

Westgarth HOUSE by Kennedy Nolan

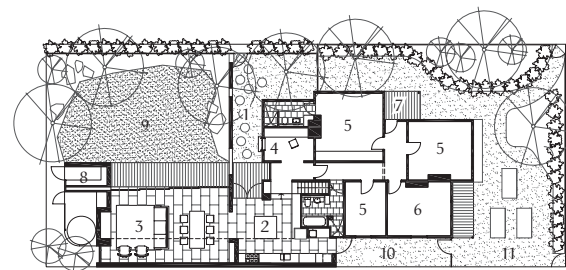
• MELBOURNE, VIC •

In this addition to a suburban Melbourne house, a seemingly straightforward move has proven unusually interesting and graceful.

Words by Toby Horrocks
Photography by Derek Swalwell

01 The new living pavilion, with its flat roof and "bird's beak" fascia, embraces the garden.





Plan 1:400



- 1 New entry court
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Living/dining
- 4 Study
- 5 Bedroom
- 6 Playroom
- 7 Original entry
- 8 Storage
- 9 North lawn
- 10 Service court
- 11 Vegetable garden

In a quiet back street of Westgarth, near the Merri Creek in Melbourne's northern suburbs, an Edwardian weatherboard occupies a street corner. Its backyard presents its long street-facing side to the north and enjoys borrowed views of trees. According to architect Rachel Nolan, co-director of Kennedy Nolan, it was "no great epiphany" to put a new living area down the south boundary and open it up to the views and sun. But the Westgarth House is winning awards – so far one from the Victorian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects in the Alterations and Additions category, and another from the Houses Awards in the House in a Heritage Context category – proof that what Kennedy Nolan designed is far from ordinary.

The addition is low-slung and flat-roofed, reminiscent of 1960s architecture, although Kennedy Nolan has its own take on this mode. "One of the problems with having a flat roof is that you end up with big fat fascias," says Rachel. The architects worked hard on the detail and created what they call "the bird's beak," a white-painted steel fascia, its width split in two by a fold of light and shade. The invention became a motif, repeated in the profile of the fence, the cover of the fuse box and a graphic painted on an interior wall. There is a level of quiet consistency in the design choices. Textures are varied, often drawn from the existing house, but colour is restricted to shades of white and grey. The floor is travertine and the only colour deviation comes from the natural oak kitchen joinery and from the garden.


Designing for a professional couple with children, the architects dealt carefully with issues of public and private space. Having opened the new living/dining room to the north and garden with giant minimalist sliding glass doors, they created a new public face and entry. A privacy screen was inserted between the new entry path and the extension, in the form of a rendered masonry wall. The wall begins inside, partially dividing the kitchen from the living spaces, and then extends out to the front fence, artfully stepping down in height as it does so. A circular opening, reminiscent of a moon gate from Chinese garden traditions, allows edited glimpses between old and new, and presents a playful way to move between the spaces that's not just for the kids.

The new public entry is directed into the kitchen. Turning the chief service zone of the house into the entry hall makes the kitchen work harder than normal. The island bench becomes a

rock in the stream of circulation, a hub around which people flow in and out of the house, or to and from the new part to the old. This "rock" is appropriately robust, made from marble and masonry. The sink and cooktop are located on the wall benches, leaving a plain expanse of marble. The fridge is out of sight, and a wall lined with cork pinboard is located around another corner, concealing the private, less curated parts of family life from guests. Kennedy Nolan has always been serious about designing the service zones in its houses. "It's something we don't really talk about anymore, it's just so ingrained in the way we plan," says Rachel. "There is never the question towards the end of the design – 'Oh, where are we going to put the bins?' – it's all worked out from the beginning."

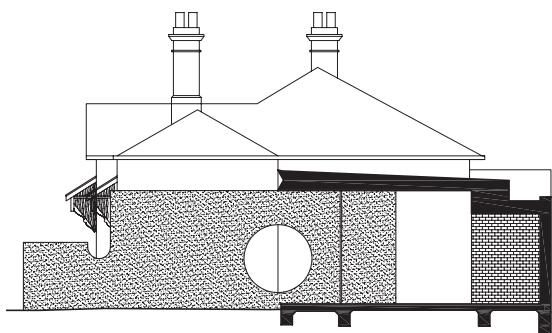
Having decided to unite the different textures and materials with white paint, with just the oak and stone surfaces left unpainted, Kennedy Nolan selected a darker tone to blend the wall with the travertine floor, and linked this colour with the white in the bird's beak motif. "The graphic is playful; it doesn't need to be there forever. It brings a level of complexity that is as cheap as paint," says Rachel.

The existing house is dark compared to the light-filled extension, and made from lightweight timber in contrast to the heavy concrete and masonry of the addition. It has been remodelled to become the private family wing, newly carpeted for acoustics and comfort and for a child-friendly play surface. A new set of stairs grants access to a small loft within the Edwardian roof space. The transition between the old and new parts of the house was carefully considered. "What is probably the most interesting space wasn't really part of the brief," says Rachel. "It unlocks how you move from new into old." She is talking about the new study, which functions as a semipublic transition space.

The architects at Kennedy Nolan understood the potential of this site and made the most of it. It gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their strength in creating graceful living spaces that smoothly marry old and new. They've done what most good architects would do, but they've done it with particular grace, style and finesse. I am left with a strong impression of intelligence and thoughtfulness – even when handling the obvious, this architecture practice excels. In its own words, perhaps it's not a "great epiphany," but it is a small marvel nonetheless. 

02 Different textures and materials have been united in the extension by white paint. Artwork: Rosetta Santucci.





Section 1:200



Street elevation 1:200



03 The kitchen is now also the entry hall, a hub around which all circulation flows.

04 A circular opening in the rendered masonry entry wall is reminiscent of a moon gate.

05 The existing house, an Edwardian weatherboard, has been remodelled as a private family wing.

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Practice profile
 A design-focused practice with a distinctive approach to the built form, working principally on residential projects.

Project team
 Patrick Kennedy, Rachel Nolan, Adriana Hanna, Frank Vedelago, Victoria Reeves, Susan Syer

Builder
 Greg Scott Constructions

Consultants
Engineer: Kersulting
Landscaping: Sam Cox Landscape

Products
Roofing: Lysaght Trimdeck in Zinalume; corrugated roofing in Colorbond 'Woodland Grey'
External walls: Roughcast render and recycled brick painted Dulux 'Natural White'
Internal walls: Recycled brick painted Dulux 'Natural White' and 'Grand Piano'
Windows: Timber-framed windows painted Dulux 'Natural White'; aluminium-framed windows in black
Flooring: CDK Stone travertine tiles; Hycraft Carramar carpet in 'Peat'
Lighting: Light Project XLux lens lights; Gubi pendant and Tim Webber pendant from Cult; Flos 265 Wall Light from Euroluce; Catalina Bollard light from Artemide

Kitchen: Carrara marble benchtop, honed; Creative Design Cabinets quarter-cut American oak joinery; Miele cooktop, wall oven and dishwasher; Qasair rangehood; Abey sink; Phoenix Tapware Vivid mixer
Bathroom: Ideal Standard wall basin from Reece; Phoenix Tapware Mia mixer; Rogerseller towel rails; Artemide Tolomeo wall light; Creative Design Cabinets quarter-cut American oak joinery
External elements: Spotted gum timber decking
Other: Jardan Nook sofa; Loom Rugs rug; Zuster sideboard; Discipline Pocket chair and Clip coat stand, and Arper Leaf chair, all from Stylecraft; Thonet Round bar stool; Ross Gardam Tailored coffee table; Pop and Scott planter

Floor area
 534 m² site
 198 m² floor

Time schedule
Design, documentation:
 4 months
Construction:
 9 months