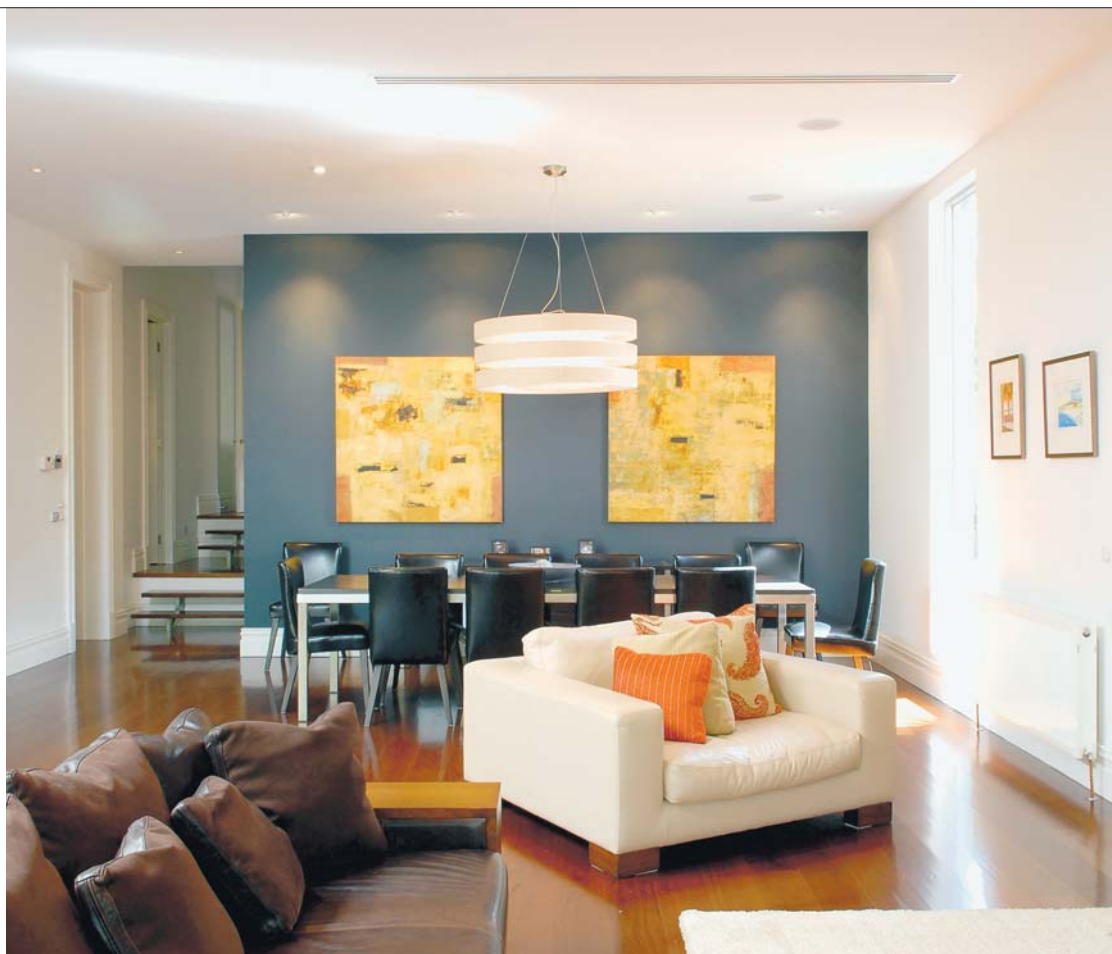
Past matters

Charis has tried to retain the original look of the house in this sitting room (above)

Out of the blue

The outdoor zone overlooking the wet-edge pool makes the ideal entertaining area (left)

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>> Artworks: (on feature wall) by Acuna

postscript



with
Charis James
(pictured with Paul Gross)

Do you entertain much?

We entertain heaps now. It works really well here. When people first arrive they are all around the kitchen bench but then they begin to move around and go outside.

What's the best part of your kitchen?

I love the pantry. That sounds really boring but when you close it off everything is hidden.

What is your favourite room?

I like different rooms for different reasons. I love the back open-plan area, because it is so big and bright, but I love the front sitting room, which is cosy and quiet and the complete opposite.

Where do you like to shop for furniture and homewares?

I love going down Swan and Church streets in Richmond because of the variety.

What is your favourite piece?

My husband and I have been married for 21 years and a cabinet was the first piece that we could afford to buy. My dad couldn't believe I bought it and thought it was an old piece of junk. I was doing up our little old shack and I think it was worth more than the house.

Were there any stressful moments during the renovation?

I suppose the only thing I really worried about was staying on budget. Luckily my husband just put it into my hands and let me make the decisions, which was great. I think being on the same page is important, or maybe he just goes along with me.

Bold and beautiful

A stunning use of colour makes the open-plan living area inviting (top left)

Meeting place

The ultra-modern kitchen is where most guests initially gather (above left)

Polished performance

The sleek bathrooms have a minimalist look with lots of limestone (left)



>> the original ceilings and floorboards remaining, and the rear extended, by the time the year-and-a-half of renovations was complete.

"I initially thought it was going to be too much work, but when I looked at where it was and what I could make it into, I couldn't resist," she says.

In the front of the home, Charis has made a conscious effort to retain its traditional features, even when replacing the old with the new. Marble floors in the foyer give it a feeling of old-world grandeur and new ceiling roses match the originals, which were too damaged to keep.

The original section of the home consists of a front parlour-style room with access to a front veranda, which Charis uses as an office for her interior-design business, Open House Design.

The main bedroom with an ensuite, her daughters' bedrooms, a main bathroom and the family media room are also part of the original home.

Also found here is what was a formal dining room, but has been turned into a special sitting room with all Charis's family photographs, favourite paintings and pieces of furniture with sentimental value.

The back of the house, where the new extension begins, is anything but traditional, with contemporary furniture, plenty of glass and a bold, streamlined look. Open plan, the space includes a living and dining area and a large kitchen complete with a state-of-the-art walk-in pantry.

The highlight of the renovation, Charis says, was seeing her idea of a concrete wall, where the fireplace and television would go, come to fruition. She says the idea raised eyebrows but she was determined to have it and was ecstatic when it turned out even better than she had imagined. "It is like a piece of art," she says. "Everyone comments on it. It is just so raw and interesting."

The clever use of glass means the room is very bright and offers incredible views of the wet-edge pool. The glass doors to the deck are electric, sliding open at the push of a button. Once outside, everything you could possibly need is at your fingertips, with a comfy living and dining area, as well as a barbecue and fridge. There is even an outdoor toilet with a shower and towel storage for the pool.

Paul says the most difficult aspect of the project was trying to gel the modern and traditional features, but he is quite proud of the final result, adding that working with Charis made the job easier. "As well as having an artistic flair she took a pragmatic approach to the project," he says. "She knew the limitations and understood the tangibles." 🏠