

FACT FILE

THE OWNERS

Brooke Taylor and Jeremy Keane

THE BRIEF

To convert an old semi with a large yard into a spacious home and garden

THE BUILDING DESIGNER

Rocco Raso, Plan Ahead Designs

THE BUILDER

RMC Construction Services



A Brooke and Jeremy with Rocco **B** Outdoor dining area **C** The entry hall **D** Bi-fold doors open out on to the garden **E** The renovated semi, on the right, with its 1918 exterior **F** A terraced garden was designed on the sloping site **G** Brooke and Jeremy's dream kitchen



Ahead of its time

A step inside this century-old semi reveals a surprisingly spacious and modern interior

It is a common dilemma for many would-be renovators. They have great ideas but without the design expertise to back them up, the results can be less than satisfying.

When Brooke Taylor and Jeremy Keane were looking for someone to renovate their two-bedroom semi in South Coogee, they were not entirely sure where to start.

"We were looking for someone aligned with our inspiration," Brooke says.

"We had a good idea what we wanted, but we did not know where to go with it. We just knew we wanted good lighting, a sense of space and lots of storage."

After a little investigating, they asked building designer Rocco Raso from Plan Ahead Designs to come up with

something that would work for them.

With years of experience in architectural design, particularly semi-detached dwellings, Rocco saw the possibilities almost immediately.

"It was a single-storey semi built in 1918," Rocco says.

"They had two bedrooms at the front and a kitchen and a bathroom at the back. But they also had this great big backyard and I thought they should make use of that."

Getting it all together

His idea was to retain the two front rooms and create a new bathroom and kitchen for the middle of the house.

The dining and living area would completely open on to the north-facing

garden and deck, thanks to bi-fold doors.

Upstairs, Rocco proposed two new bedrooms with the main bedroom looking over the yard, plus a spacious central bathroom and open living area.

High windows would allow more natural light to penetrate the space without compromising privacy.

Getting the setback right so that the upper storey is virtually hidden from the street was paramount to winning approval.

"With a semi-detached, councils don't like you to build in front of that ridge line," Rocco says.

Although it sounds like a lot to squeeze on to such a tight block, high ceilings and plenty of natural light make you feel as though you have stepped into a tardis, having plenty of room to move.



With the frustrating approval process out of the way, Jeremy and Brooke concentrated their efforts on getting the details right.

They engaged a second architect, Suzannah Esdail from Edaa Design who, along with interior designer Alain Chalon, helped Brooke and Jeremy choose their fittings and finishes.

To find their builder, Rob Mori from RMC Construction Services, they looked no further than across the street, where he had completed another renovation.

"We chose four builders to tender, but we liked him because he lives two streets away," Jeremy says.

"He did a good job over the road and his price came in middle of the pack." Rob also shared Brooke and

Jeremy's passion for attention to detail. "It suited us that he was a perfectionist, because I am that way too," Brooke says.

They were equally impressed with the contractors Rob brought with him, especially the joiner who made their dream kitchen and built-in storage systems a reality.

Old habits
Working with old houses inevitably means discovering that walls are not straight and that sometimes they are not what they appear to be, and in this case one original wall turned out to be just one skin thick.

In order to do things properly, Rocco says there were some hard decisions to be made in terms of time and money.

"As an investment, you make a conscious decision to either do it quickly and cheaply or put in a few more dollars to do it properly," he says.

"Brooke and Jeremy went with that."

In keeping with their desire to be involved in the process and do things right the first time, Brooke and Jeremy hired a landscape architect to design a terraced garden out of the sloping site that had become a dumping ground for all manner of household rubbish over the years.

Jeremy is a keen gardener and came up with a list of plants he wanted in the design, along with a collection of orchids he had been storing at a neighbour's house during the 18-month process.

"The orchids made it through the →



GET THE LOOK

SCULPTURE CLUB

Brooke and Jeremy have travelled extensively through Asia, buying the odd piece of furniture and colourful paintings along the way. They also picked up beautifully hewn statues in Vietnam, one of which they had converted into a stunning contemporary water feature for their garden. You can buy similar solid-marble Vietnamese statues here from Mostly Marble. Prices start at \$499, while the Wave statue pictured is \$2100. Custom orders are also available.

● MORE INFORMATION
Mostly Marble
 mostlymarble.com.au



TAP DANCING

Brooke and Jeremy thought long and hard about what finishes they wanted in their new bathrooms. They combined the organic shapes of their bath and hand basins with the sleek good looks of modernist tapware. For a similar tapware set, check out the new range from Dorf. Pictured is the Jovian Wall Basin Mixer tap priced at \$419.

● MORE INFORMATION
Dorf dorf.com.au



HOOKED ON CLASSICS

There are good reasons why some designs stand the test of time. The Eames chair with Eiffel Tower base is as comfortable as it is stylish and it works well with contemporary interiors, despite being designed more than 50 years ago. For a similar design, try the Julie Chair from Oz Design Furniture. It is only available in white with a chrome base and is priced at \$129.

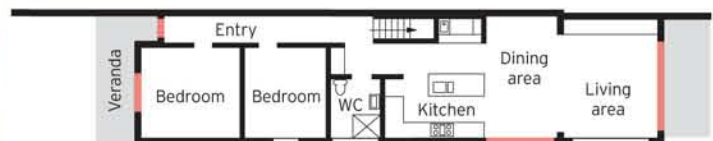
● MORE INFORMATION
Oz Design Furniture ozdesignfurniture.com.au



A The streamlined kitchen, dining and living area
B The bathroom features louvre windows, modern fittings and fixtures, and a frameless shower screen
C One of the four bedrooms **D** The upstairs has two bedrooms and an open living area



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



construction period and they are still my favourite plant in the garden," he says.

They also wanted to find a place for a custom-designed fountain the couple bought while travelling through Vietnam.

Maintained by a 5000-litre rainwater tank, the six-month-old garden looks like it has always been there, thanks to its clever design and careful choice of plants.

"We had a sandy base in the backyard so you really needed plants indigenous to the area," Jeremy says.

"They also need to be fairly hardy and drought tolerant."

Entertainment zone

The house, with three distinct zones, has also become a great place for entertaining. Brooke and Jeremy hosted a New Year's Eve party as soon

as they moved in at the end of last year. Given the enjoyment all those involved took in pulling this long-running project together, it could be the first of many celebrations.

"When you have been in the business a long time, money is important but it is also about having fun," Rocco says.

"Usually when I would come over here, we would sit down and they would give me a beer. You looked forward to doing that bit extra for them."

Robyn Willis

● MORE INFORMATION
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Photos: Bob Barker