

SATURDAY

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Life's little luxuries

How a pair of empty nesters learned to live large in a compact house **12**



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Display Metricon's single-level Delta 26 has space for all **14**



Living and sleeping areas are all on one level with easy access to the backyard.

Meet the not-so-new neighbours

Moving next door proved the perfect opportunity for this couple to start again, writes **Robyn Willis**



Carefully planned built-in joinery in the dining room allows for display while maintaining an uncluttered look.

The dilemma facing this couple is one familiar to many empty nesters.

With their kids grown and out of the nest, they no longer needed such a big house, but they didn't want to knock it down.

They also loved their neighbourhood in Russell Lea in the inner west and had no desire to move away. Instead, they sold up to a young family and bought the house next door.

And then the real work began.

Upstairs, downstairs

Local architect Mark Szczerbicki understood that the house the couple required would need to be flexible but low maintenance.

With room for two storeys at the front and one at the back, he designed a three-bedroom house for the sloping site with all the living and sleeping accommodation on one level leading directly on to the backyard.

Underneath, he made the most of the sloping site, excavating for a rumpus room, lift, wine cellar and parking for three cars.

"The rumpus room works as a self-contained flat, because it has a bathroom so guests can come in and stay," he says. "The owners use it as a separate area for the grandkids so they can make a mess."

In the alfresco dining space upstairs, the laundry doubles as a bar when extended family come to visit.

"We tried to maximise the functionality of the spaces," he says. "The laundry has a sink and a bench and it operates as a bar for parties. "If you hide the washing machine out of view, it's a nice clear space. It's really about maximising the use of these rooms."

While the house is modest compared to many others in the area, Mark has paid close attention to detail so that the owners can enjoy everyday luxuries on a daily basis.

PROJECT

Owners

A pair of empty nesters with a large family

Architect

Mark Szczerbicki
markszczerbicki.com

The problem

A house that was too large for them in a street they loved

The site

A block in Russell Lea on a 3m slope from front to back

Design solution

Buy the house next door, knock it down and rebuild a low-maintenance home

How long did it take

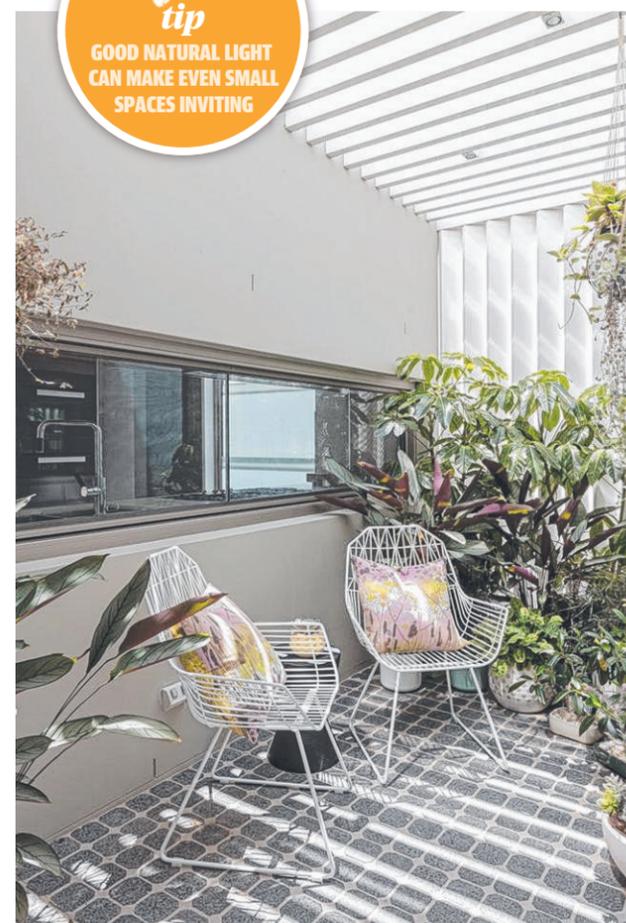
10 months



GOOD NATURAL LIGHT
CAN MAKE EVEN SMALL
SPACES INVITING



The compact backyard is a popular spot for relaxing and entertaining.



The kitchen is highly functional but has been designed to blend into the open-plan living area.



THE SOURCE

Builder Ferrocon, ferrocon.com.au **Tiles** Di Lorenzo Tiles, dilorenzo.com.au **Lighting** Gubi dining pendants from Cult, cultdesign.com.au; LED lighting from The Lighting Guild, lightingguild.org **Furniture** King Living, kingliving.com.au; Globe West, globewest.com.au **Fireplace** Gas flued unit from Real Flame, realflame.com.au **Joiner** New Age Joinery 0414 244 346

Bedrooms are simple but stylish with everyday luxuries built in.



"The idea was to maximise the personal luxuries like the walk-in robe and the generous ensuite," he says.

Starting from scratch

While his team did the interior design and fitout, leaving all your old things behind isn't realistic for many — so Mark designed for that.

"They had some nostalgic things they wanted to keep so we designed a few display cabinets for things like the crystal collection to integrate it into the design," he says.

One thing they did leave behind though, was their high energy bills.

"We went over and above with the environmental requirements, with a 10,000L rainwater tank under the driveway and solar panels that produce most of the energy for the house," he says. "There is also hydronic underfloor heating and a gas fireplace plus really good ventilation through the windows at the front of the house.

"Their energy bills are next to nothing compared to the old house."

Mark says this house was never about making a big architectural statement.

"I've had great feedback from people on the street — they are surprised that you can have a modern house that still looks 'homey,'" he says. "There's something warm and inviting about it. It's not trying to be cutting edge — it's softly integrating into the street."

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Pictures Tom Ferguson



From street level, it's a short run up the stairs to the living area. An internal lift next to the garage makes moving groceries upstairs easier.