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# INNER STRENGTH

Old meets new to striking effect in a former Sydney worker's cottage that has been reinvented as a spacious family home.

STORY *Chris Pearson* | STYLING *Alexandra Gordon* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Tom Ferguson*



**LIVING** An off-form concrete wall appeals to the engineer owner's love of the material. Valley sofa, Jordan. & Tradition 'Fly SC5' coffee table and 'Lato LN8' side table, both Cult Design. Shabargan rug, Hali. Missoni 'Alvaro 162' throw, Spence & Lyda. Kingston KS76 downlights, Tovo Lighting. Patagonia Alpha polished granite slab, Worldstone.

**EXTERIOR** Cedar cladding, Onsite Timber. Trim in Dulux Monument. Summit S660 natural gas barbecue, Weber.

## H&G HOUSES

**LIVING & Tradition**  
'Copenhagen SC14' floor lamp and 'Fly SC5' coffee table, Cult Design. Valley sofa and Kimbell 2 ceramic sculpture, Jordan. Alvar Aalto vase in Linen, Iittala. Resin bowl, Dinosaur Designs. Hekke Grande flooring, Tongue & Groove. GFRC outdoor dining table, Mitchell Bink Concrete Design. Cushions, Atelier Furniture. Exterior cladding in Dulux Monument.

### THIS IS THE LIFE

"This is a very social house," says owner Phil. "With the living area and kitchen in the middle, you can always see what's happening, and it connects seamlessly with the backyard." He and wife Kate spend many hours in the living room with their young son, Harrison. "We have the doors wide open, so the downstairs becomes a single indoor-outdoor, communal space." ▶

"You never feel you are inside or outside, but rather in one single space." PHIL, OWNER

THE LAYOUT

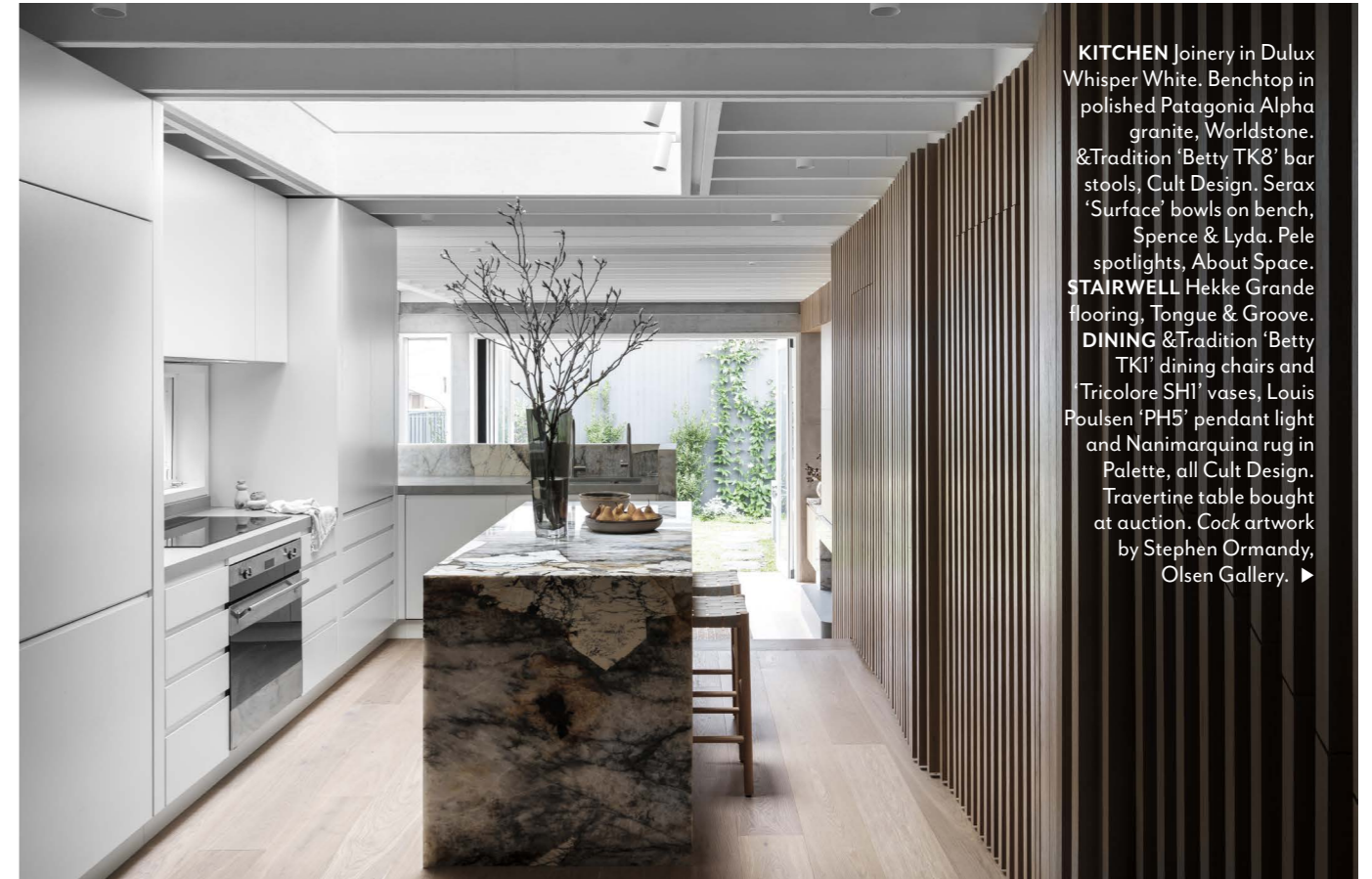


THE PALETTE

Dulux Monument  
(exterior cladding and trims)

Dulux Whisper White  
(kitchen joinery and walls)

Porter's Paints Grey Fox

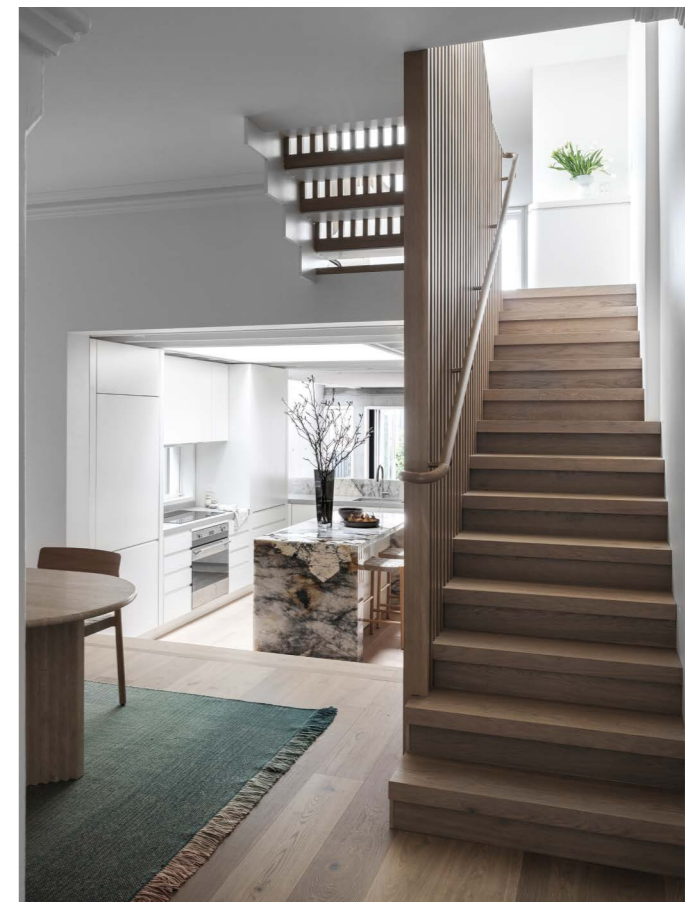


**KITCHEN** Joinery in Dulux Whisper White. Benchtop in polished Patagonia Alpha granite, Worldstone. &Tradition 'Betty TK8' bar stools, Cult Design. Serax 'Surface' bowls on bench, Spence & Lyda. Pele spotlights, About Space.

**STAIRWELL** Hekke Grande flooring, Tongue & Groove.

**DINING** &Tradition 'Betty TK1' dining chairs and 'Tricolore SH1' vases, Louis Poulsen 'PH5' pendant light and Nanimarquina rug in Palette, all Cult Design. Travertine table bought at auction. Cock artwork by Stephen Ormandy, Olsen Gallery. ▶

Paint colours are reproduced as accurately as printing processes allow.



**HARRISON'S BEDROOM** Bed, Mubu. Bedlinen, Cultiver. Wallpaper, Stories for Walls. Zanotta 'Teti' occasional table and &Tradition 'Flowerpot VP7' pendant light, Cult Design. Authentic Models mobile, Royal Design. Missoni cushion, Spence & Lyda. Cubebot wooden toy, MCA Store. **LANDING** Joinery by Joinery Hub in Dulux Whisper White. Gaspard vase, Maison Balzac. **BATHROOM** Vixel B34 glass mosaics, Artedomus. Terrazzo, Worldstone. Brodware 'City Stik' tapware, Candana. Juno bath towel, Jordan.



**L**ike Doctor Who's TARDIS, this three-bedroom one-time worker's cottage in Sydney's inner west grows bigger and bigger as you move through it. And it takes its owners, Phil and Kate and three-year-old Harrison, to exciting places. While it presents at the street as humble and compact, beyond the tessellated porch, it's a state-of-the-art family home with a sleek rear facade.

When the couple bought the property in 2019, location was its prime asset. "We like the grittiness of the area, but there are lots of young families too," says Phil. "And the house had a certain charm, despite additions that had bastardised it over the years."

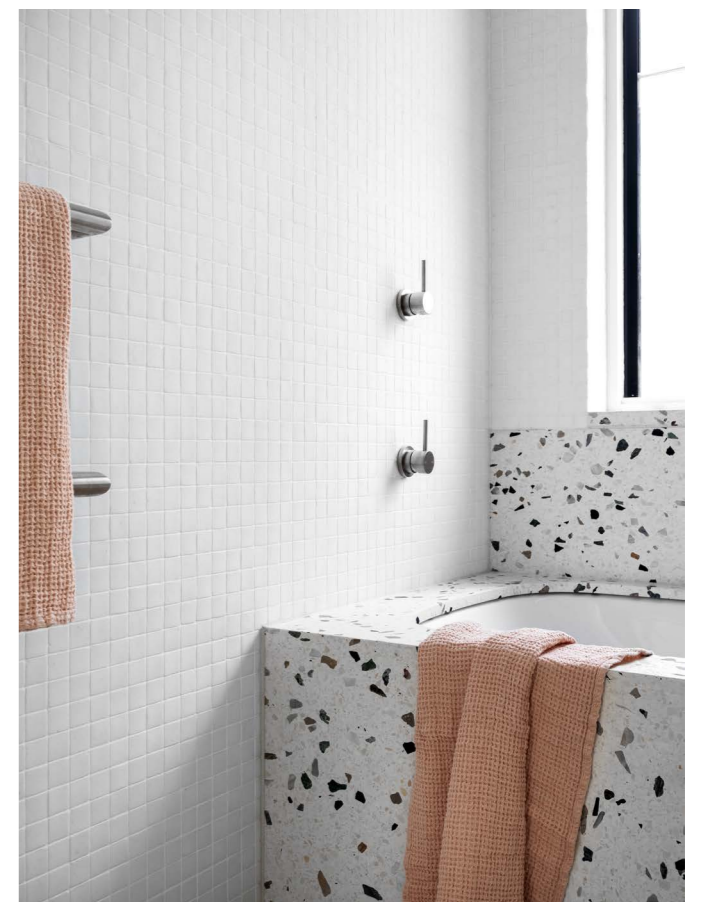
Enter architects Victoria D'Alisa and Alex Porebski of Porebski Architects, who were tasked with reimagining the clunky floor plan. "It was a single-storey cottage with an attic, in an awkward and dysfunctional L-shape layout," says Victoria. "Due to poor positioning of the laundry and bathroom, there was no relationship between living areas and the back garden."

The front section had been robbed of many heritage features - most jarringly, aluminium windows had sidelined the original sash windows - but, luckily, some features remained, such as an arch in the hallway, cornices, ceiling mouldings and, a later find, a fireplace boarded up in what would become the dining room.

"In a very open brief, Kate and Phil asked us to make full use of the site, with a home that provided generous living areas filled with light, along with three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a cellar/secret man cave," says Alex.

The couple had prepared a moodboard with earthy hues, splashes of blue-green and natural materials "for the emotions we wanted to garner", says Phil. Concrete is his passion - he works for an engineering firm - so it topped his wishlist. "I love its honesty, especially the industrial finish of off-form concrete. We also like curves, so we asked them to pop some of those in there, too."

Victoria and Alex demolished the awkward add-ons and created a new two-storey addition, abutting both side boundaries to optimise space. On the ground level, a hallway with a bedroom to the left leads to a dining area, both within the original cottage, while a kitchen, living area and courtyard step down beyond that. The design duo expanded the attic to create an entire storey, with two bedrooms and two bathrooms, connected by ▶





a hallway with a study. “The design takes advantage of the gradual landfall, creating a lovely transition of volumes as the house steps down from the street to the living area and garden,” says Victoria.

Embodying the curves and concrete the couple requested, a sinuous rounded upper storey in steel and slatted-timber sits atop a living room in structural off-form concrete. Internally, a circular skylight soaks the centre of the house in daylight, while another skylight highlights an off-form wall in the living area.

“The new addition sympathetically ties in with the original cottage, but the two are also clearly differentiated,” says Alex. “Cornices, skirtings and architraves were kept in the original areas, while the new addition uses more contemporary detailing, such as shadow-line reveals and flush shadow-line skirtings.”

Timber floors connect old and new, and from there the duo diverged into bold Patagonia Alpha granite, quartzite and terrazzo for the new section. “The palette is refined, but rich in texture,” says Victoria. Pattern is celebrated in the exposed beams and a screen of timber battens, which frames the staircase and morphs into a vertical slatted wall concealing the pantry and powder room.

The garden, by Ben Starr of Starr Landscapes, forms a harmonious whole with the house, both inside and out, with the centrepiece a curved off-form concrete bench, surrounded by olive and bay trees and vertical climbers.

Not surprisingly, the handsome off-form wall in the living area is a favourite element for concrete aficionado Phil. “And I love the flow of the house. You never feel you are inside or outside, but rather in one single space and always at the transition point of one to the other.” Another favourite would have to be the trapdoor in the living room leading to a wine cellar, aka Phil’s cherished man cave, which houses around 400 bottles and a widescreen TV.

“This house now speaks to our personalities so well and we could never leave,” says Phil.

*Porebski Architects, Chippendale, NSW; (02) 9310 1234 or porebskiarchitects.com.au. Starr Landscapes, Maroubra, NSW; starrlandscapesgroup.com. Pamment Projects, Mascot, NSW; pammentprojects.com.au.*

**MAIN BEDROOM & ENSUITE** After *The Rain* artwork by Marisa Purcell, Olsen Gallery. Bremworth ‘Untouched’ carpet in Calm, Carpeteria. Enna wall light, Enlightened Living. Verdi Cristallo hexagon mosaic floor and wall tiles, Worldstone. **EXTERIOR** Duomo Piccolo wall light, Nightworks Studio. Hay ‘Palissade’ bench, Cult Design. Tessellated tiles, Renditions Tiles. House painted Dulux Rottneest Island, front door painted Dulux Bottlebrush.



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## THE SOURCE

*Judicious use of Modernist-style elements brings a heritage home bang up to date.*



Produced by Nina Dorn.

1 & Tradition ‘Flowerpot VP7’ pendant light, \$900, Cult Design. 2 Passa interior wall light, \$89.95, Harvey Norman. 3 Australian House & Garden ‘Rhythms’ vase, \$39.95, Myer. 4 Ligne Roset ‘Agosto’ wool rug by Constance Frapolli (251x351cm), \$4450, Domo. 5 Flexform ‘Ascanio’ coffee table by Antonio Citterio, POA, Fanuli. 6 Elio cushion in Amaretti, \$86, L&M Home. 7 Bloomingville ‘Cian’ marble objets d’art, \$64.90/set of 3, Designstuff. 8 Juno Moon occasional chair, \$1675, Contents International Design. 9 Valero 3-seater sofa, \$6195, Coco Republic. For *Where to Buy*, see page 190. H&G