

High ceilings, low cost

PROVING THAT LESS IS MORE

Sam Marshall's Darlinghurst home-cum-architecture studio would make, as he says, 'a great bachelor pad'. The irony is that just as Marshall put the finishing touches to the renovation, as both architect and builder, he got married. He even had to postpone his honeymoon to collect the State's residential architecture top honour, the Wilkinson award, for his design.

Marshall was surprised, because he thought another finalist would be more likely to snare the award, and delighted, because this renovation was, by necessity, completed at the exceptionally low cost of \$60,000. 'It was all I could borrow,' says Marshall. Although he stresses that turning this once-derelict, early 20th-century horse carriage workshop into a home and studio, while keeping to a small budget, wasn't easy. It was only possible because he did much of the labour himself, with the assistance of a young architect employed in his office at the time, Drew Heath. (Heath has since established his own practice, where he applies the uncommon approach fostered on this project — acting as both architect and builder on his increasingly admired home designs.)

Marshall was also able to keep costs down because of the innovative use of ordinary materials, as well as his abiding respect for a building's existing heritage. 'I've tried to keep the original building; the beautiful original walls,' he says. 'I wouldn't touch them for the world. It was built in 1903 and

1. Beyond the louvres upstairs is a small rooftop terrace for catching sun in the winter. 2. In the large open-plan living area the deep open-shelved bench helps define the galley kitchen space. 3. Galvanised steel panels clad the bathroom walls. 4. The architect has kept the space as raw as possible with exposed beams and unpainted walls. The living area is made up of two simple built-in couches.





it's taken that long to get them [the walls] right. I'd hate to see them painted white because that'd just destroy them.'

Instead, remnants of old paintwork and the patina of a century's use remain. 'There used to be a telephone there,' he says, pointing to a patch of wall at the top of the stairs in the living space. 'The old bloke who lived here used to just jot phone numbers down [on the wall]. And they were all alpha numeric. As you can see it might have been MA300. I love that.'

'I see heritage as an evolution. I see that all the things that have happened on the way are important.'

On top of the existing building's fabric, Marshall has added only the barest of elements to transform it into a home and studio. 'What I've done is brought it up to a liveable state,' he says, 'because it didn't have windows and it didn't have plumbing and it didn't have electricity. I've put all that in.'

Structurally that has meant introducing steel framing to stabilise the crumbling structure; pouring a concrete stairway and ground floor (with heating); slotting in a mezzanine level under the roof for a bedroom and bathroom; and adding a small deck on top of the new tin roof to capture inner-city views and the winter sunshine. Creating the deck and its access walkway also enabled Marshall to introduce louvred windows to admit light and cross ventilation.

Of course, all this left little change for standard interior finishes. Case in point: the bathroom. Here instead of building standard stud walls, waterproofing them and tiling them, Marshall had to 'go back to first principles'. 'I had to ask: How can I do it more simply?' The solution was to clad the walls in brake-pressed galvanised steel panels, costing \$50 each, or \$25 per square metre. 'They are just siliconed in with an upturn at the bottom so that water can't get in,' he explains.

The bathroom floor, meanwhile, is \$80 worth of timber, with the water draining away on to galvanised steel directly underneath. At one end of the room is the shower, at the other the loo, and in between is a stainless-steel hand-basin/laundry tub/benchtop with a washing machine and dryer concealed behind colourback sliding doors. The ceiling is plasterboard lit by his 'only indulgence', Kreon uplights.

In the living space below, joinery is similarly straightforward. The kitchen cupboards and seating were built with form ply cut up in a joiner's shop and assembled on site.

The overall result is a rugged beauty that stems from the honest, inherent qualities of the original building, together

with the appropriately simple and robust additions Marshall has made.

Not that the newlywed is likely to enjoy it for much longer, as he contemplates parting with his 'bachelor pad' for more suitable digs. 'It'll be hard,' he smiles, turning his head to take in his handiwork, 'I know every nail that's gone in and we've had some killer parties here.'

STORY GUY ALLENBY **PHOTOGRAPHY** PATRICK BINGHAM-HALL & BRETT BOARDMAN

THE AIM To experiment in valid new solutions that I could build cheaply myself.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE? Two years.

WHAT THE OWNER WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY I would have bought the warehouse on the other side of the courtyard as well.

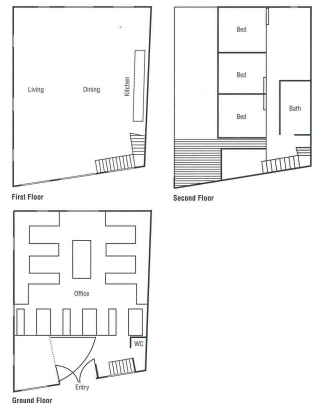
FEATURES THE OWNER IS HAPPIEST WITH The robust nature of the spaces, finishes and details.

INSIDER TIPS Even though everyone inhabits buildings, and thinks they are experts, they are not. Trust your architect's judgement.

ARCHITECT Sam Marshall.

BUILDERS Sam Marshall, Drew Heath, Ted Marshall & many others.

JOINERS Robert Vella, Sam Marshall, Drew Heath, Sean Barnett & Tynan Dwyer.



5. Beneath the stairs is a toilet and hand basin formed in concrete. The architect used a wok as the mould for the sink. The water drops from a length of copper pipe. 6. Built in off-form concrete by Drew Heath, the stairs were left rough in keeping with the warehouse's rugged industrial past. 7. A sliding plywood panel screens the concrete stairs. 8. The bathroom bench houses the washing machine and dryer behind sliding colourback glass. The ceiling is lit by the architect's one indulgence: Kreon uplights.