

<25 Problems solved

Small balconies were added to the two, north-facing, secondary bedrooms – the main bedroom already had a balcony, virtually the sole outdoor space in the existing house, that faced the street.

“We had to bring back the balustrade and facade to their heritage quality,” says Peter. “The balustrade also had to be safe for today’s standards – we lifted it by 200mm to comply with the Building Code of Australia. Originally, it was 800mm high and felt distinctly unsafe – people were shorter in Victorian times. We also stiffened the balustrade with brackets.”

The original bathroom was in the basement – an interesting concept given the three bedrooms were two floors above it.

The challenge to Peter and Co was twofold: put the bathroom back upstairs where it belongs despite the limited space, and find a way to fit in a bath.

The architects overcame the first obstacle by making the second bedroom slightly smaller and slotting in the bathroom off the corridor.

A Japanese bath topped by an oversized shower head solved the second problem – it’s deep rather than long and is designed for sitting and soaking instead of lying and wallowing.

The obsolete bathroom in the basement became a storage area and an “out-back dunny” was turned into a modern toilet.

Dealing with council

The project enjoyed a surprisingly good run in council, with plans approved in just more than six weeks. That said, the architects had worked on them for several months, which included talking to council about alleviating neighbours’ concerns.

“The most important thing and the biggest learning curve was the way Peter dealt with council,” says Tony.

Having a great council building inspector and a heritage architect who used to be a councillor also helped, says Peter.

Tony’s terrace forms part of the streetscape and its facade – in particular a distinctive balustrade – had to be kept in character for heritage purposes.

Tips checklist

- ✓ If you’re planning to renovate a heritage property, it’s a good idea to work with an architect with experience in this area
- ✓ When buying a house with original features, consider whether they meet modern safety requirements
- ✓ Tony saved money by preparing and demolishing his property himself – you can too but remember to check with your council about the safety aspects



While part of the balustrade seemed in fair shape, most of it was in poor condition or missing. Tony decided to replicate the original via a costly process called sand casting, which involves pouring molten metal into a mould cavity formed out of natural or synthetic sand to make iron, bronze, brass or aluminium parts.

Then there was the matter of repairing the damaged structure, including demolishing and rebuilding the unsafe back wall and redoing internal supporting beams.


“We selectively repaired parts of the structure,” says Peter.

“Demolition is only valuable when you can increase the [overall] space. We maintained the volume of the building and brought it into the 21st century.”

Who’s going to buy it?

Some advice for those thinking about purchasing property to do up and sell:

“You’ve got to think clearly about who’s going to buy it in order to get the maximum return on your investment,” says Peter. “It has to be appealing to the potential buyer. It’s a matter of keeping this picture very clear while controlling your costs.”

He adds: “The plus in this project was that because it was a derelict building, the market value had decreased. Once we repaired the structure, we had the opportunity to enhance the property’s value. The quality of the design is what lifts the value, especially in areas like Paddington.” 

MORE INFORMATION: If you’re tossing up between buying or building, check out Peter’s online guide Buy or Build at www.peterdaltonarchitects.com.au. The website also features a house design budgeting tool to help you work out what you can afford.



A The front room was opened up and the staircase modernised
B The architects slotted in a bathroom upstairs with a Japanese tub
C The distinctive balustrade had to be kept in character for heritage purposes

