

NEW
HOMES

RENOVATION

Taking
stock of
the past

A 1930s house with formal overtones is extended and updated for smart casual living, writes **Jenny Brown**.

MELBOURNE'S interwar stock was among the best built housing before World War II and since because it used top materials and tradesmen, as builder Michael Hill well knows.

Through his company, Neumode Design and Construction, he has revamped 20 of these houses in and around Glen Iris.

He greatly admires the double-brick construction with the enriched exterior and interior detailing, which can include art deco-style plaster ceiling roses and cornices, unpainted hardwood architraves, picture rails and window frames and, externally, contrasting brickwork in rendered-concrete walls.

"Before the Second World War, there were still the skilled tradies around," he says, "and they used quality materials. They can be hard to work with. Even the roof tiles are glazed. In later housing, a lot of those features were stripped out."

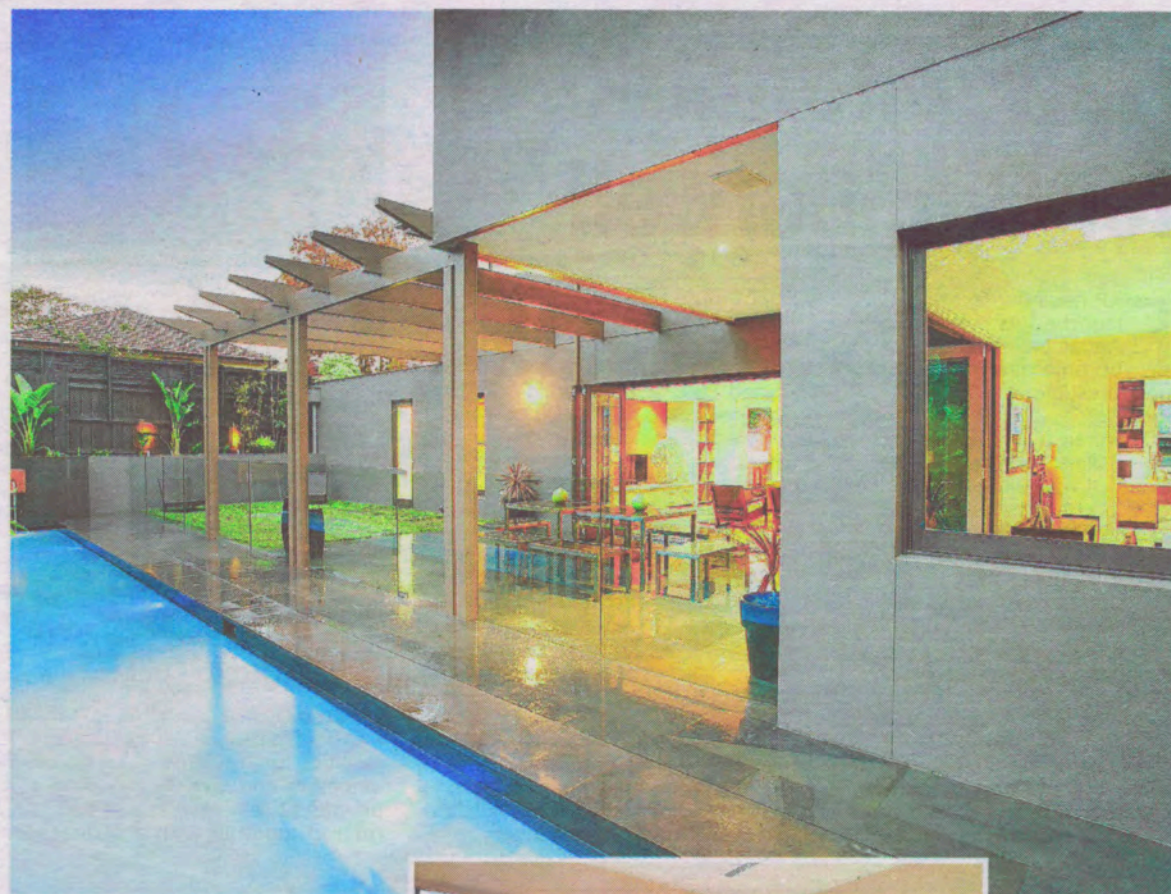
Last year, when he extended a

corner-set house of this style for himself and his family, Mr Hill engaged his usual partner in design, architect Melissa Fleming of Metroworks Architects.

Without making it look too apparent from the street, they expanded the 1935 single-storey house into a very luxurious 465-square-metre, four to five-bedroom, two-storey residence.

The extension skirts the southern boundary to maximise the sunlight available for the courtyard and new lap pool. The new internal staircase rises through a double-level atrium hallway to a popped out, seven-metre-high roof apex in which they reused an original leadlight window and thereby maintained the streetscape's period cohesion.

They also kept the three front principal rooms. As the house had been in the one family since it was built, the Victorian ash architraves were unpainted and the plasterwork and doors were perfect.



"Double-cut architraving," marvels the builder. "And those doors. Most people take them off and throw them away without knowing how valuable they are."

Behind the '30s formality of the original lounge, dining and the main front bedroom, the new design of a highly contemporary house with two main bedrooms and plenty of upstairs and downstairs living space announces itself in the volume of the central stairwell.

Fleming likes to do "entry experiences. It's part of my design philosophy." After meticulous measurement, she also likes to design with a pencil. "I put the [computer] mouse away, go back to the good old drawing board and scribble and play with layout ideas. It's a feel thing," she says.

"This house took a lot of juggling of the floor plan. It originally had a narrow dog-legging hallway. So it was a bit like a jigsaw puzzle to leave in place what was right and to create a flexible new floor plan that also had plenty of storage."

In organising the major L-shaped extension, she was enabled by the siting of the house on the block, which left lots of room for development.

"We could set it up for so many different options," says the owner-builder, who has since sold and



Bi-fold doors create a seamless transition from the living area to the pergola and pool outdoors.

renovated another neighbouring house of the same era.

All the options have been covered: the bedrooms are all doubles, there is an upstairs rumpus room and the main en suite and walk-in wardrobe make up a virtual wing in themselves.

The flowing dining-kitchen and downstairs living room have secondary rooms leading off including a large laundry, powder room, pantry and well-insulated wine cellar with racking for 1000 bottles.

The pool-deck living quarters are a pleasing 65 to 75-square-metre L-shaped space. "Big but not barn-like," Fleming says. "It works but you're not lost in space."

"It's all very well to put in big open-plan spaces and to surround them with glass but if you can't put furniture in them without it fading, what's the point?"

The reconstituted grey-flecked stone island bench is a deliberately

strong presence in the kitchen because the architect wanted it to work as a piece of furniture. "It effectively is furniture," she says. The courtyard pergola is similarly substantial. "I do winery-scale pergolas," Fleming says.

As a builder's own home, the construction, appointment and finishes are of the same high tone and taste as the quietly effective architecture.

And by measure of amenity, it is a mansion. "We wanted to do something that blended with the streetscape but that was also modern, about quality and something that had that 'wow factor,'" Fleming says.

Contact

- Metroworks Architects Pty Ltd, 9690 9661
- Neumode Design and Construction, 9885 2600, neumode.com.au



The stone island bench is a strong presence and facilitates casual dining.