

FROM BRICK TO SLICK

This 1950s brick home is updated with a new modern look. Architect Stephen Gray incorporates echoes of the past combined with a strong, industrial edge.

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ExoTec® facade panel and fixing system gives an industrial edge to this residence.



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WHEN ARCHITECT STEPHEN GRAY OF Liquid Architecture was asked to update a standard brick home, he was hardly surprised. "You couldn't be happy with red brick! Well, certainly not 1950s red brick," states Gray matter-of-factly.

While red brick is ripe for updating to a more modern look, the owners had a number of other reasons for wanting to renovate their recently

purchased home. "They are empty nesters with grown-up children, and are approaching retirement age," says Gray. "So they wanted a house that could give them flexibility. They entertain a lot, and the family comes and stays or the grandchildren come over to play. So they need to be able to throw the house open to party mode quite often."

However, he notes that the owners also had to accommodate the times when it was just the two of them. "In those cases, you don't want to be sitting in a cavernous space. It needs to be intimate, easy to control in terms of temperature, and appropriately scaled for two people," he says.

While the older style of the building had its disadvantages, its original architectural design meant there were many pluses to the property. "In terms of its passive solar performance, there wasn't anything wrong. When you walked in, you could immediately tell it had been well designed – it was light and warm, and the living and sleeping areas were all in the right spots. But you also walked in and thought 'this is a house that was built in the fifties', which doesn't really suit modern living standards."

CONTEMPORARY DESIGN TO SUIT MODERN LIFESTYLES

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A single living space was transformed into a succession of rooms flowing into one another.

notes Gray. "There used to be just one living space, now we have a succession of rooms flowing into one another, ending in outdoor living areas," he says. "In this house we also added internal bifold doors to allow these rooms to be closed off when necessary."

While opening up the internal spaces was crucial, the Lake Macquarie house was also given a complete external facelift. Unsurprisingly, the original red bricks were the first thing to be modernised and covered in a thin render. "We allowed the brick bonding to show up through the render, by using a thin coating rather than a full cement render," says Gray.

Then James Hardie's ExoTec® facade panel and fixing system was used, to create a deliberate contrast between old and new. "We wanted something quite flat and sharp edged, in contrast to the rest of the building," he says.

INCORPORATING ECHOES OF THE PAST

Liquid Architecture often uses colour and texture as a design device, and Gray believes in striking a balance between the

types of materials used. He says: "When we have an existing building that's been there for 60 years, we think: 'OK, let's respect that.' But we'll stop it being unsightly, while being true to it by keeping the ghost of the brick there. Then, as we add new parts to the house, we make them sharp edged to create a contrast to the rest of the building."

With clients who were very open to their architect's advice, the vision for the renovation changed only in size. The final design was slightly scaled down from the original. "They realised they didn't need so many bedrooms and bathrooms, especially as it would have meant adding another level to the house," says Gray, noting that these important decisions were made long before construction began.

To complete the external makeover, bold choices were made with colours and finishes. Lime green, originally chosen by the clients for their kitchen benches, was featured inside and out on Gray's advice. "It was painted over the external cladding, which was a very simple way to achieve a striking look," he says. ⇒



»COMMERCIAL LOOK AT HOME

While the ExoTec® facade panel and fixing system was initially designed for commercial construction, it's become a favourite of home designers. So James Hardie developed Scyon™ Matrix™ cladding. Whereas many other products with a commercial look are installed with steel top hats, Matrix cladding uses simple-to-install Scyon™ cavity trim battens. You can gun-nail the sheets and paint quickly on the pre-primed sheets. This means you get a commercial look, without the price tag.



Why not make it metal?

If you're looking for a distinctive finish with an industrial edge for your home, an Axoloti metal coating could be the answer. It can be applied on surfaces such as ExoTec® facade panel and fixing system or Scyon™ cladding to achieve a unique look. Axoloti co-founder Kris Torma says: "We use a liquid application to apply semi-precious metals to any surface of any size or shape. Once it's applied, we can do anything to it to give it the look you want."

The thin veneer of metal comes in a variety of finishes, which include copper, bronze, brass, and of course, rust. "It has a real Australian flavour, and it's very different. You get beautiful depth in rust, with lots of different textures coming through."

For more information see www.axoloti.com.au.

The rust-like finish was achieved using Axoloti on the ExoTec® facade panel and fixing system.



Architect Stephen Gray advises not to be fearful of contrasts when updating an older building. "Don't be ashamed of having old and new parts of the house," he says. "Instead of trying to blend the two together, make a clear distinction between the old and new."

A STRIKING INDUSTRIAL FINISH

The brave colour choice contrasted superbly with the rust look chosen for a large external wall and the oversized front door. Rather than using metal materials, the result was achieved by adding a metal finish from Axoloti over the ExoTec (facade panel and fixing system) and the door. "It allowed us to achieve the look of a metal building without the weight of a metal panel," says Gray. "This gave us structural advantages and meant we could use lightweight materials which were significantly cheaper. If I was building it again today you would use Scyon™ Matrix™ cladding [a product that looks similar to ExoTec but is designed for residential use]. It's engineered well and looks exactly the same at ExoTec."

While work ran to schedule once construction began, the entire process spanned over two years. Firstly, the clients took six months to consider the original design, and then, once it was submitted to council, the roof had to be amended to avoid compromising the neighbour's views. "We did the initial design in early 2004, started

building in September 2005, and finished 10 months later," says Gray. Once the build finally began, part of Gray's role was to act as the client's agent throughout, making weekly site visits to ensure everything ran smoothly. He says most clients using an architect will ask them to do this aspect of the job. "It's easier as all communication goes through one person. The builder talked to me, and I talked to the client, and vice versa.

"If clients do it themselves, it's usually a financial decision. As architects usually charge hourly rates, over 10 months it can become costly. But I think it's worth it and it helps clients get the best results as design intent is realised on-site," he says.

The overall look of the house was achieved in no small part by the clients' willingness to follow the architect's lead in experimenting with colour, texture and finishes. "They were really good to work with. I'd say things like: 'There's a product called Axoloti that is going to make parts of the building look like it's washed up on the beach, are you OK with that?' and they'd say, 'Great'. It was a lovely surprise."