



WORDS
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DREAM

Sixty years after its creation,
this modest mid-century house's
hopes have finally been fulfilled.

HOME

PHOTOGRAPHY
Derek Swalwell

Most renovations of heritage homes aim to restore them to their former glory. The revamp of this mid-century-modern property went one better, reimagining it through the lens of the original architect's probable inspiration to achieve its unrealised dreams.

Located in the bayside Melbourne suburb of Frankston, the house was conceived in 1963 by architect/famous footballer Jack Clarke, a director of the Small Homes Service project launched in 1947, which offered Melburnians an economical way to build humble but well-designed family homes from a range of architectural plans. Only 49 homes were to be built in Victoria from any one plan, so each was relatively unique, all in all an appealing prospect at a time when post-war optimism was exerting a strong influence on home design and quality of life, while the car was defining cities, allowing them to expand.

Modest yet undeniably special, this three-bedroom abode was built for Jack's structural engineer and his wife, who brought up six kids in it. The new owners were thrilled to find themselves in possession of such rare heritage and as they prepared to welcome their first child, sought to preserve it for the future. Their architect, Melbourne-based Kiwi Antony Martin of MRTN Architects, had loftier goals.

Likely due to the simple building techniques and limited materials >

RIGHT MRTN collaborated with landscape architects SBLA, sharing with them the West Coast/Palm Springs narrative they'd created, which SBLA then translated to the outdoors. The updated garden includes a lawn to the west with raised planting and a semicircular wall, and a pergola-covered outdoor terrace in the north, which looks out towards the street, creating a public-private interface that allows interaction with the neighbourhood — a hallmark of retro suburban bliss. Australian natives feature heavily in the planting, sculptural ones that relate somewhat to cacti and other plants you'd see in California.

THE PROJECT

Antony Martin of MRTN Architects renovated this three-bedroom home in Melbourne's Frankston for a couple and their baby daughter.

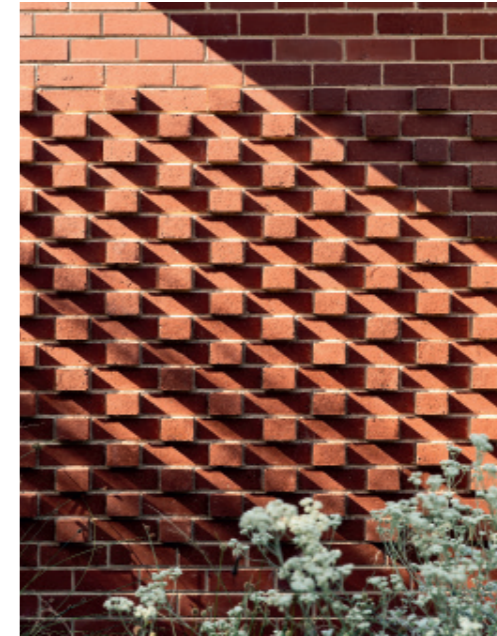


available in the '60s, the home was quite utilitarian (comparison can be drawn to the work Group Architects were doing in New Zealand at the same time), and featured defining Small Homes Service characteristics such as very efficient spaces and use of materials, and the celebration of the car through the carport. But Antony sensed there was an aspiration to the ultra-rational plan that connected it to examples of mid-century architecture in California, where there was a richer palette. Backed by this thinking, the reference point for the renovation became photos taken in the 1950s and '60s by late US photographer Julius Shulman, known for his documentation of West Coast architecture.

“We realised Jack might have been familiar with the same photographs but not had access to the resources they'd have had on those projects, so for us, as well as setting up the house for the clients and safe-guarding it for the next 60 years, it became a story of continuing the original intention of the planning while using materials that are available now,” says Antony. “It was a very different brief to the usual alterations and additions. Instead, we had to try to address the problems in the design, then introduce some materiality into it.”

While bridging the gap between past and future, they even managed to unearth Jack's drawings, which came with a nice surprise. “We didn't have >

RIGHT An element that's crucial for Antony on any project is the floor. “We're in constant contact with it, so it's key,” he says. “I was very interested in Japanese terracotta tiles, and terracotta's great because although it's man-made, it does have quite natural characteristics because the clays turn different colours depending on how they're fired in the kiln. The Inax Fabe Re tiles from Artedomus we found have beautiful reds, purples, browns and black in them.”



ABOVE Antony says he likes the inherent contradiction in this house. “It's a very modest family home, which is good — it's the size we should still be planning homes today. But there's also this big, heroic gesture of the carport [seen on the previous pages] and the entry and arrival [above]. I love that it does that, that celebration of the house and coming home. I also appreciate the timeless appeal of really rational planning. When you do a house of this size, because it isn't spacious, the garden is important and plays into how you appreciate the house.” In fact, a lot of the photos the team were referencing saw people entertaining on their outdoor terraces, “which became useful, because this house has a lot of those mid-century-modern California characteristics but didn't do that one key thing, so that was where we started to look at where we might make impactful change,” says Antony.

IT'S A LONG WAY FROM MELBOURNE TO PALM SPRINGS, BUT WHAT THEY HAVE IN COMMON IS THEIR CLIMATE.

his plan during our design phase, but we got hold of it during construction, and it was fascinating because we'd guessed at the intention and those assumptions were proven correct," says Antony. "It was great and validated some of the things we'd chosen to remove — including a few changes that had been made in the '70s, '80s and '90s — and some we'd chosen to retain."

A key idea for Antony and his team was to alter the footprint and outward appearance of the home as little as possible. The resulting addition of only two new spaces — an ensuite inside and a terrace outside — meant a lot of this project's magic happened behind the scenes. This was something that impressed the Australian Institute of Architects, who presented MRTN with the John and Phyllis Murphy Award for their work, in part due to the admirable "suppression of ego" about it.

"There were a lot of things that were really difficult yet are completely non-apparent," says Antony. "There's no glory in repitching the roof! But I did a lot of work on that and had to get it just right."

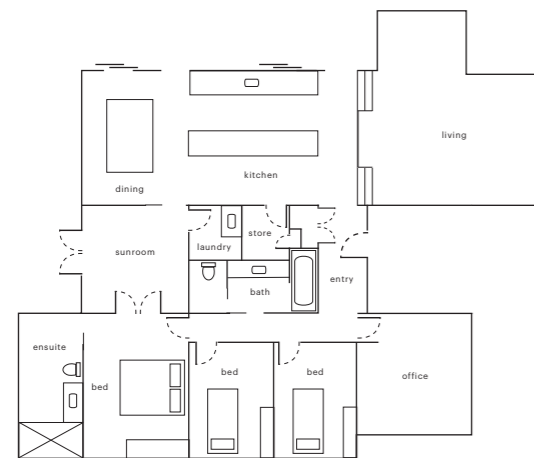
Along with pushing the south wall of the bedroom wing out to the line of the original eaves, this task extended the size and ceiling height of the sleep spaces. The renovation also saw the dining, living and kitchen areas rearranged, and the kitchen rotated so it faces outside >



ABOVE There was a geometry to the home that the update related to. The roof plan is essentially a square and then the living wing and the bedroom wing are rectangles, so Antony added the triangular terrace to the north, and SBLA created the outdoor garden with the semicircle to the west. The colour and material palette similarly started with the house's original elements — and then there's the pink carpet, Supertuft Escape Velour in Sophia, something Antony introduced and one of the homeowners set her heart on, to the point of getting the dye specially commissioned after they discovered it had been discontinued. The walls throughout the house are in Dulux Remuera.



ABOVE Although the nature of the light in the house remains the same, the windows throughout have been upgraded from the original Stegbar versions (classics produced in collaboration with architect Robin Boyd of the Small Homes Service scheme). The homeowners already had some mid-century furniture they were happy to unite with a house from the same era. In the living space are a vintage chair from Angelucci 20th Century, a 1965 sofa by Kai Lyngfeldt Larsen for Søren Willadsen, a 1952 Nelson Saucer Bubble pendant light by George Nelson and a vintage coffee table from Danish Red. The *Gaagal* No. 5 artwork is by Otis Hope Carey and the *Inside Feelings* sculpture is by Tessy King. On the opposite page are a vintage daybed and footstool.



ABOVE One of the homeowners is a trained chef and passionate cook, so improving the kitchen was a priority. Rotating it to face north, Antony did away with the idea of an island and instead integrated the main bench into the wall below the north-facing window (pictured opposite). In American black walnut veneer, the central cabinets aren't full height, so the character of the roof with its central black ridge beam is maintained. "We've designed a couple of kitchens for chefs' homes and love it because they're not concerned with size," says Antony. "They don't need a big kitchen — they want it to be treated as a social space where everyone can be involved or at least see the action, and they want quality equipment." The appliances here include a cooktop, ovens, a warming drawer and a dishwasher by Miele, and an integrated fridge by Fisher & Paykel. **TOP LEFT** In the dining space, a 1970s Semi pendant light by Fog & Mørup hangs above a 1960s drop-leaf dining table by Børge Mogensen for Søborg Møbelfabrik, teamed with 1960s No. 210 chairs by Farstrup Møbler.



ABOVE The owners say they love the familiarity of their abode — it's reminiscent of the unpretentious yet welcoming family homes of their own suburban childhoods. Antony kept this sentiment top of mind throughout the project but is adamant about the need to make the house fit for the future and better aligned with a historic vision. "It was not the intention of the project to return the Formica kitchen to its Melbourne 1963 state!" he laughs. At either end of the new bench, with its honed Bianco Carrara marble top, there's seating and bifold doors that open the kitchen to the terrace. The tapware here and throughout the house is Scala by Sussex.

“WE DIDN’T FEEL
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ABOVE & OPPOSITE Antony's desire to honour this house saw him thinking he'd ruined his chances of being hired to do the job. "After our first meeting with the clients, I was like, 'Oh my god, I've completely blown that — I didn't even ask them what they want, we just talked about the house the whole time!'" In the end, the savvy owners selected him from their list of potential professionals for his demonstrative love of the home. "Later, when I asked them why I got the job, they said it was for that reason — because I was so enthusiastic about it." Now, his affection and care is apparent in every room, including the main bedroom, where he opted for washed linen curtains for their natural texture and light-filtering properties. The Box One nightstand is by VIA Copenhagen and the Twist bed is by Karpenter.

and is connected to the new northern terrace. The west-facing sunroom was altered so it can be closed off to stop heat transfer into the house in summer, plus the home's insulation and roof drainage were upgraded, and double glazing and hydronic heating installed.

The existing colour and material palette centred around red bricks, black beams and white window frames. To complement this, Antony looked to materials used in '60s California, like the kitchen's American black walnut veneer. "It's not a material we'd typically use today, but it seemed appropriate for this house, and then we lined the central services core with cedar lining boards, which are very much from that era." In fact, almost every surface required replacing or refinishing in some way, including the had-it ceiling lining swapped for MDF board with an expressed joint detail like the original.

The home is such a masterful example of mid-century design that visitors struggle to put their finger on what's old and what's new. "For me, that's really satisfying," says Antony. "Restoring the house back to its original state was not the intention – the intention was to fulfil its ambition. That mission to make it better and more beautiful was important to me, and now I can stand back and go, 'If this were my house, I wouldn't do anything differently'. It's fantastic – and, actually, I'm just really jealous now!" ▲

RIGHT MRTN worked with the builders to retain and repurpose as many of the home's original materials as possible. The wall pushed out to create this new ensuite was remade using the existing bricks, and the space also features a brick screen (best seen on the previous page) that shades this room from the hot western sun while providing a veiled view to the green of the garden, and shadows that play on the terrazzo tiles by Signorino on the floor. These tiles were also used for the vanity top, while Inax Sugie tiles from Artedomus line the walls.



TOP & ABOVE Inax Plain 50 tiles appear in the main bathroom with Inax Pom Ponette mosaics, both from Artedomus. Here, the built-in bath/shower is a brand new yet mid-century touch. The existing skylights in this space flooded the room and corridor with natural light, but they were on their last legs, so to stop them flooding the room with rainwater as well, Antony repitched the roof over this zone too. He ran the mirror right up the wall so it reflects the sky and also took an opportunity to introduce a bit of colour, which started with the offset of green marble for the benchtop, chosen for that mid-century feel, and continued with pops of Dulux Emerald Forest on the walls (not visible here).