



DESIGN ARCHITECTURE

Opening acts

Innovative use of materials is blurring the boundaries between indoors and out, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

Treating the outdoors like the indoors has been gaining in momentum, with architects using traditional outdoor materials, such as brick, both inside and out. Likewise, concrete and limestone used in living areas extend beyond windows and doors to outdoor terraces. "It's pushing the boundaries to allow the outdoors to appear integral to the home," says architect Duncan Sanby, co-director of Utz-Sanby Architects.

The firm used a cream-coloured Bowral brick in the main passage of a house at Whale Beach, one of Sydney's northern beaches. This bridge-like link connects the main living areas at the front of the house to a rear pavilion comprising a casual living area at ground level and a main bedroom suite above.

Pivotal to Utz-Sanby's design is a courtyard complete with barbecue facilities. "We wanted to express the bricks both inside and out to strengthen the connection to the outdoors," says Sanby, who used the same brick for the built-in barbecue.

As well as the brick walls, Utz-Sanby used limestone flooring in the kitchen and living areas and in the courtyard. To ensure one continuous plane between the indoors and out, the sills were concealed below floor level. The operable ceiling above the

courtyard also gives the sense of another room, even in more inclement weather.

In its renovation of a house in Elsternwick, Melbourne, b.e Architecture was also keen to bridge the indoors and outdoors. The Edwardian-style brick home was extensively renovated and the rear additions and lean-tos removed.

As the house is oriented to a western rear garden, b.e Architecture included deep eaves (about 1.5 metres wide) for sun protection. And along the southern boundary, facing north, is a loggia-style room, enclosed on three sides.

The loggia, opening on to the garden, features white-painted brick walls and a concrete floor. And to bring the garden into the picture, one wall is dotted with hanging plants. While the architects could have treated the loggia as a completely detached space, they were keen to take it past the full glazing of the living room walls.

"We took the brickwork [of the loggia] 400 millimetres inside the living room to extend the outdoors," says architect Andrew Piva, a director at b.e Architecture, pointing out the fine line that separates the bricks from the plaster wall. Likewise, the concrete floor makes an appearance 400 millimetres inside the living room,



juxtaposed with the rich oak floors that appear throughout the house.

"The concrete edges the oak in a way to give a sense of a customised carpet, in oak, rather than wool," Piva says.

Having the rear garden set at a slightly lower level than the house also creates a vista of an extended living space, with sight lines drawn across the entire back garden.

"The rear elevation is draped in greenery. When the doors to the living areas are retracted, you feel as though you're sitting in the garden," Piva adds.

Architect Simon Knott, a director of BKK Architects, was also keen to blur the division between indoors and out for a home in Northcote, Melbourne. Referred to as the "dollhouse", due to its simple, glazed dollhouse-like extension, the double-storey addition now embraces the 25-metre-high lemon-scented gum tree. "The idea of the dollhouse is not just the form," Knott says.

Clockwise from main: Utz-Sanby's Whale Beach house uses brick and limestone to forge a smooth connection between inside and out; the 'dollhouse' exterior and interior created by BKK Architecture; the loggia meets the living room in b.e Architecture's Elsternwick house. PHOTOS: MARIAN RIABIC, PETER CLARKE, SHANNON MCGRATH

"The extension was designed to allow for flexible spaces. They're not prescriptive."

At ground level are the open-plan kitchen and living areas. And on the first floor of the Northcote house is the main bedroom and ensuite, together with a study area. Green carpet on the first floor picks up on the landscape with the established gum creating a sense of being in a treehouse.

BKK also used a variety of window types in the rear elevation to blur the division between indoors and out.

Every window, whether a sashless, sliding or three-metre-wide pivotal window, opens in a different way.

"These windows break down the threshold between the house and garden," says Knott, who also included a dry-stone wall in the garden that gives the sense of an outdoor room. "Wherever you are in the house, you're always conscious of the outdoors," he adds. **L23**