

## Domain RENOVATION JENNY BROWN

CARPET CHOICE

## 'Mongrel' house reveals its pedigree

An unexpected council decision forced a new strategy and led to a happy outcome.

**A**FTER purchasing a 650-square-metre corner block in beachside Elwood, builder-developer Greg Oakley put his best-laid plans to Port Phillip council for approval to demolish "a mongrel of a house belonging to a deceased estate" and replace it with four smart, two-storey townhouses.

He'd been advised that there was a heritage overlay but presumed that because the 1930s California bungalow was "so ugly and bastardised by a 1950s extension", the house wasn't worth saving.

"You can imagine my disappointment when the council said, 'No, you have to keep the house,'" he said. The brick bungalow with stained-glass details and stucco gables was so disgustingly run-down, not even the estate agent would stand inside for long.

Yet it was considered intrinsic to the character of the streetscape and the council was keen to keep the neighbourhood as intact as possible.

Mr Oakley bit his tongue, backed up and consulted ERM — Environmental Resources Management — a company that advises on all facets of building and landscaping developments and mediates to find workable solutions for builders and council in speedily securing all-important planning permits.

ERM principal Christina McRae encouraged Mr Oakley to take a more appreciative look at the inter-war neighbourhood vernacular, to "breathe new life into the original house" and to put only two startlingly contemporary townhouses at the back to create new and interesting "layers" to the site.

Technically, Greg Oakley lost round one. By agreeing to renovate and restore the house so that it looked like its old self, however, he quickly won the requisite planning approval.

Having recently sold the second townhouse and added terrific modern amenity and a pool to the



Greg and Flower Oakley (top) and the ugly duckling bungalow they transformed into a beauty. PICTURES: LUIS ENRIQUE ASCUI

80-year-old bungalow, he's "pretty pleased" with a win/win outcome to what could otherwise have been a disputatious and expensive project.

"Instead of getting into a fight, we negotiated," he says. "And because we showed the council and the house some respect, things flowed smoothly."

Well ... sort of. It was, remember, a mongrel of a house — "a Pandora's box of nightmares, with insufficient footings, sagging rooflines, off-square walls and a disastrous sewer and stormwater system", Mr Oakley says. He also wanted to remake it as a three-bedroom-plus-study, open-plan

house — "I prefer modern" — that went up into the roofline to achieve a second storey without making it look spatially squashed, or too much like a "mock" reproduction.

But again — and with the help of Stuart Holmes of Neil Architecture — by retaining the roof profile and the two side brick walls and dropping the downstairs floor level, he was forced to find other winning solutions. Everything but those two walls was demolished and the old bricks and mossy terracotta tiles were recycled into the new exterior form.

"That saved us money and meant less waste," Mr Oakley says. "We reused as much as we could."

Of the original interiors, only the dining room and foyer were recycled. The rest became a brand new, flow-through, light-filled addition with ceiling-height pivoting doors, embarrassing amounts of storage and en suites and powder rooms with sky windows.

The kitchen and partially bisected living-dining area now has an American oak floor, faux fireplace and a northerly aspect over the new pool. Upstairs, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a tuck-in attic study create a whole new world under the roof.

"California bungalows have so much wasted space in the roof," Mr Oakley says. Now the four



different rooms, set around an open foyer, "all have unique rooflines, which was the result of having to work within the roof profile". He says had he known from the outset "that we could have achieved a space like this, I wouldn't have been so disappointed by being knocked back by the council".

The two tall, side-by-side townhouses that took over the backyard and, as Christine McRae predicted, added a contrasting visual layer to the old site, sold quickly and proved popular enough with the neighbours for them to applaud the outcome of the auction.

The builder-developer and his life partner and on-site labourer, Flower Oakley, are living in the restored bungalow until they move on to their next project.

Greg Oakley is pretty confident that when they do come to sell, the new house in the old skin will have enhanced market appeal.

It all happened because a council threw up a stumbling block. But Mr Oakley now knows that it's probably prudent to keep an open mind when developing in an established area. "Expect the unexpected because it is not always a negative," he says.

"We didn't have to go to the VCAT [Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal], we didn't have to get a heritage architect and, although we had to change our strategy, we're delighted we did."

## CONTACT

**Oakley Property Group**  
9846 2291  
oakleyproperty.com.au  
**Neil Architecture**  
9427 9833  
neilarchitecture.com.au  
**ERM Melbourne**  
9696 8011  
erm.com

## REFRESH YOUR HOME. REFRESH YOURSELF. CARPET CHOICE



REFRESH  
YOUR HOME.  
REFRESH  
YOURSELF.



CATALOGUE OUT NOW.

Choose from over 200  
fantastic 4 & 5 Star  
resorts, hotels & cruises in  
Australia, New Zealand,  
Asia and the Pacific.

Reward yourself with up to  
\$3000\* towards your holidays!  
Receive \$1000 in Holiday Choices  
vouchers for every \$1000 you spend.  
HolidayChoices.com.au



\*\$3000 in Holiday Choices Vouchers. Terms and Conditions apply - visit HolidayChoices.com.au

CARPET CHOICE

Phone 132 008 for your nearest store or visit [www.carpetchoice.com.au/choices](http://www.carpetchoice.com.au/choices)