

NEW HOMES RENOVATION

Let there be light

Lou Sweeney marvels at a 1910 house renovated into the 21st century.

IT HAS long been the contention of this column that Alphington is one of Melbourne's hidden gems. It's not that the property prices are low, it's more that the languid feel of the place — startling as it is split by the might of Heidelberg Road — lends an exclusive feel. Leafy and fringed at its low south end by the Yarra, it's a fine part of town.

For Lisa Riddle, John Kilner and sons Sam, 15, and Alex, 12, their fine block-fronted home provided the perfect canvas for what is a stunning, light-filled renovation that pays homage to its origins while placing it squarely in the 21st century.

"When we bought it," says Ms Riddle, "we had the discussion about tearing it down and starting again. It certainly would have been less expensive to do that, but we decided to see how we could incorporate our needs into some of the existing design."

The existing house, built about 1910, had seen renovations before, one as far back as the 1930s. Another stamped the house with some unmistakable '50s hallmarks.

The remodellings featured such dated gems as metal kitchen cabinetry and tar and paper benchtops. "You'd wipe those things and all the

black would come off on your hands," says Ms Riddle.

The bathroom had plush carpet, once considered the height of luxury and style, and a most unusual chequerboard roof.

Floral carpets, plain rooms and aluminium windows all pointed to a time mid last century where considerations such as sustainable living, the environment and style, were but a fanciful space-age dream.

The lack of insulation, a closed floor plan and poor orientation to the sun meant the house was freezing in winter and oppressive in summer. Mr Kilner says environmental considerations were paramount in the renovation. "We pretty much built the renovation around making the house naturally warmer and lighter. It was important for us to work all those aspects out from the start."

Karolien Vanhee from Kneeler Architects bought the family's vision into shimmering being with her introduction of light, air and floor-plan flow. What presents now is a brilliantly conceived series of areas that connect the rear extension to the refurbished original.

"I like the way Karolien incorporates clean lines in her design work. The light elements and function work together with both practicality and shape. Everything has a connection and form that we really like," says Ms Riddle.

It's the practicality of the house married to its striking form that makes this a renovation standout.

Not only that but there's a sense of purpose and warmth to the areas; something that doesn't necessarily always gel when you're working from period to progressive.

Every room in the front section is finished in an elegant modern style. The main bedroom, for example, looks over the front garden and has



John Kilner, Lisa Riddle and sons Sam and Alex in front of the renovated area of their home.

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an excellent south wall of storage along with a sharp new ensuite opening to a small courtyard that connects to the rear. It acts as a primer for the introduction of light to the rest of the house.

The new bathroom and refurbished formal living room further along the hall are fine pieces of work. While the former brings the light through the space giving the already large area an even larger, brighter feel, the latter's large proportions are comfortably contained by sliding glass doors to the rear section, beautiful side windows and a sense of easy family comfort.

The new rear section houses the open-plan kitchen and dining area as well as a superb, light-filled study tucked away to the left.

This is a cracker of a space with a long rectangular window tracking the workspace from east to west and

throwing plenty of light as you work.

The kitchen is again another instructive piece of the architect's work. A floating line of cabinets hangs between two slips of light on the north wall, courtesy of more rectangular windows meaning everything is lit up. A double CaesarStone bench coolly delineates cucina from company over at the dining table. The whole area is squared off with large windows over the north and west to allow maximum light, warmth and airflow.

"It's wonderful in here," says Mr Kilner. "You feel like the light moves around the space and changes all the time."

Angling back and west is the family room, where the projected rooflines further enhance the feel of space and are smoothly finished with more high tracking windows and oblique ceiling lines.

From here anodised bi-fold doors open to a fine square deck that faces north and creates a flowing indoor/outdoor space that ranges back across the family room to the dining and kitchen areas.

On the other side of the deck is a room with its own bathroom to be used in future as an office, retreat or guest suite. The family room, deck and utility space present as a series of cubes — marking specific areas but with a flow to them.

Russet tones on the exterior cladding, along with the anodised steel, glass and anchoring beams, give the home an elemental, organic feel and rising elegantly over the extension the roof of the original section completes a terrific meeting of the lines.

John Kilner is *The Age's* education development manager.

The details

The brief: To overhaul the original section of the home and create a light-filled, flexible extension for a family of four.

Architect: Karolien Vanhee, Kneeler Design Architects, Collingwood.

Web: kneelerdesign.com.au

Phone: 9416 4544

Builder: Joseph Taouk, Delroy Constructions. Phone 9388 0322

Suburb: Alphington

Budget: Not disclosed

What we love



Kitchen: This beautiful heart of the home has been designed with function, form and light in mind. As Mr Kilner says, "It's a really easy place to be. I cook quite a bit and I love it in here."
Study: "One of our favourite rooms," says Ms Riddle of the sharp study. Everyone can fit in here and the light in the room makes it a great place to work."

