



Internal landscape

Shoehorned into a laneway on a tight city site, this house and artist's studio look inwards to a restful courtyard and a forest of green

Introducing new structures to a restricted space might seem like enough of a task for an architect. Then there is the need for everything to feel light, spacious and open.

This new home by architect Stephen Rofail involved repurposing a six metre-wide laneway, together with an existing studio, both at the rear boundary of a residential property. In this space the owners wanted a two-bedroom, light-filled residence looking back to the main house, and a new self-contained artist's studio.

"The tricky shape and limited footprint greatly informed the design," Rofail says.



Above left: Reminiscent of a Japanese courtyard house, this house with a linked studio comprises three gabled pavilions and a two-storey corner elevation, seen to the rear of this image.

Legend: 1 original home, 2 central courtyard, 3 new pavilion-style home, 4 pool and deck, 5 studio.

Left: The thin-edged steel awning to the dining room tapers the built form gently into its garden setting.



Above: The living room in the new two-bedroom house looks across the tropical backyard to the existing home. This space is open to the kitchen and dining area to the left. Sliding doors open up these areas to the outdoors. Clerestory windows in the gabled roof ends have louvres that help control the heat.

“To create a degree of separation from the rear and side boundaries, and provided views to the lush trees in the central rear yard, rather like a Japanese courtyard house.”

The Japanese house concept lies behind several other aspects of the design. The linked home and studio form a series of gabled pavilions with steeply raked ceilings and clerestory windows.

“Breaking the new house into pavilions plays down its size and nestles the home into its urban forest landscape,” says the architect.

“Walls of glass sliding doors mean owners or guests can step from the dining room or living spaces straight into the courtyard setting. When all the doors are drawn back, the interiors and outdoors become one.”

Another connection is provided by the exposed beams and rafters in the raked ceiling – their branch-like forms echo the trees outside, says Rofail.

Despite the separated roof forms of the house, the interior is open plan. Both the dining room and living room alongside open to the courtyard garden.



The two-storey section of the house, on the rear and side boundaries, accommodates the master suite upstairs and a guest bedroom and bathroom downstairs.

The house is built with an on-ground slab, masonry walls and timber roof framing. The glazed openings to the living and dining area, as well as the artist’s studio, are supported by steel portal frames. V-groove lining boards were used for the external cladding of the first floor master suite and all the interior ceiling lining and exterior soffit lining.

Rofail says texture and detail were important

to maintain the serene feeling of a forest retreat. Given the natural outlooks, the house is finished in a rich stained cedar and earthy paint colours. An aged oak floor runs right through the home, which is another nod to the setting.

“Part of the brief for the new house was to optimise natural ventilation and this style of architecture allowed us to do that,” says Rofail. “As hot air rises, it is released through the open louvres in the upper windows, which in turn draw in cooler air from below. At the same time, the clerestory windows and high eaves allow maximum natural light to penetrate.”

Above: The large kitchen is set close to the dining and living areas. The interior design is generally natural and understated without being minimalist. Feature detailing includes the Venetian glass mosaic tile splashback and V-groove doors on the cabinetry, echoing the exterior cladding. The room straight ahead at the end of the hall is the ground floor guest bedroom, in the two-storey section of the home.



Just as the courtyard separates the old house from the new, a central deck and pool provide an internal division between the two-storey private section of the new house and the self-contained artist's studio. Here again, the facades are oriented to face each other. The studio has the same gabled roof form and wall of sliding glass doors as the house, ensuring this working space is also light-filled and airy.

The entry to the secondary yard and studio from the main courtyard is through an old brick wall. This was retained from the original structure – Rofail says he was keen to incorporate

what he could of the old into the new. To the right of the entry, a protruding wall shows the position of the staircase inside the home. This element is finished in Mini Orb, creating a contrasting feature surface. The sleek corrugated iron facing also echoes the lines of the V-groove panels on the cladding and eaves, as does the timber decking around the pool.

"Despite the rather tight footprint, and urban high-density surroundings, this design achieves a sense of privacy and spaciousness by turning inward, with the public spaces looking to the leafy heart of the property," says Rofail.

Facing page: The two-storey section of the home echoes the roof forms of the pavilions. A linear accent is carried through on the exterior rafters, cladding, window louvres, balustrade and timber decking.

Above: The brick facade of the original studio was retained and incorporated into the new design.

Architect and interior designer:

Stephen Rofail RAlA, Stephen Rofail
Architect (Glebe, NSW)

Builder: Redwood Projects

Kitchen manufacturer: A-Plan Kitchens

Cladding and ceiling lining: Painted
treated V-groove lining boards

Roofing: Colorbond, Custom Orb,
Woodland Grey

Doors and windows: Custom, cedar-
framed, by Redwood Carpentry

Flooring: Aged rustic oak by Havwoods

Lighting: LED uplights and downlights
by Tovo Lighting; LED Studio gallery
track lights by Archilux

Fireplace: Lopi Republic from
Abbey Fireplaces

Pool: Barrier Reef Pools

Cabinetry: Polyurethane

Benchtops: Corian, by SCF Interiors

Splashback: Venetian glass mosaic
tiles from Di Lorenzo

Sink: Franke Neptune Plus from
Reece Bathroom Life

Mixer: Aquaport 3-way mixer from
Tru Water Filters

Oven, cooktop and rangehood:
Omega

Dishwasher: Fisher & Paykel

Appliance supplier: Winning
Appliances

Story by Charles Moxham

Photography by Katherine Lu

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Right: The new artist's studio also
has a gabled roof. This building
sits along the rear boundary of the
property. A second internal courtyard
separates the studio from the new
house, and contains the pool and
warm-toned grey ironbark decking.

