



## Energy

### PROJECT

Blurred House

### LOCATION

Northcote, Victoria

### ARCHITECT

Bild Architecture  
www.bild.com.au

### BUILDER

DR Building

### WINDOW GLAZING/INSTALLATION

- Aplo Pty Ltd (steel-framed bi-fold doors, fixed and awning windows)

- Nobel Park Glass (double glazed clear glass)

### GLASS SUPPLIER

Viridian

### PRINCIPAL GLAZING

Standard clear double glazing (4mm, 6mm, 4m)

# BLURRING OLD AND NEW ARCHITECTURE

Text – John Power  
Photography – TM Photo

A new breed of architectural lions is embracing the best of heritage and modern design trends within single projects. Nowhere is the meshing of old and new styles better presented than in Blurred House, a recently completed home extension in Melbourne. John Power reports.



There was a time when major home extensions had to 'match' primary existing infrastructure: the building equivalent of matching a new coat to old pants... same materials, same colours, same textures.

Nowadays, however, a number of contemporary architectural stylists are refusing to panic about mismatching styles when creating significant modern renovations or additions to old buildings, preferring to retain original building features right alongside the latest materials and layouts.

A 'mash' of styles no longer means a 'clash' of styles.

Blurred House, a suburban three-bedroom home in the Melbourne suburb of Northcote, unashamedly blurs the distinction between old and new.

From the street, the front of the house looks like any other weatherboard 1930s Californian Bungalow in the neighbourhood, complete with leadlight sash windows, timber-paneled flywire screen door, and original rendered porch columns. Indeed, apart from some minor cosmetic rejuvenation, the entire front half of the renovated dwelling is original. But look a little harder and there are telltale signs that a 21st Century aesthetic has touched the building. A slender, diagonal, parallelogram-shaped

clerestory window – definitely not a feature of Californian Bungalow design – is visible just below the roofline facing the street, and the high rearward walls also indicate the presence of new spaces within.

The back half of the house is entirely new, featuring a fully glazed, two-level, rear wall looking onto the backyard swimming pool. This massive glazed wall is the spiritual and physical engine for a range of internal design features, which not only enhance communion with the outside world but also maximize light, space and energy efficiency. It should come as no surprise that that the project was nominated for an award in the Viridian 2012 Vision Awards (Residential Energy-Efficient Glass Design category).

#### OBVIOUS QUESTIONS

With such stark differences in style between the front and rear halves of the house, some obvious questions arise: What was the point of retaining the original Californian Bungalow façade? How do the front heritage rooms blur into the more modern rear extension? And does the entirely glass rear wall pose problems regarding privacy and energy efficiency?

Project Architect Ben Milbourne, from Bild Architecture, says the old and new styles coexist perfectly because of the clear practical appropriateness of all zones of the house, regardless of age.



'This massive glazed wall is the spiritual and physical engine for a range of internal design features, which not only enhance communication with the outside world but also maximize light, space and energy efficiency.'

**'We had some issues with lateral bracing because it's effectively an entirely double glazed wall, so introducing cross bracing was not really possible.'**

"The 'blurred' idea was largely ours," Ben explains. "The clients said they really loved the original Californian Bungalow parts of the house. But the rear of the house had been renovated once before, perhaps 15 or 20 years ago, which created a very large (single level) open plan area consisting of living, kitchen, dining, which was really unsuccessful in terms of its practicality. The clients said they simply didn't use it. They used the outdoor spaces a lot and they used the spaces at the front of the house a lot, and left the 'in between' spaces alone."

Therefore, the challenge for Bild Architecture was to recognise the unappealing elements of the earlier extension, namely its unwieldy layout, poor lighting and lack of connectedness with both the backyard and front rooms, and replace them with a design solution that would be welcoming for all three members of the client's family. Hence the notion of a 'blurred' house that would streamline the appeal and usage of all parts of the dwelling.



#### **GLAZED WALL ON SHOW**

The centerpiece of the renovation, quite clearly, is the fully glazed east-facing rear wall, which is the focus of all major internal spaces. The upper level of the two-level extension features an internal mezzanine/loft-style sitting room and sunny balcony, which serves as a springboard for a host of lively internal features. The mezzanine allows for an airy vantage over the lower internal living area as well as the external backyard and pool. Meantime, the dining area directly below the mezzanine, with its standard-height horizontal ceiling, opens invitingly into an adjoining living area – a stunning light-filled space with a higher, sloping ceiling that leads the eye into the cavernous upper level. The three separate ceiling heights are reminiscent of multi-tiered shade sails, gently reinforcing the relationship between indoor and outdoor living.

The pitch of the sloping ceilings, Ben says, called for some creative engineering designs concerning the expansive rear wall glazing, all of which features double glazed units (Viridian clear 4mm/6mm/4mm).

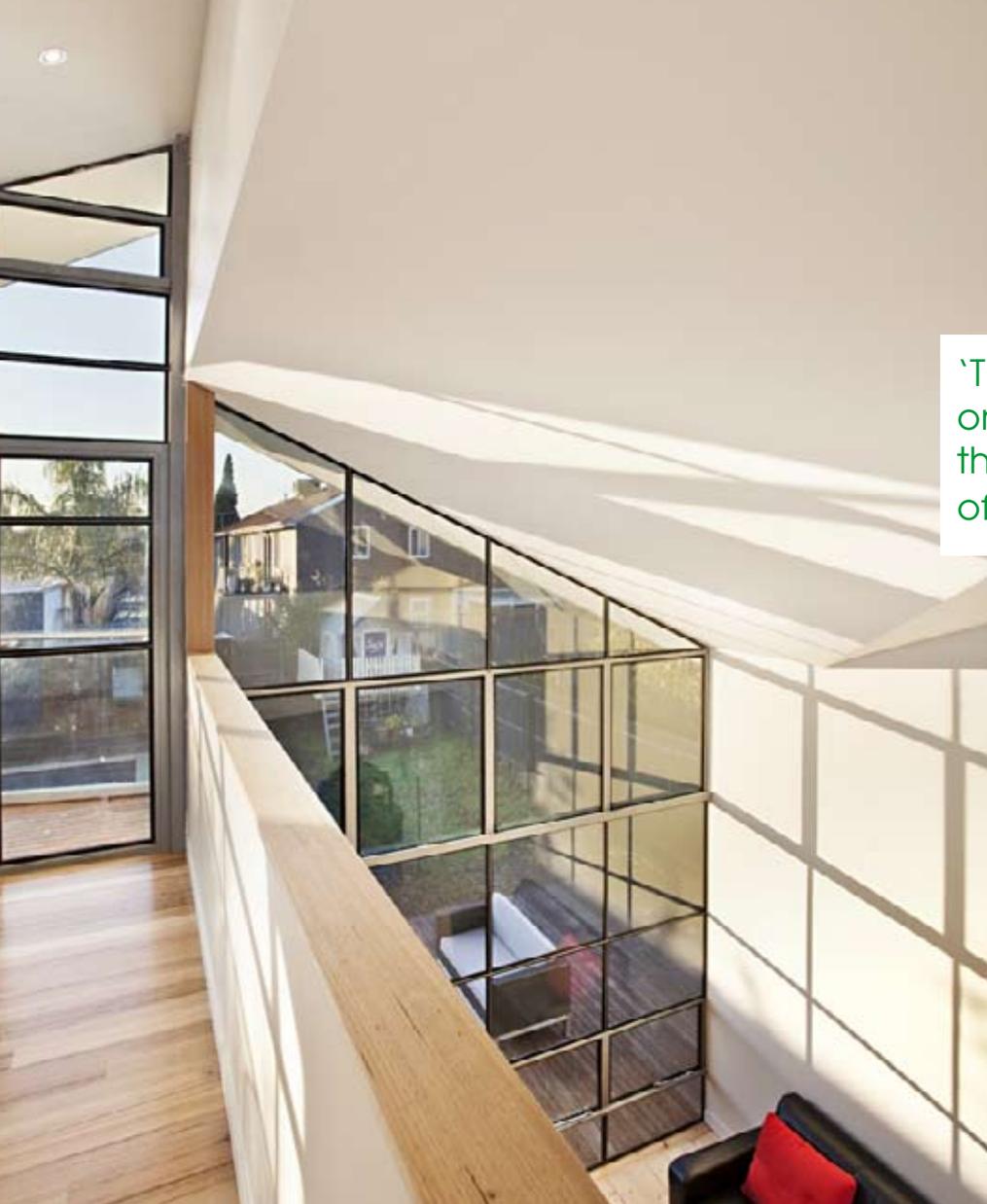
"We had some issues with lateral bracing because it's effectively an entirely double glazed wall, so introducing cross bracing was not really possible. We looked at about four or five different options with our engineer and in the end went with the steel framing solution with mostly rectangular double glazed units of manageable size."

#### **CONTROLLED TEMPERATURES**

The clean and solid lines of the rectangular metal framing, Ben explains, satisfied the desire for high-quality craftsmanship while simplifying the practicalities of installing both manual and mechanized operable awning windows.

Operable windows, it must be noted, are crucial to the energy efficiency of the entire house, as they permit highly sophisticated temperature and ventilation control.

"The second-bottom row of windows in the (ground floor) living space is operable – they're manual – and the second-top row of all of the windows, both in the double-height void space and also in the upper level loft space, are on electric winders;



'The wall of glass was one of the things driving the overall design in a lot of ways.'

"Importantly, our clients were really keen about establishing strong connections between the inside and the outside – they spend a lot of their time living outside during summer and they wanted to maintain that atmosphere even during winter. The wall of glass was one of the things driving the overall design in a lot of ways."

The appeal of 'inside-outside' living lends the home a 'beach house' feel, particularly when the pool is in full use on hot days.

#### SUCCESS IN USAGE

The ultimate endorsement of this project is its ongoing happy usage by the clients and their large community of friends and neighbours.

there is a control panel down in the dining space so in summer, if it ever gets too hot inside the house, you can open up both the bottom windows and very top windows to create a 'stack' effect, which has been really effective. On hot days of 41 or 42 degrees, the owners keep the house sealed during the day and at night vent the whole house."

Ben says the home's original heating and air conditioning systems are in place, but that power consumption has dropped sharply for both heating and cooling, despite the extension increasing the size of the house by 50 percent.

An openable parallelogram window in the upstairs study aids cross ventilation. This window's size and placement, though entirely sympathetic to the triangular and sloping visual orientations of the overall extension, was largely determined by ResCode height guidelines.

Of course, this level of climate control would not be possible without the expansive, multi-height windows of the glazed wall, but isn't

there a downside to full-wall glazing in the form of lack of privacy?

#### PRIVACY

Privacy and its converse 'overlooking' considerations have been addressed with minimal disruption to the broader scope of the project.

"The key element for us regarding overlooking was the upper level space," Ben says, "which was affected by ResCode controls. The projecting hood that comes out to the north side of the balcony is largely about addressing those concerns, both for the neighbours and also for our clients, who obviously don't want to be looking into the neighbour's backyard either.

"With regard to overlooking into the house, our clients weren't too concerned about it." Ben notes that while there is a double-storey apartment block to the rear of Blurred House, it is some distance away and its orientation means there is only a small obscured bathroom window directly facing the property.

Ben says the property is a hub for a large number of people, and the family certainly makes use of the entire house in a way that was never possible before the extension was created.

The 'blur' between old and new, it might be argued, is as much about the residents' full enjoyment of the whole house as any theorised design formula.

