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This is the life
"It's not a big house so the main areas have to be fairly flexible," says homeowner Kieron Gait. "Xi-an can be spread out playing in the living space and then just as easily we can sweep up her toys into cupboards and storage drums and the day moves on." When guests come over, they tend to hang out in the kitchen, spilling out across the shifting levels of the deck. "We can have 20 people over for a barbecue and everyone will find their own spot without needing extra tables and chairs," he says.

Wei Shun Lee, baby Xi-an and Kieron spend family time on the deck, which conceals two 5000L in-ground concrete water tanks. Artek 611 chairs by Alvar Aalto, available from Anibou. Coral pendant light by David Trubridge. Magis Puppy from ECC Lighting+Furniture. **For Where to Buy, see page 248.**

OUTWARD BOUND

The big idea with this owner-builder cottage renovation in Brisbane was to create great new living spaces that cascade from the house out into the garden.

STORY & STYLING **KATE NIXON** | PHOTOGRAPHY **MAREE HOMER**

Kieron and Wei ripped up the carpet in the living area to reveal spotted gum timber floorboards, which they finished with polyurethane. Sofa from Jimmy Possum. Eames lounge chair from Living Edge. Floor lamp from Artemide. Kieron and Wei designed and made the oak coffee table. Origami stars by Wei. Joinery by Simpson Cabinets. Windows by Duce Timber Windows & Doors. Magis Julian Cat chair from ECC Lighting+Furniture. **OPPOSITE** The well-organised kitchen features a Blum pull-out larder, as well as silver ash veneer cabinetry and stainless-steel benchtops by Simpson Cabinets. Appliances by Miele. For Where to Buy, see page 248.

After dropping into a weekend open house in 2004, Kieron Gait and his partner Wei Shun Lee placed a speculative offer on this postwar two-bedroom, one-bathroom cottage in Brisbane's inner east. As an architect and interior designer respectively, they could see its value: "It had good potential on an elevated block with views of Moreton Bay," says Kieron. "The suburb had a lovely village atmosphere and it was affordable so it had the right ingredients for us." The next day the house went to auction and was passed in, therefore falling to Kieron and Wei. "Suddenly we had this house… it seemed sort of by accident!" says Kieron.

They moved in and lived in the cottage for three years before commencing the renovation, initially only ripping down the retro floral wallpaper and repainting the walls white. "Before we bought it we didn't have any strong thoughts on what we wanted to do," says Kieron. "It took some time for our ideas to evolve on how to deal with the house and the block." The concept that emerged was to connect the house to the back garden via a deck extension and reworked living spaces. "Essentially we decided to turn the plan around and shift the focus from the street front to the rear of the block to gain privacy and a landscaped area," he says. >

< Keeping the main envelope and roof line the same, they in-filled the old concrete verandah at the front of the house. Although well oriented in the north-east corner, it faced the house next door and the reasonably busy road and bus stop. "It really wasn't such a nice place to be," says Kieron. "Closing this in helped us turn the house around to become part of the rear garden rather than the road." The extra floor space allowed them to gain a third bedroom (currently used as a shared study) and ensuite bathroom with the main bathroom inserted between the existing two bedrooms. This streamlined the sleeping and bathing zones along the eastern wall.

A new, framed entrance opens into the centre of the home. Once a poky mishmash of a living room, kitchen, pantry, bathroom and hallways, this area is now an open-plan living/dining space. Beyond these rooms is the deck extension, accessed via full-height sliding glass doors with New Guinea rosewood frames. The garage remained but the couple added a new kitchen at the rear. It completes the new square floor plan and again connects to the deck and garden.

"The original design had one skinny window at the end of the corridor facing the back garden with no real access," says Kieron. "You had to walk through the garage and down some stairs to even get to it!" >

Decorated with pretty butterflies, pink spots and stripes, Xi-an's room is a little girl's dream. Storage units from Ikea. Eames rocking chair from Living Edge. Cot from Stokke. Wall decals from Cocoon Petite Living. Shelf from Ikea. **OPPOSITE TOP** Joinery runs along the wall of the dining room, providing extra seating and storage. Dining table from Ikea. Artek 611 chairs by Alvar Aalto, available from Anibou. Artworks by Judy Watson. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** As with the rest of the home, the main bedroom is simply decorated and inviting. Bed from Freedom. Artwork by Judy Watson. Kieron and Wei designed and made the side table. **For Where to Buy, see page 248.**

< This rejigged floor plan has a completely different flow now, with the deck extension forming a series of gradual levels that ease onto the newly landscaped rear. "We used large pieces of spotted gum timber as thresholds between the higher and lower decks, exaggerating the edge details with steps becoming seats and balustrades becoming tables," says Kieron. The openings and balustrades are carefully located to edit views of the adjacent houses, and cascade from the house into the garden. An enclosing, falling silver ash timber roof line draws each level together, creating the overall effect of a much grander space than the block's actual 520m².

With perfect timing, baby Xi-an (now 19 months) was born with the renovation completed so has only ever known the luxury of the new carefully crafted spaces. The renovation has effortlessly accommodated her addition and provided ample space for family time and moments alone. "The 'crow's nest' in the south-east corner of the deck is a favourite spot to linger with a glass of scotch, making the world right!" says Kieron. "It's these little moments within the space that work for us so well."

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The back deck is sheltered by silver ash timber battens. Kieron made the wood table top for the outdoor setting. Artek 611 chairs by Alvar Aalto, available from Anibou. **OPPOSITE** A Breezway louvred window brings light and air into the bathroom while maintaining privacy. Bath by Kaldewei. Basin by Duravit. **For Where to Buy, see page 248.**

BEFORE

What they did

THE BRIEF
To keep to the existing structural lines, close in the front verandah and reconfigure the internal spaces to include an additional bedroom and bathroom, plus a new kitchen and deck extension. Kieron and Wei wanted to refocus the house towards the rear of the block to gain privacy and a usable garden.

KEY FEATURES
Kieron and Wei used spotted gum and silver ash timber in the floors, joinery, decking and battening to create a connection between the open living spaces and new outdoor extension. Joinery stretches the length of the living/dining space, then wraps around into the kitchen, providing storage and seating.

WHAT IT COST
About $275,000.

SAVE
As owner-builders, the couple saved money by ripping up all the carpets to expose existing spotted gum floors, which they finished with polyurethane.

SPLURGE
The silver ash battening, which was extended up the side wall and across the roof line of the new deck extension.

HOMEOWNERS' TOP TIPS
- Rework the floor plan to maximise the assets of the original house and site.
- Make light and ventilation top priorities. Introduce recessed skylights in dark corners and windows in unpredictable places to extend a room.

H&G