

TIGHT SITES IN FOCUS

TEXTURED RESPONSE

Brick surfaces, existing stone walls and various timber elements bring a high level of textural intricacy to this



small, beautifully crafted extension by Sydney architect Tom Ferguson.



TOM FERGUSON SPENT FIVE YEARS living in his dilapidated historic terrace in Sydney's Rozelle. "It's amazing what you adjust to," he says, surveying the building's recent conversion somewhat incredulously. But after living with the dwelling's existing hand-carved stone walls and skewed timber floors for all those years, the architect had gained a real appreciation for the building's timeworn surfaces. The redesign and extension plays on these textures. A game of juxtaposition begins in the existing rooms and unfolds into new work at the rear.

An associate at Sydney firm Cracknell Lonergan Architects for some years, Tom has honed his talent for working with small city spaces. This house provided him with the first opportunity to work for himself – in this case as both designer and client. "This was a blank slate, and my own brief," he enthuses, recalling the limitless possibilities the project presented. Free from restrictions imposed by outside clients – and with no real pressures regarding time frames – Tom has been able to realize a design that is both a bold intervention on a very narrow site and a sensitive, finely detailed addition.

Some unusual tactics have been employed in the new planning of the house. A bathroom has been inserted into an existing formal living room and an old upstairs balcony has been enclosed to become a long shower. "Upstairs, I decided to do what everyone is *not* doing these days, which was to enclose the balcony," he explains. "And downstairs putting the bathroom in the old living room was the key to being able to open up the back of the house."

Installing a bathroom into a period-style living room may appear a disrespectful strategy. The precision with which Tom has carefully inserted the sleek double shower and various fixtures, however, ensures the room's integrity. A basin and toilet are housed in a freestanding joinery wall and the existing timber floors, fireplace, high ceiling and its rose have all been retained. "The idea was not to put too much against the walls, to keep the sense of this as a room," Tom explains. The shower occupies the full height and width of the room. There is a fascinating tension between the smooth modern interventions and the rich turn-of-the-century interior that highlights the qualities of both.

This mode of working with one material against another is set up here and carries throughout. A logic is developed between unfolding and unlocking volumes of new and old stone, timber, brick, tiles and concrete that holds each in its place. Each material is offset by the next and the textures and features of the existing building are brought into focus. In the bathroom, the fireplace and period-style light fitting seem to have been reinvented as fresh installations and, in the same way, the smooth consistency of the dining room concrete floor is a source of delight when juxtaposed with elements of existing brick and stone.

By demolishing a series of building accretions, Tom has established the start of the new works at the original rear stone wall. The new

dining, kitchen and living rooms are well-composed volumes that appear to attach lightly to the existing sandstone dwelling. "In massing terms, these spaces were conceived as three-dimensional volumes that can slot in quite neatly." A thick wall of honey-coloured joinery extends along the southern boundary, supporting a plane of dark-panelled timber that appears to fold down from the ceiling to become a kitchen bench. Frameless glass highlights fill the spaces left between. At the join of new and old, a small, well-planted light well, executed as a frameless glass prism, provides balanced light and ventilation.

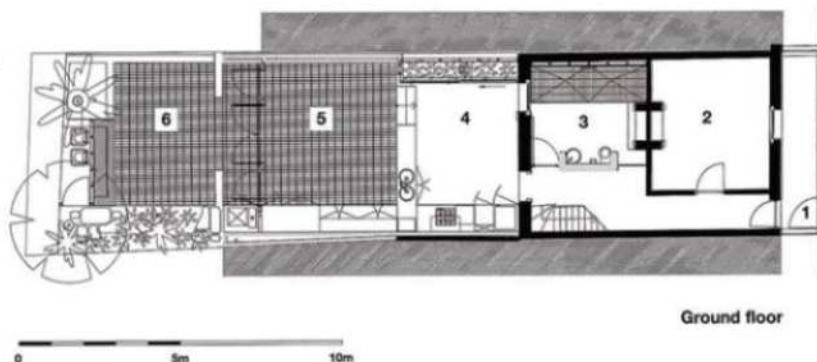
With a stepped floor and ceiling, the living space enjoys a ceiling height of 3.6 metres. "I wanted to create a sense that the space opens up as you come downstairs into the lounge," says Tom. Materials are put to work here, to bring together the overall composition. The dark-panelled ceiling over the kitchen emphasizes a sense of slight compression. A concrete floor steps down to another floor, this lower one paved with stacked bricks. These bricks tie back into the overall composition by continuing up the vertical faces of the walls and extending out into the garden, broken only by tall dark timber doors that underscore the composition.

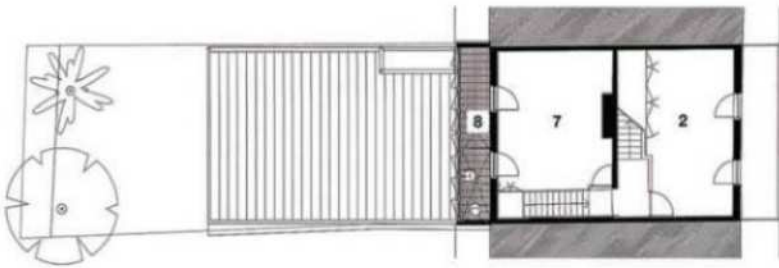
Alongside an impressive collection of classic furniture, the bricks attest to Tom's interest in Sydney's early modern architecture. "The bricks are one of the only things that have been there right the way through the design. They were inspired by a house in Edgecliff – a late-sixties Sydney School courtyard house." Like all the materials in the house, the architect has selected the bricks for their tactile quality. "I like the warmth ... it's a full brick on edge. You get the feeling that you are really grounded." A retractable fabric screen fixed to the edge of the roof shades the full-height glass from the summer sun, but in winter the bricks are bathed in light and re-radiate warmth.

Throughout the house, generous spaces address the designer's own brief to himself. A loft space is used as primary storage, eliminating clutter elsewhere. And the details of the house show a directness of approach undiluted by client concerns. "There are a lot of details that I wouldn't do for a client unless I was sure they were open to it, like having the joinery running to the outside, for example."

In this house, Tom Ferguson celebrates the sculptural patina of external walls and beaten timber. The new spaces added to the rear have their own language but are generated from reactions to the existing building. The ideas enjoyed a long gestation period and the brief presented many possibilities and a sense of tabula rasa as this was his first solo project. Discussing the finished project, Tom seems relieved. "It's nice to stop thinking about it after obsessing about it for so long," he says, smiling. Indeed, he ought to relax. This project evinces the reverence of someone who is aware of the opportunity. Each move is considered, extracting the maximum sensory impact. **PETER TITMUSS**

PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT: This view from the rear back through the living area shows the kitchen as a piece of pale timber joinery, emerging from a dark stained Tasmanian oak ceiling. **RIGHT:** This kitchen detail shows brick walls juxtaposed with smoother joinery elements. **OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT:** Light washes down a timber outer wall via a slender skylight. **RIGHT:** The brick floor is carried all the way through to the rear courtyard.





- 1 Entry
- 2 Bedroom
- 3 Bathroom
- 4 Kitchen/dining
- 5 Living
- 6 Courtyard
- 7 Main bedroom
- 8 Ensuite

First floor

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THIS PAGE: The main bathroom has retained vestiges of its past as a Victorian drawing room.

ARCHITECT

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PRACTICE PROFILE

Sole practitioner specializing in residential design of all scales.

BUILDER

Steele Associates

CONSULTANTS

Engineer Partridge Partners
Landscaping, interiors
Tom Ferguson
Lighting Tom Ferguson, Light 2

PRODUCTS

Roofing Lysaght Klip-Lok, Colorbond 'White'; R3.0 insulation **External walls** Rendered brickwork, painted Dulux 'Antique White USA' **Internal walls** Rendered brickwork, painted Dulux 'Antique White USA' **Doors** Timber frames, finished in Sikkers 'Catal HLS Ebony'; Dorma pivot doors; Centor hardware; Industrial Expression door pulls **Flooring** Bowral bricks laid on edge, 'Hereford Bronze'; LV1000 and 'Stainless' floor sealer; concrete, hand steel trowel, light machine polish; existing timber floors, sanded and sealed with water-based polyurethane; Supertuft Twist carpet **Lighting** Mito 80S MR-16 trimless recessed downlights; Brox Out exterior wall lights; Cubu 120 all ceiling lights; Solzi pendant; Punto halogen exterior wall lights; JSB Lighting 'Xentix' strip light **Kitchen** Electrolux Gallery Collection appliances, integrated fridge; European ash veneer and solid Tasmanian oak cupboards and benchtops; solid Tasmanian oak shiplap ceiling; Intamix Borna taps **Bathroom** Intamix Borna tapware; Artedomus Vival glass mosaic tiles; Hatna 'You & Me' sanitaryware; Industrial Expression accessories; Rogerseller shower heads **Shading** Creative Canvas awning **External elements** Bowral bricks, 'Hereford Bronze'; plantation Kwila 20 mm x 40 mm battens to timber screens

TIME SCHEDULE

Design, documentation
4 months
Construction 8 months

SITE SIZE

146 m²

PROJECT COST

\$250,000

PHOTOGRAPHY

Simon Kenny