

# Carlton House by Tom Robertson Architects

• MELBOURNE, VIC •

Drawing on existing constraints and opportunities, this renovation to a nineteenth-century terrace house has transformed a “cramped and dark” space into a home that works perfectly for its owners.

Words by Sarah Hurst  
Photography by Derek Swalwell  
Styling by Bec Sheppard

 2 (couple)

 1 +1 flexible room

 1 +1 powder room

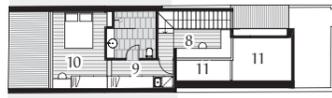
 Site: 89 m<sup>2</sup>  
Floor: 104 m<sup>2</sup>

 Design: 9 mths  
Build: 10 mths

 \$4,400 per m<sup>2</sup>



01 The back three-quarters of the house have been rebuilt as a double-height volume, broken up by a “floating box.”  
Artwork: Derek Swalwell.



**First floor 1:400**



**Ground floor 1:400**



**Sections 1:400**

- |                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1 Entry         | 7 Courtyard |
| 2 Flexible room | 8 Study     |
| 3 Kitchen       | 9 Laundry   |
| 4 Pantry        | 10 Bedroom  |
| 5 Dining        | 11 Void     |
| 6 Living        |             |

The challenge in renovating can sometimes present in the form of latent conditions; unknown, unexpected and often challenging elements of an existing structure that go unnoticed until walls, ceilings and floors begin to be pulled away.

The owners of Carlton House in Melbourne's Carlton bought the home seventeen years ago and the possibility of problematic existing conditions made their eventual need to re-model it overwhelming. The owners described the existing house as "cramped and dark," and their brief to Tom Robertson, director of Tom Robertson Architects, was to create "space for [our] two dogs, light for us, and a house that did what we wanted it to." On a site landlocked by Victorian terraces, drawing light into the rear east-facing elevation of the house became fundamental to the way the new works were planned.

In its original, un-renovated state, Carlton House presented to the street as a two-storey nineteenth-century terrace. At the rear of the eighty-nine-square-metre site, the house had been incrementally added to as a single level, with a kitchen wedged in to abut an existing outhouse. Pushed to the east-facing boundary, these resulting ground-floor programs were competing for light with the living room, which sat much deeper within the plan. Ceilings slung below a low roof line of the single level further impeded light entering the ground-floor living spaces, with the only promise of sun being drawn into the living room as a sliver of light at the end of a long and narrow external walkway.

As a two-storey terrace at the front, the house previously comprised one upstairs and one downstairs bedroom, and a ground-floor bathroom, kitchen and living room. With only the main bedroom located on the second level, the sequence of spaces below were cramped and disjointed, and as such the need to replan these spaces was crucial to the overall success of the house.

The design for the new works saw the back three quarters of the house demolished and rebuilt as a double-heighted volume, with a "floating box" in the space. Between the dark zinc panels of the new eastern facade and the lane boundary beyond, a small external courtyard was created with the purpose of providing a previously unachievable outdoor terrace, as well as giving space to the new six-metre-tall facade through which natural light could now be drawn into the ground-floor living spaces.



**02**

**03**



**02** An upstairs study nook helps to create a private haven while maintaining a connection with the spaces below.

**03** From the ground floor, the second level appears as a sequence of volumes balanced over the kitchen and stair.



04

**04** A black benchtop has been left as a large, functional surface, ideal for a “foodie” client.



05

**05** The luxurious ensuite is a “marvel of delicate grey terrazzo,” illuminated by the skylight above.



**06** The new eastern facade is clad in dark zinc panels and is set back from the laneway boundary to allow for a small courtyard.

The existing northern and southern boundary walls abutting the adjoining terraces were inspected in preparation for the new works and found to be brittle at points. With concerns about the existing conditions not being able to support the proposed second level, the new structure was modified to suit the existing conditions, with steel framing introduced to stiffen the walls and support the floor above. From the ground-floor living area, looking into the second-floor mezzanine, the new steel framing reads as a single black beam puncturing the floating white surfaces overhead, and is a reminder of the existing house and its limitations.

From the ground floor, the second level appears as a sequence of volumes balanced over the kitchen and stair. Now with a larger footprint, the main bedroom maintains its original location while a new ensuite and its entry are concealed within a wall of black-stained timber. Behind the dark timber lining the ensuite is a marvel of delicate grey terrazzo and skylight, through which hues of blue sky and sunlight illuminate the inboard room. A laundry and study nook also find their place on the second level and help to create a private

haven while maintaining visual connections to the spaces below.

The ground floor required careful re-planning to ensure the four-metre-wide footprint was efficiently and thoughtfully arranged. In a bold move, Tom proposed the second bedroom at the front of the house be dedicated as a wine store and home theatre, to allow the clients to entertain across the entire ground floor. A self-confessed “foodie,” the client took particular care and interest in designing the kitchen and dining space with Tom to suit his specific needs and desires. A large cooktop with two ovens underneath are located against the back wall of the kitchen, leaving the bench as a large, functional surface of black porcelain. A pantry is tucked neatly behind the kitchen, while further storage cupboards can be found under the stair.

Drawing on existing constraints and opportunities, Tom Robertson Architects has created a home that is in many ways markedly different to the dwelling’s original form, yet sensitive to its context and maintaining a certain character we’ve come to expect and enjoy from this period of Australian domestic architecture. 🏠

#### **Architect**

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#### **Project team**

Tom Robertson, David Ascroft

#### **Builder**

Dimpat

#### **Consultants**

**Engineer:** HTD Consultants

#### **Products**

**Roofing:** Lysaght Klip-Lok in Colorbond ‘Monument’; Lysaght Custom Orb sheeting in Colorbond ‘Surfmist’

**External walls:** Unitex Fast-R render in ‘White Swan’; VM Zinc Anthra-Zinc Plus in ‘Dark Charcoal’; steel-plate hoods in Dulux micaceous iron oxide in ‘Natural Grey’; Dulux ‘Natural White’ and ‘Black’

**Internal walls:** Gyprock plasterboard in Dulux ‘Natural White’; Signorino terrazzo tiles in ‘Monte Carlo,’ honed; Woven Image Echopanel 101; pine V-groove lining boards in Dulux semi-gloss ‘Black Spur’; penny round ceramic mosaic tiles in ‘Matt White’ from De Fazio Tiles and Stone

**Windows:** Rylock aluminium frames

**Doors:** Rylock aluminium exterior door frames; internal doors in Dulux Aquanamel semi-gloss in ‘Natural White’

**Flooring:** Signorino terrazzo tiles in ‘Monte Carlo,’ honed; penny round ceramic mosaic tiles in ‘Matt White’ from De Fazio Tiles and Stone; Blackbutt flooring and stair treads

**Lighting:** IBL Dark trimless downlights, Prolicht Invader downlights, Nocturnal Glider wall light, Molto Luce wall light and Tal Micro Scoop wall light, all from Light Project

**Kitchen:** Kubus kitchen sink; Astra Walker Icon+ tapware in ‘Matt Black’; Hettich hideaway bins in ‘Arctic White’; Maximum porcelain

benchtops in ‘Moon’ and ‘Taxos,’ honed; Laminex laminate joinery in ‘Natural White’ and ‘Natural Black’; Dulux 2-pac in ‘Black Spur’ and ‘Natural White’

**Bathroom:** Falper Scoop and Lavamani washbasins in ‘White’; Astra Walker Icon+ tapware, shower and towel hooks in ‘Matt Black’ and ‘Matt White’; Vitra Nest toilet pan; Peak toilet button and in-wall cistern; Radiant heated towel rail

**Heating and cooling:** Fujitsu split-system airconditioning

**External elements:** Blackbutt timber decking

**Other:** Made by Morgen furniture; tensile stainless steel mesh balustrade, powdercoated