

Sanctuary

MODERN GREEN HOMES

ISSUE
64

Prefab & modular supplier guide; reclaimed timber treasure trove;
joey sanctuary bushfire rebuild; sweet syrups from foraged flora

**PREFAB
POWER**

**OFFSITE
CONSTRUCTION
GATHERS PACE**

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WIN

**One of two e-scooters from Voltrium,
with a total prize value of \$6,500**

Offer open to Australian residents. Details page 81

Studio portrait

LOCATION Northcote, VIC • WORDS Rebecca Krispin • PHOTOGRAPHY Luke Ray



At a glance

- Underutilised garage converted into a multifunction workspace, guest room and more
- Existing structure and materials retained where possible
- Building envelope upgraded

In Melbourne's inner suburbs, Tom and Rachel turned their unloved brick garage into a seriously useful home office and guest room.

When the couple were choosing a home to buy, they were lucky to have Tom's long-time friend, architect Cameron Greiner, helping them out with the search. By the time they purchased their Californian bungalow in Melbourne's Northcote in late 2020, Cameron knew the property well.

The house needed some love before the new owners moved in. Cameron planned a staged renovation to the main house, the first part of which involved replacing the kitchen and bathroom as well as adding skylights to increase natural light. This greatly improved the amenity of the house without requiring lengthy and costly permit applications, and allowed Rachel and Tom to move in just a few months after the birth of their second child in early 2021.

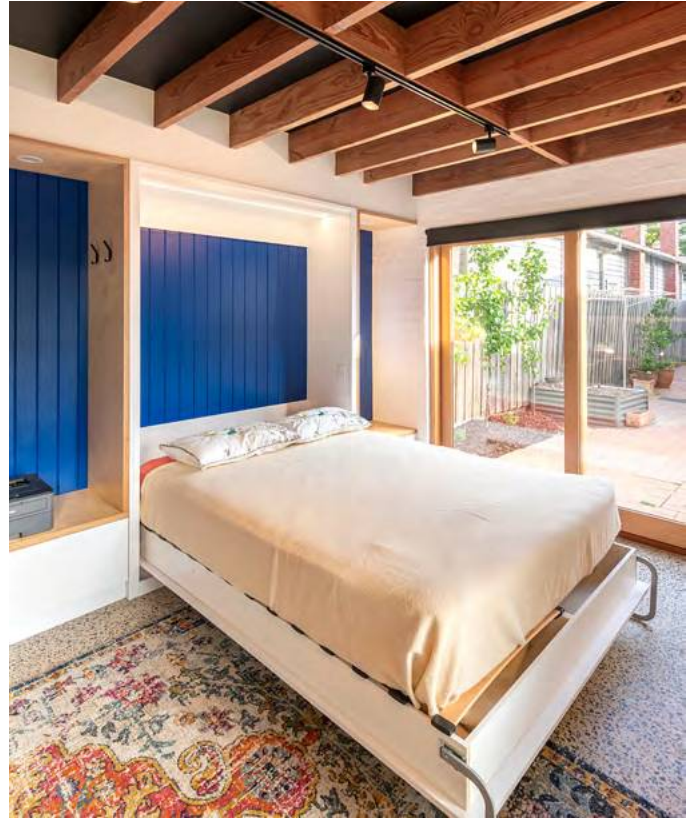
As Covid lockdowns dragged on, however, it quickly became apparent that Tom needed a quiet and private home

office where he could work without the kids underfoot. Cameron immediately suggested the old brick garage in the backyard. It was occupying valuable space on their block, and couldn't easily be used for parking due to the narrow driveway access.

Repurposing an existing structure fitted well with Tom and Rachel's philosophy and budget. It also suited Cameron's approach to sustainability. "In our office, we have a pretty strong ethos about reusing buildings. The most sustainable building is the one that already exists," he says.

The garage itself was dark, dingy and damp, with a small window and a roller door. Cameron's design response was simple and practical, maximising the use of existing materials. He doubled the size of the old window and replaced the roller door with a sliding door, using high-performance timber-framed double glazing. The old concrete floor was ground and polished, the brick walls were painted externally, and new insulation was added to the walls and ceiling. "These relatively minor changes completely transformed the space," he says.

The revamped room now enjoys a



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“Once we ripped out the garage door, put in the window and cleaned it out a bit, it was actually a pretty cool space,” says designer Cameron of the modest garage conversion. A Murphy bed plus built-in desk and storage make the small studio as versatile as possible.

high level of thermal comfort year-round. There is no need for cooling, and the only heating is a small electric panel heater. The window has a western aspect, and in winter the afternoon sun heats up the thermal mass in the concrete floor; the warmth is then released slowly at night. “It’s quite extraordinary: when I come in at 6am in winter and the heater has been off, it’s still warm in here,” Tom says. The window is shaded in summer by a steel awning, and the internal blinds have a white backing to reflect the sun when it’s not wanted.

Cameron paid plenty of attention to

the details, and thanks to the reuse of existing materials, more of the budget was available for a high-quality fitout. The beautiful internal joinery includes a plywood desk, shelving and over a dozen hidden storage cupboards, including discreet lockable sections for confidential work documents. A bookshelf sits adjacent to the door, and there is a fold-down Murphy bed for guests. The large sliding window features an enticing box seat inside as well as a bench outside, which facilitates a connection between the studio and garden. There is additional storage space inside the roof cavity, and

a small bike store and garden shed at the rear.

“The builder we engaged, Richie from Buena Vista Homes, was excellent,” says Cameron. “We’ve worked together on a few projects now and his attention to detail, communication and flexibility was impressive, especially given he was navigating Covid lockdowns during the build and the family was still occupying the main house.”

The studio was carefully designed for multipurpose use, which is handy now that Tom is working more in his company’s offices. The family regularly

uses it for accommodation for visiting relatives and friends, and it has also hosted garden parties, playgroup gatherings and yoga practice. “As the kids get a bit older, I expect to get kicked out of this space. They’ll probably want to use it for homework, as the desk can fit two people, as well as other things,” says Tom with a smile.

Cameron’s favourite part of the project

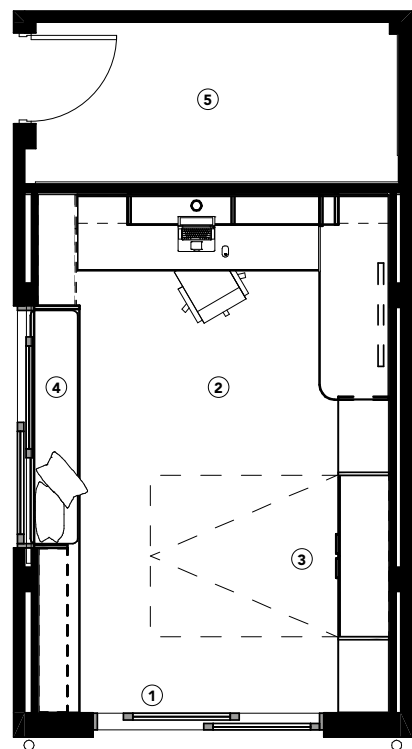
is the top-notch fully-sealed window and door system, which he has wanted to try out for a long time. “It has that level of quality that you just don’t get with many other windows,” he says. He catches up with Tom occasionally and they discuss the next and more extensive stage of the renovation. But given that the home is meeting the family’s current needs, this is on hold for now.

Tom particularly loves the light and garden views his comfortable workspace offers, as well as the fact that it has added so much versatility to their inner-city home. “I look out onto our lawn and our fig tree, so there’s a lot of green, and it’s so quiet with the double glazing. It’s been great to add a lot of value and versatility to our property by doing minimal work with smart design.” 5



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Window seat inside, bench outside: creating connections to the garden.

FLOOR PLAN



LEGEND

- ① Entry
- ② Studio
- ③ Fold-down Murphy bed
- ④ Window seat
- ⑤ Bike and garden store

HOUSE SPECIFICATIONS

RENEWABLE ENERGY

- Solar PV system on main house

PASSIVE DESIGN, HEATING & COOLING

- New operable windows and doors promote cross ventilation
- New roof ventilation installed to existing Colorbond roof
- Concrete floor for thermal mass
- Insulation and double glazing for high-performing building envelope
- Steel awning to window for summer shade

ACTIVE HEATING & COOLING

- Nobo electric panel heater

BUILDING MATERIALS

- Existing brick structure and Colorbond roof retained and repaired as required
- Existing concrete floor ground and polished
- New timber frame wall to interior face of existing brick walls
- EasyVJ wall lining
- Insulation: Knauf Earthwool batts to new timber frame walls and ceiling between existing rafters (R2.5)
- MaxiPLY plywood joinery

WINDOWS & GLAZING

- Binq Leggero series double-glazed lift & slide window and door with Victorian ash frames

LIGHTING

- LED lighting by About Space

PAINTS, FINISHES & FLOOR COVERINGS

- Dulux low-VOC interior paints
- Osmo Polyx Oil to plywood

OTHER ESD FEATURES

- Studio is designed to be multifunctional, and a Murphy bed integrated into the joinery allows it to be used for guests
- Owners purchased the property due to its walkability to schools; they use public transport for work and share a single car to reduce vehicle ownership

DESIGNER

Jost Architects

BUILDER

Buena Vista Homes

PROJECT TYPE

Renovation

LOCATION

Northcote, VIC
(Wurundjeri Country)

COST

\$100,000

SIZE

Studio 28m²
Land 434m²



INSIGHTS

"Our block is only about 430 square metres, so we don't really want to waste space. We had this structure just sitting there providing nothing but storage, and it didn't really require much to turn it into something that adds a lot of value and versatility to the house."

Tom, homeowner