

Bower Architecture extends the idea of heritage into the 1960s with New Modern, a renovation and expansion of a midcentury home in Melbourne's east that offers a contemporary interpretation of the original home's design language.

“For a while, whenever people spoke of heritage, there was a certain image that came to mind but it’s important to recognise that over time heritage changes, and now modern architecture is very much heritage,” reflects Jade Vidal, co-director of Bower Architecture, the practice he founded in 2005 with Chema Bould and Anna Dutton. This understanding of the changing nature of heritage informed the architects’ approach to the project, along with the Bower philosophy of “revealed spaces”.

Applied to all of their work, “revealed spaces” speaks to a process where an outcome is not predetermined and is shaped by the unique characteristics of each site, client and brief. Where precisely the outcome lies is a point to be discovered through the rigour of the design process, which sees the Bower Architecture team of architects and interior designers working collaboratively. As a team, the practice works across projects, willingly engaging with changes and evolving the design right through construction to achieve a highly refined result.

“That is part of what Bower is about – our aim is that our work should feel meant to be. That’s the mark of a successful project,” says Jade. “There may be many design directions that could be followed, but once everything is thrown in the mix, [the final result] feels right and meant to be.” This approach is felt throughout New Modern, in which the architects focused on finding the balance between design that is sympathetic to the original, while still recognisably contemporary. “That’s not an uncommon principle, but it’s exciting to see it applied to modern architecture,” says Jade.

The street-facing elevation gives nothing away – here, the architects took a restorative approach, repainting the facade and preserving the proportions of the front balcony and undercroft. The low, intimate undercroft experience was one of the defining aspects of the original that influenced the decision to restore the front facade, respecting the clarity of the home’s design and heritage.