



rise and fall

Kennedy Nolan Architects has taken advantage of the hilly topography of Melbourne's north-east to transform a single-level weatherboard house into an intriguing multilevel home.

EAGLEMONT, a famously cloistered suburb in Melbourne's north-east, is a maze of irregular streets and long, sloping blocks that reflect early intentions for the area to offer an atmosphere of mountain retreat. Its undulating topography offered both challenge and inspiration to Kennedy Nolan Architects in its recent expansion of a modest-sized interwar weatherboard house, which it turned into a modern, four-bedroom family home.

The project is sited along the Righi, a street named after a peak in the Swiss Alps known as the "queen of the mountains". The houses in this area look down to Ivanhoe through a lacework of largely European foliage, and the architects were anxious to maintain this aspect of their client's property. "The issue for us," says practice partner Rachel Nolan, "was to enable a successful transition between old and new. We wanted to minimize our footprint on the garden because it is so precious, and there were so many well-established trees close to the building."

Heritage considerations aside, the large subfloor structure and sloping garden presented a considerable challenge when deciding how to alter the dwelling. A typical open-plan family room addition to the back of the property was not a suitable option. Nor was it desirable, given the house's proximity to its neighbours on either side. "These are tight blocks and so require privacy," says Rachel. "Open-plan family rooms are often very exposed." Rather than extending outwards with the additions, Kennedy Nolan went up and down.

Four rooms around a central hallway – the majority of the original house – have been maintained, but the rear service area has been demolished and the floor dropped. This is where the junction between old and new begins. "It's a nice, simple idea, bringing the house in touch with the ground," says Rachel. The effect is impressive: behind original glazed double doors at the rear of a street-facing sitting room (and potential fourth bedroom), the floor falls away. Below is the slate-covered floor of a dining area, leading out to a kitchen and lounge area beyond. Above, there is the original ceiling complete with plaster mouldings. A small row of windows, well above head-height, and the outline of an original fireplace halfway up the wall are the only, ghostly traces that record the room's previous life.

From the new ground floor, the glass doorway into the sitting room becomes a Juliet balcony with a stylized perspex balustrade in the shape of a silhouetted tree. The slate floor, white walls and an autumnal orange ceiling set the visual tenor of the design, which is at once dramatic and eminently livable. Space is playfully configured; internal views are not immediately comprehensible. What appears from the front door to be an abstract composition – the edge of something not quite revealed – gains perspective as we walk down the original hallway and the vaulting dimensions of the new space become clear. There is a feeling of revelation continually awaiting the visitor.

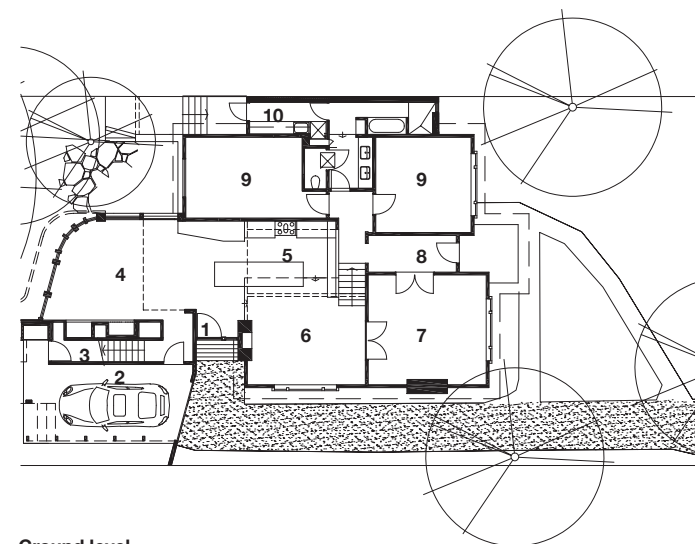
The motivation to recycle much of the house was an ethical one, but it also enabled the architects to play with the feeling that there are secrets here. "I like the idea that something new has happened behind an existing house," says Rachel. "It makes you want to move into it. There's a sense of theatre to this. When you look down the side of the house you can tell that something new has happened, but you can't quite understand what it is."

In keeping with this playful secrecy, two new bedrooms are hidden in the addition. One, tucked behind the kitchen, laundry and existing bedroom, is a sizeable room for a child, with private amenities. The other is the main bedroom, reached by a partially concealed staircase from the lounge area. Learning that a first floor sits atop the new ground level is a surprise. "It's quite a retreat up there," says Rachel. "It's quiet. You have no sense of the first floor from down below." The staircase is carpeted and leads to a row of inbuilt robes on the right and a bathroom beyond. "We like using carpet a lot – there's a great acoustic up here," Rachel says. Behind a wall of concrete block to the left, the bedroom is hemmed by a rounded feature wall that seems supple with movement and, echoing the balcony downstairs, features a patterned wallpaper motif of stylized trees.

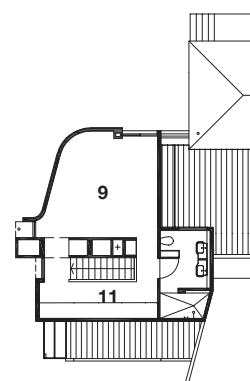
Sparsely positioned windows enable cross-ventilation and bring the outside in. Branches sitting close by dapple the walls with their shadows, while allowing a feeling of privacy to dominate. Controlled views are a theme of the house – from up here, Heidelberg's art deco town hall is visible in the distance, but neighbouring houses are not. The rounded feature wall of the main bedroom, inspired by the swelling curves of a grand piano – one of co-designer Patrick Kennedy's favourite shapes – is also an important feature of the external design. It adds to the first floor's air of seclusion, which is just the thing for the parents of a growing family.

Looking back to the house from the garden, we see not just a wall but the chiaroscuro effect of light playing against black varnished slats. "It's not obviously domestic," says Rachel, reflecting on the feature wall. Of the house, she says, "It's like a form in the garden. It fits in here without being a big box. It's rare in a family house that you ever have a garden from which you can stand back and look at your house." A final design gesture, paying respect to the significance of trees in the character of the site, is a striking arrangement of irregularly spaced wooden columns lining the glass rear wall of the lounge area. From different perspectives, the arrangement appears to shift, like a continually moving forest or the long black keys of a grand piano as it is played.

Inside and outside, like old and new, are skilfully melded here. Kennedy Nolan's achievement has been to recall the story of this site as they reinvent it. Their design at the Righi is, if not the queen of this quiet and verdant suburb, certainly a jewel in its midst. **EMILY POTTER**



Ground level



Upper level

- 1 Entry
- 2 Garage
- 3 Store
- 4 Living
- 5 Kitchen
- 6 Dining
- 7 Sitting
- 8 Hall
- 9 Bedroom
- 10 Laundry
- 11 Robe



PREVIOUS PAGES: The house retains a private outlook despite its close proximity to neighbouring residences. THIS PAGE: Inspired by the mellifluous curves of a grand piano, the new extension's glossy black facade rises up amongst the trees. Irregularly spaced columns introduce an organic rhythm to the rear elevation.



ABOVE: Features from the original house that have been retained, such as the ceiling detail above the dining table, provide a link to the history of the building. **OPPOSITE:** Upstairs, the curving wall of the master bedroom helps create a sense of private retreat. **FOLLOWING PAGE:** Glazed double doors, now protected by a delicately detailed balustrade, indicate the original floor height of the old house. The dining room lamp now hangs where it might have almost touched the floor.





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PRACTICE PROFILE
Six-person practice engaged in a variety of architectural disciplines but working principally on residential projects.

PROJECT TEAM
Patrick Kennedy, Rachel Nolan,
Mike Macleod, Zoe Geyer

BUILDER
Ducon

CONSULTANTS
Engineer Wood & Grieve
Landscaping Mark Kader
Interiors and lighting
Kennedy Nolan
Quantity surveyors
Prowse Quantity Surveyors

PRODUCTS
Roofing Zinalume decking; mineral fibre insulation **External walls** High-gloss enamel to treated pine lining boards; alabaster concrete bricks **Internal walls** Alabaster concrete bricks; kiln-dried hardwood and mdf panelling; wallpaper and paint on plasterboard **Windows** Stained kiln-dried hardwood strapping **Doors** Stained kiln-dried hardwood doors **Flooring** Chinese black slate; Supertuft Escape Twist carpet in 'Web' and 'Scram' **Lighting** Mondo Luce **Kitchen** Calacatta marble benchtops; Dombrecht tapware; Smeg appliances; American walnut and factory paint cabinets **Bathroom** Dombrecht tapware; Pozzi Ginori and Duravit fittings; Calacatta marble; Vixel glass mosaics **Climate control** In-slab and panel hydronic heating; split-system aircon **External elements** Mintaro Slate paving **Other** Laser-cut perspex Juliet balustrade

TIME SCHEDULE
Design, documentation
6 months
Construction 8 months

PHOTOGRAPHY
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