

The time travellers' life

A long-term delay to renovation plans provides this designer with a unique perspective on the past

Words **Robyn Willis** Photography **Cricket Saleh**

People renovate houses for all sorts of reasons, but few consider the notion of legacy and custodianship when they're planning their dream home.

While owner and designer Amelda Wilde fell in love with this 1930s bungalow in the Victorian city of Geelong with its mix of Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau styles, it had seen better days. But it was exactly evidence of lives already lived within those walls that had Wilde and her husband hooked.

"I am pretty obsessed with old homes, or pretty much anything that is old, weathered, distressed and interesting," Wilde says. "We both grew up in Geelong and were looking for something with a story — and room to grow."

Not long after moving in, Wilde commenced her architecture degree. Children followed so it was another 15 years before the couple had the funds and the time to take on a major renovation.

"We were really young and naive when we bought the house (thinking) that we would be able to renovate straight away (but the economics and skills (required)

were a reality slap (plenty of people have) endured," she says. "Time and money was limited."

While their initial timelines blew out considerably, Wilde says it did give them the opportunity to consider their needs, and the rhythm of the house, so that the original character was still evident.

"We allocated this time to deeply consider the design intent and functional requirements," Wilde says. "In hindsight, experiencing a home and location prior to renovating and building is an incredibly important and influential time to establish the atmosphere of magic you would like to create."

The passing of time also allowed Wilde and her husband to become more circumspect about their needs, planning for the longer term, rather than their immediate circumstances.

"The architecture degree, plus having young children stole a few more years from our program than originally planned, but I am grateful as the time enabled me to reflect more on the design outcomes and complete the project in a more established time of life," she says.

In keeping with her love of old houses, Wilde kept as much of the



Amelda Wilde celebrates the old and the new in her own home, choosing to keep the original blackened bricks of the 1930s fireplace (left) while specifying an industrial-style kitchen (above) for the new addition.



original house as possible, even down to the soot-marked bricks of the fireplace. An old lean-to and the existing kitchen were shaved off the rear of the house to allow for a spacious new addition which is both contemporary and nostalgic, thanks largely to the mix of an industrial-style steel kitchen and a liberal use of veined stone tiles, velvet upholstery and plush floorcoverings. It's a deliberate strategy to bring out the best in both new and old.

"My belief is if you want to amplify something, demonstrate the opposite through contrast and exaggerate the beauty of the other thing," Wilde says. "The existing house is heavy in timbers. It's dark, handcrafted and oozing fairy tale vibes. This is why I love old houses. "So in order to magnify this beauty, I chose to contrast at all times — in colour, proportion, materiality and light."

All materials for the new work have been chosen for their longevity and ability to wear the passing of the years with grace.

"I wanted to use materials that would age well and be truly authentic," she says. "I also wanted to design for legacy and future >>





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Texture and pattern have been layered throughout the house, creating a sense of warmth.

<< proofing as the internal walls are independent of the structure and could be adapted in the future.”

Wilde has also used colour to set mood and create zones, from the deep olive green of the living room through to the ecru tones of the new work.

“Colour is pretty powerful in creating atmosphere, drama or expression with immediate and significant reaction and I have used colour as a tool to spotlight beauty — subtly, and overtly obviously,” she says.

Five bedrooms are spread across the floorplan, providing a little separation, with one corralled into use as a home office and another serving as a dressing room for now. It’s another nod to flexible design and multipurpose spaces.

“I believe in creating varying spaces that offer different experiences and purposes,” she says.

“I like to separate bedrooms into multiple private precincts which I think enables future planning and

opportunities to re-purpose spaces as required.”

Wilde’s husband used his skills as a steel fabricator to create the kitchen himself, working nights and weekends to complete the job. While some in the construction industry downed tools when building sites closed during COVID, she says her husband’s hands were rarely idle.

Over the course of the 18-month build, the couple have put their hearts and souls into this house, reflecting their desire to add to its story rather than overwhelm it.

“I am aligned to the theory of trying to build spaces that will endure time, age well, be adaptable, considered and liberated for future families and stories,” she says.

“I would much rather preserve something special than create something new detached from human experience and value.

“I have fantasies of haunting this place for eternity.”

More: ameldawilde.com.au



Colour has been used to delineate the work from the old, with the bathroom and kitchen in neutral tones.

