A STITCH IN TIME

Inspired by treasured cross-stitch tapestries, this imaginative Melbourne renovation meets its downsizing owner's every need.

STORY **STEPHEN CRAFTI** / STYLING **NATALIE JAMES**
PHOTOGRAPHY **NICOLE ENGLAND**

When Pam Mitchell came across this single-fronted Victorian terrace in inner-eastern Melbourne, she knew she had found 'the one'. Despite its lack of natural light and – its greatest shortcoming – no connection to the outdoors, the property had some vital redeeming features. It had a backyard, albeit modest, was close to local shops, the city, and just a stone's throw from the railway station.

Pam, keen to scale down from a larger house and happy to put some work into the property, engaged architect and interior designer Fiona Dunin, director of FMD Architects, to tailor the tiny terrace to her needs.

In response to Pam's desire for a better indoor-outdoor flow, Fiona decided to keep the front two rooms and dismantle the remainder of the house. She then conceived a new, light-filled, open-plan kitchen, dining and living area to add to the home. But this wasn't to be your typical glass box; cross-stitched tapestries by Pam's mother were the starting point for a beautifully original design.

"We wanted to create a sense of the addition being 'stitched' onto the original rooms," says Fiona, who ▶

LEFT Pam's living area now has the connection to the garden that she craved. When the doors are left open, the sound of trickling water from the pond resonates throughout the room. A few select pieces, including a sofa, ottoman and armchair from Jardan, allow the space to 'breathe'. On the wall is a backing cloth painting from Spacecraft. **FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 208.**

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FIONA DUNIN, ARCHITECT (BELOW)

The simple palette of materials in the kitchen/dining room includes plywood, laminate, tile and mirror. Pam selected the angular Urban Chairs from FeelGood Designs to complement the ceiling beams. The table is from Jardan and the sideboard was customised by Zuster.
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◂ refers to a bobbin when describing the radiating plywood beams that feature heavily indoors and out. "There's a sense of the beams unravelling," she says.

The placement of the beams also loosely delineates the kitchen from the living area and a courtyard garden, designed by landscape architect Myles Broad of Eckersley Garden Architecture. "Having a small garden and an outdoor space was integral to the brief," says Pam. "I love being surrounded by plants. I wanted the connection to the garden to be as transparent as possible."

Before Pam bought the property she'd lived in a large five-bedroom house with an expansive garden, so the downsize required her to shed a lot of furniture. Keen to start afresh she brought with her only the treasured cross-stitch tapestries, which are now displayed together on one wall, and a few personal items.

The built-in furniture in the living room, designed by FMD, was key to establishing a restrained and uncluttered look. The plywood entertainment unit takes on the ▸

◂ form and outline of three 'houses', two of which are inverted. "I was keen to respond to the home's original pitched roof," says Fiona. "I was also mindful of providing generous storage to ensure Pam's minimal aesthetic could be achieved." She also took a streamlined approach to the kitchen's island bench; the lower portion of the unit is clad in a mirrored surface that reflects the timber floor, allowing it to appear unimpeded.

The same sense of efficiency was applied to the one and only bathroom, which has a solid sliding door between it and the main bedroom. When closed, it becomes a guest bathroom. "I travel a fair bit," says Pam, "and at this stage of my life I was looking for a low-maintenance home with spaces I enjoy being in at all times of the day."

And that's exactly what she's got, with a thoughtful reminder of her mother carefully woven in. ▸

FMD Architects, Melbourne, Victoria; (03) 9670 9671 or www.fmdarchitects.com.au. Eckersley Garden Architecture, Richmond, Victoria; (03) 9413 3215 or www.e-ga.com.au.

'IT'S MAGICAL SHOWERING IN THE MORNING AND LOOKING OUT ONTO THE FERNS.' PAM

LEFT In the main bedroom there are a number of well-chosen elements – including the Hay Mega Dot quilt from Cult and side lights by Marz Designs – but the hero feature is the lightwell that penetrates the core of the home and illuminates the bathroom. Staghorn ferns and Boston ivy underplanted with sweet violet thrive in this zone, while the mirror-fronted vanity unit increases the sense of space. All tiles, Academy Tiles.
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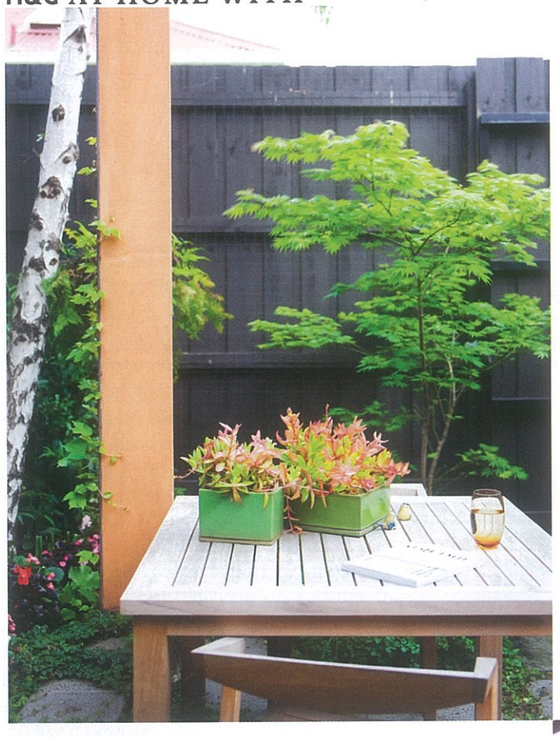
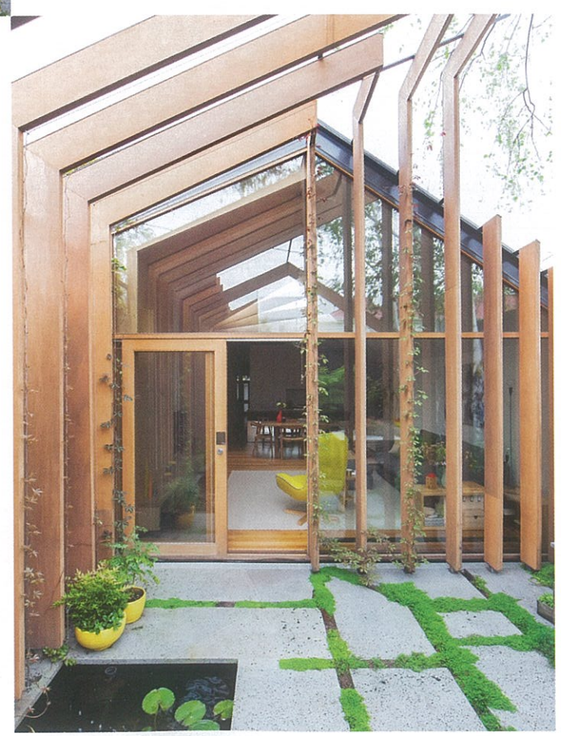


DOWNSIZING DYNAMICS

Pam uses every part of her home. The spare bedroom, located at the front, has a desk by the window that benefits from a leafy, eastern aspect. One of its built-in wardrobes includes office equipment that allows for occasional working from home. The furniture throughout was also carefully considered because when Pam moved in she was keen to live with less. "I still wanted to surround myself with things that make me happy, but I also loved the idea of buying new furniture and accessories that were appropriate for this space," she says.



'I GET ENORMOUS PLEASURE FROM JUST SITTING IN THE GARDEN AND POTTERING AROUND WITH MY FINGERS IN THE DIRT.' PAM

ABOVE / A sublime new Japanese maple and a cluster of pre-existing silver birch trees work wonderfully together in the courtyard. Teak table, Jati Furniture.
RIGHT / The water feature brings the sound of trickling water into the living room. Silver vein creeper and Boston ivy were planted next to the posts and will eventually offer more protection from the afternoon sun. Plantings between the pavers include kidney weed, Corsican mint and white creeping thyme.
OPPOSITE / The home's original facade was restored by removing years of paintwork and exposing the brick. Pam brought the outdoor bench from her previous home. For similar, try Bunnings. FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 208. ▶