

# INDUSTRIAL ART

Carabott Holt Architects has transformed an underground warehouse into a cleverly realized home that retains the bite of its industrial past.

Story by Matthew O'Connor Photography by Rhiannon Slatter



PREVIOUS PAGES: A butler's pantry is concealed behind the main kitchen, liberating the open-plan living and dining space from the usual kitchen clutter. THESE PAGES, ABOVE: An oversized wall graphic references the warehouse's industrial past. OPPOSITE: The formal lounge on the second level looks over the double-height main volume. A glazed garage alongside becomes a showcase for prized automobiles.

**THERE IS AN OLD SAYING** that I've always enjoyed hearing: "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." A literal reading would suggest that this is mostly correct – the ear is indeed one of the more unusual body parts. Conversely, a silk purse brings to mind shiny and compact and functional and beautiful. The impossibility of one being transformed into the other seems fairly logical.

Architects and designers, though, have actively defied this saying for generations. The right of passage for many architects during the early years of practice (especially in Melbourne with its extensive manufacturing history) is the warehouse or factory conversion project, whereby large, dirty, raw, brick-walled spaces with no ventilation or natural light must become beautiful and functional spaces for humans to comfortably inhabit.

Initially, this Collingwood warehouse conversion by Carabott Holt Architects accurately fitted that description of compromised space. It is actually underground, with the only natural light from windows about four metres above ground level, on one wall. From the outset, this project brief would never have mentioned "Maximize the views," nor would it request "Concertina doors to the courtyard." The brief was more likely to have noted, "Do your best with this large, rectangular underground space which happens to be about six metres high with only one set of windows that look directly onto the street." And do their best they did.

When you can't look out, you must look in. These spaces are good to be in. They are dramatic, internalized spaces, they form well-ordered volumes where the luxury comes not necessarily from extravagant finishes, but from generous and accessible spaces – not the least of which is the main double-height space that is the centerpiece of the design. The designer has allowed this space to remain bold and free, avoiding any compromise that would be caused by excessive division or over-maximization of the potential floor area. The hand of experienced design is at work here.

There is a boldness in this project. It is a style that is sadly lacking in much mainstream house design, especially from the past. The generosity of space is just the first in a series of bold gestures that define this project. The simple design decision to avoid dividing the space horizontally into two full floors gives the warehouse an expansive feel.

A second factor that contributes to the distinctive character of the space is the oversized graphic that runs across the entire living space. It reads "8/93" – the number of the warehouse shell when it was purchased. These numerals were sprayed on the wall by the builders to identify the space. The architect chose to reference this earlier life of the building by including a contemporary version of the same numbers. The stencilled three-metre-high characters evoke a playful feel. It is a simple design idea, but it adds vigour to the project.

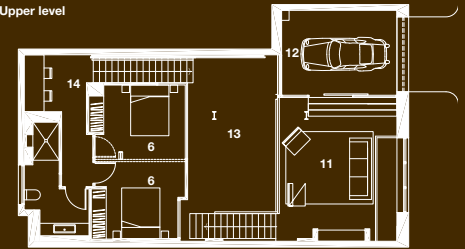
This sportive spirit is evidenced too in the glazed garage that



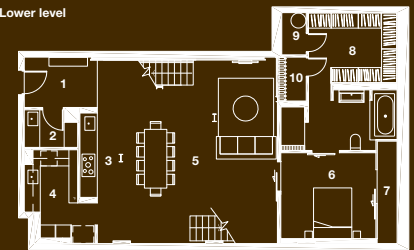


- 1 Entry
- 2 Laundry
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Butler's pantry
- 5 Living/dining
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Light well
- 8 Walk-in robe
- 9 Store
- 10 Wine cellar
- 11 Formal lounge
- 12 Garage
- 13 Void
- 14 Study

Upper level



Lower level



**They form well-ordered volumes where the luxury comes not necessarily from extravagant finishes, but from generous and accessible spaces.**

OPPOSITE: The double-height living space forms the centrepiece of the project. The cantilevered bedrooms on the eastern edge employ windows and louvers to borrow light from the warehouse's only natural light source on the opposite wall.



**ABOVE:** Beside the master bedroom, the ensuite leads past a small wine cellar to a walk-in robe. **OPPOSITE:** Rough-hewn materials have been used throughout. Open-tread stairs lead up from the main living space to the bedrooms, bathroom and study.

nestles alongside the formal lounge. It becomes an ideal vitrine for the sunshine-hued Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera that crouches within, a shrine to big boy's toys.

With only one wall of windows, the brief would undoubtedly have read, "Maximize all available natural light." To do this, the architect has employed another strong gesture, stretching this single light source throughout the space. The light that floods the main bedroom and ensuite on the ground floor is tunnelled down a light void from the window at street level above. It is over four metres in length and about a metre wide. This clear glazed space is very successful in punching light into the private spaces on the lower level. It integrates a secluded courtyard space as part of the bedroom.

Simple but well resolved, the light well succeeds in three ways. First, it lights up an underground space in a subtle manner, without obviously revealing its function. As it runs the full length of the bedroom, you don't really notice it's there. Second, it creates a sense of depth – diffused by glazed sliding screens, the light transforms the interior into an open and abundant space, rather than a dark and compressed basement. Third, the void expands the lower bedroom with a versatile installation area. Separated from the bedroom by a floor-to-ceiling wall of glass, the light well adds a certain spaciousness to what could have otherwise been a compromised bedroom. It is both flexible and practical – one resident might envisage it as a gallery; another might see an

internal garden come to life.

The last brush manoeuvre that invigorates this space is the lower-level butler's pantry. I must confess to not having a butler myself – but that's not to say that this kitchen setup can't work without one. The concept is certainly appropriate for open-plan spaces – when the rush of dirty dishes from a three-and-a-half course meal coincides with the fourth glass of wine and a dessert with brandy custard, it's hardly the point at which you, as host, should start scraping the dishes in front of the guests you are trying to impress. So, what could be better than stashing all the soiled gear in the butler's pantry adjacent to the main kitchen and then getting straight back to your pudding? The dishes can be done by the butler – or failing that, you can confront them in the morning during the hangover haze. I can see the practicality of this solution, and I am told that the owner deems the arrangement a definite success.

And perhaps that's what makes this project charming – it succeeds despite some fairly challenging initial conditions. The architect's use of bold elements – generously proportioned volumes, free of unnecessary division; daring graphic elements that lend the project a sense of fun; an artfully conceived light well that channels light into the lower level; a superbly practical butler's pantry to eliminate kitchen clutter – speaks of an intelligent approach to residential transformation. The finished project might not be a silk purse, but it's still shiny, compact, beautiful and functional. **H**



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**PRACTICE PROFILE**  
 The practice engages in a broad range of work including residential, commercial, interiors, retail, hospitality and urban design masterplanning.

**PROJECT TEAM**  
 Jamie Carabott, David Carabott, David Sydes

**BUILDER**  
 Fynan Construction

**CONSULTANTS**  
 Engineer John Brock  
 Lighting Space Furniture

**PRODUCTS**  
**Internal walls** Feature Alucobond cladding; acrylic translucent panels; Evener 'Urban' Veneer (bedroom feature wall) **Windows** White translucent louvre windows (bedroom); Clipsal C-Bus electric opening windows and blinds **Doors** Designer Doorware; Light Blocks Snow sliding door (living/dining) **Flooring** Stained oak Edwardstown Carpet; Petwiler **Lighting** Foscarini pendant **Kitchen** Polished concrete benchtop; honed and sealed; Frankie undermount sinks; Blanco ss oven, cooktop and integrated recessed rangehood; Reace tapware; glass splashback; gloss laminate finish to cupboards; integrated Miele coffee machine and microwave; Blanco dishwasher; CaesarStone benchtop **Bathroom** Reace tapware; Rogerseller walk-in tub basin and bottle tray; Corian vanity; recessed mirror cabinets; stepless shower with integrated ss grater; black gloss wall tiles; Reace bath (ensuite); Corian bath surround (ensuite) **Climate control** Ducted r/c heating and cooling **Other** Bosch alarm system; integrated steel wine racks; Simplicity 1800 open gas fireplace with black honed granite surround (formal living)

**FLOOR AREA**  
 220.4 m<sup>2</sup>

**PROJECT COST**  
 \$300,000

**TIME SCHEDULE**  
 Design, documentation 3 months  
 Construction 8 months