

NEW HOMES RENOVATION

'Bat cave' is now a light house

A range of techniques created brightness, writes **Jenny Brown.**

IT WAS the most difficult shell offered in the massive conversion of the Foy and Gibson warehouses on Oxford Street, behind Smith Street, in Collingwood. It sat untouched for years after every other eccentric space had been made over for residential use.

The 15-metre by eight-metre shell was at the back of the building and, because of a natural slope, was mostly subterranean. It had one three-metre-square window as a light source and, adding difficulty, a garage intruded into one corner.

Initially, says David Carabott, principal architect of Carabott Holt Architects, Collingwood, "it didn't have a lot of opportunity. We took it on as a challenge," he says. "The challenge was to retain volume, the groove of history and to create a groovy pad."

As is evident from the crisp black, white and silver "industrial palette" of the end product (a two or three-bedroom, two-bathroom laneway townhouse), "we had a lot of fun".

With the property only a stroll from the office, interior designers and other architects wandered in to suggest ways of tackling such an ostensibly problematic project.

The obvious solution was to use the seven-metre height and divide it



The garage is enclosed in clear glazing to cleverly create another light portal in a property that preserves its industrial feel.

into two shallow floors. But that would have killed the natural light.

"It would have made it into a bat cave," Carabott says. "The task was not to maximise floor space but to maximise the light penetration."

The trickier option was to hollow the core, cantilever a mezzanine box at the back and sink the main bedroom, en suite and walk-in wardrobe underneath an open mezzanine sitting area or "wintergarden" on the opposing wall.

The wintergarden partakes of the window and shares a glazed column

that illuminates the bedroom and bathroom beneath. It opens up to the air and strategic mirror placements and white walls bounce light.

Instead of banishing the garage from the picture, Carabott clear-glazed the garage walls and gained an extra light feed through a perforated roller door.

"I've always wanted a space where you can park your car in the lounge room," he quips. "We could have frosted the glass but we chose another chance to get light in."

Following the theme of industrial steel supports and red-brick walls, revealed by sandblasting away "300 coats of paint", the architect introduced more steel in angled stairway hand railings on the opposing stairways. The balustrades are clear glass — for the light.

Materials more often seen on exteriors became feature-wall cladding. The mezzanine bedrooms, which the owner has chosen to use as one big office, are within an overhanging box with a Ned Kelly slot window. It is clad in aluminium to reflect light. It also seems to hover, suspended over the heart of the apartment. As Carabott puts it: "Wrapped in cladding as a three-dimensional object. Like a sculpture in space."

One whole side wall is panelled to the high ceiling in white (again, to bounce light).

During the renovation, the number 893 was uncovered and Carabott replayed the numeral as a graphic installation. "It was part of the memory of the place," he says. "Plus, it was a cool idea."

While the big themes suggest industrial, the conversion also has hotel-level luxury. The bathroom, en suite and walk-in wardrobe in the low space under the garage are custom-designed to the light fittings that slot vertically into wardrobe joinery. White laminate cupboards and costly white Corian benches play to the light.

The real discovery is the butler's pantry, tucked away in the far back corner. "We really went to town with the storage," Carabott says. "It's one of the best kitchen arrangements we've ever done."

"It is designed so that when you're entertaining, all your dirty dishes can come back here."

The owner calls it "self-cleaning" and "the best preparation area". He travels and appreciates five-star conveniences.

With all the deft light play, it is surprising to see so much black in the decor.



The kitchen splashback is black. Portions of tiling are black and so are several of the ceilings.

Black in a light-challenged apartment?

"You can't go wrong with black and white," Carabott says.

"And we've started to use black for ceilings because you don't feel them so much if they are black."

He says the project's peculiarities "made us think outside the box. If we had failed to get the light right, it could have been a bomb."



Luxurious fittings have been used throughout.

Contact

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