



THE  SUNDAY AGE

# Living *by* design

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**The outdoors edition**

outside rooms ■ metal exteriors

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... and Jamie Durie's mission



# Metal as anything

New building materials are creating exciting options. Denise Ryan found four unusual creations

ABOVE: Louvers on the rear verandah of the all-metal extension serve as privacy barriers and sun shades. RIGHT: Bright, light and painted in white — natural light floods the stairway. PICTURES: BRANKIN SLATER & CRAIG SHELL

PORTRAIT (from left): EAT Architects' Eid Gah, Thomas Pai and Albert Mo.

ONCE UPON a time, brick was the main material of choice for house builders. But technology in the form of daring computer-aided designs and new building materials is changing the way we construct our homes.

Traditional building materials still make up the majority of exterior cladding but alternatives are finding favour.

According to a poll by Archicentre, the advisory arm of the Australian Institute of Architects, about 56% of exteriors are being done in weatherboard, either in combination with other materials or as stand-alone jobs. Brick veneer accounts for about 54%, solid brick about 26%, high-density foam cladding about 24%, concrete blocks more than 1% and reinforced concrete almost 2%. With extensions, glass accounts for 50-60% of north-facing walls.

But more adventurous architects are looking further afield, using steel and other metals to achieve eye-catching exteriors.

Metal was the cladding preference for the four sleek creations featured here. Architects Albert Mo and Clare Cousins faced the challenge of creating contemporary extensions in inner-city heritage



areas; David Carabott used distressed steel columns in his transformation of a Collingwood warehouse; and Paul Morgan crafted a visual delight on a difficult, remote site.

Mo, of EAT Architects, successfully grappled with heritage restrictions when designing a contemporary rear extension for a double-fronted Victorian house in Hawthorn. The heritage overlay meant any addition or renovation had to be unsighted from the street.

Mo created a new kitchen, living and dining room on the ground level at the rear, with a main





ABOVE: A steel canopy extends over the sweeping northern facade and acts as a temperature control for this house in the Strathbogrie Ranges. LEFT: The windows of the bedrooms are enclosed by curved timber louver screens. PICTURES: JOHN GOULINES

PORTRAIT: Architect Paul Morgan.

bedroom on the level above. "The good thing about metal is that it's heavy and structurally sound," he says. "You can use a minimum amount because it has such a large span. Because there is less structure, it reads as if it is lighter."

Another way to enhance a sense of lightness is to have most of the structural elements L-shaped. "It has a thin profile when seen straight on," Mo says.

Aluminium louvres have been used over the glass windows and also act as eaves to filter the northern sun. The louvres wrap around the side of the house, providing a privacy screen.

"The owners love it," Mo says. "The louvres create ever-changing light and shade throughout the day. As the sun moves, it creates shadows, producing graphical lines in the house."

Mo has watched steel prices rise about 30% in the past year.

"The client was very lucky," he says. "It would

be impossible to build this house with the same budget now."

Architect Paul Morgan has also witnessed a sharp rise in the price of steel.

"Builders will tell you it has gone up 56% recently, probably because China buys most of Australia's iron ore," he says.

This trend makes his firm's recent project, an inter-generational holiday house in the Strathbogrie Ranges, even more special. The striking curved frame of the house is metal, with timber louvres. Alucobond cladding has also been used.

The site, a paddock on the side of a hill on a large property, is two hours from Melbourne and had no power, water or road to the site. The three-bedroom house, plus bunk room, was built by the grandparents to share with their adult children and grandchildren.

"The needs of the grandchildren were foremost in the brief," Morgan says. "Goalposts were added to a flattened area used for entertaining, creating a mini football oval, such as you might find in the primary school of a country town."

The house's frame acts as an "environmental envelope" as it gives a high level of insulation.

Sustainable features include steel framing >



ABOVE: In time, the pleated, copper sheeting cladding – initially coloured a raw pink/orange – will oxidise to a deep brown.  
 TOP RIGHT: The double-sided gas fire (behind the lamp) helps heat the living room and warm the decked, outdoor eating area at the side.  
 PICTURES: SHANNON ACRANH

POURTRAIT: Architect Clare Cousins.



around the roof wind scoops, which purge hot air in summer and also allow cooler air to circulate, minimising the need to use the reverse-cycle air-conditioners.

The living rooms, oriented to the north, are sunny but the eaves reduce the heat. Each room has cross ventilation and is designed to allow natural light.

Architect Clare Cousins chose steel for its dramatic effect in a rear extension of a family house in Middle Park. The extension includes a second-storey landing, which acts as a play area, and a roof terrace to provide further outdoor play space as the ground area is limited.

Cousins says the clients expressed interest in a metal cladding, with Cor-ten rusted steel considered. But copper sheeting was eventually chosen for its patina, and for the way it changes over time.

When first installed, it is a raw pinky/orange, which can “shock the neighbours ... and the client”, Cousins says.

Within six months the copper oxidises to a deeper brown. “We started looking at how we could manipulate the thin sheeting to create a concertina look, which resulted in the custom-made folded pattern,” she says.

The copper facade also acts as a “fringe, or skirt”, she says. Because the upper level has a larger footprint, it acts as an awning, providing shade. “It also creates a beautiful light and shade effect when the sun hits it in the afternoon.”

The clients were nervous at first, she says, but after examining computer and cardboard models, they took a “leap of faith” and were “thrilled with the finish”.

Metal was also used in the deck roof, and colorbond metal cladding was used on the boundary walls.

Cousins has also noted the rising cost of copper since the project was completed in April. She says it has always been an expensive metal but is low-maintenance, long-lasting and creates a feature for the house.

As the house is in a heritage zone, Cousins, as did Albert Mo, had to make sure the contemporary extension could not be seen from the front of the house. “It is a laneway surprise,” she says.

Carabott Holt Architects didn’t have to supply



the wonderful raw steel for their recent project in Collingwood. Their conversion of a warehouse in the former Foy & Gibson building used the existing distressed steel columns.

“We took our lead from them,” architect David Carabott says. “They had the original ‘Made in England’ stamps so we decided to use them as a sculptural element in the space.”

New charcoal-coloured steel beams have also been used in this conversion into a three-bedroom apartment with two bathrooms and two open-plan living zones, one at mezzanine level. Along with the main kitchen, a butler’s kitchen is tucked out of sight. Also hidden is a wine cellar of blackened glass and steel racks at the end of the staircase.

The other apartments in the building have a



standard entrance but this property can also be accessed from the rear lane, providing an unusual scenario – the car-parking space, behind a glazed wall, is visible from the living room.

The stairs have a central steel stringer, and the handrail on the stairs refers to the rugged steel used elsewhere. Alucobond cladding, which is normally applied externally, was used to clad the silver box in the space, providing a connection to the brick wall, steel and concrete of the exterior.

The numbers 893 have been spray-painted on the wall of the original unit. They refer to the street address, 8/93 Oxford Street.

"We took the memory of that and reinterpreted it as a super-graphic on the wall," Carabott says. The numbers are back-lit and there is a cut-out for a television screen to sit in the number 3.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The building's number has been turned into a graphic visual, factoring an inset for a television screen in the "3", and glazed glass ensures the car can be seen from the mezzanine level; the handrail and stairway reflect the rugged use of steel visible throughout the renovation; the ground-floor opens up living zone. **PICTURES: RHIANON SLATER**

**PORTRAIT:** David Syles and David Carabott of Carabott Holt Architects.

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