

The Saturday  
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# home

## FEEL-GOOD LIVING

How to make your house harmonious

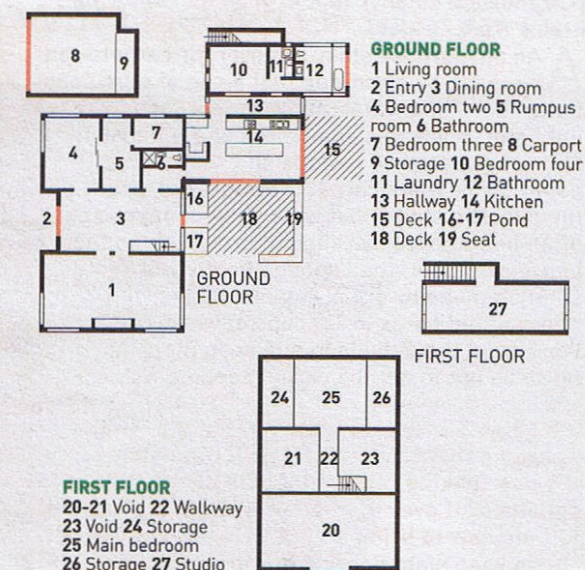
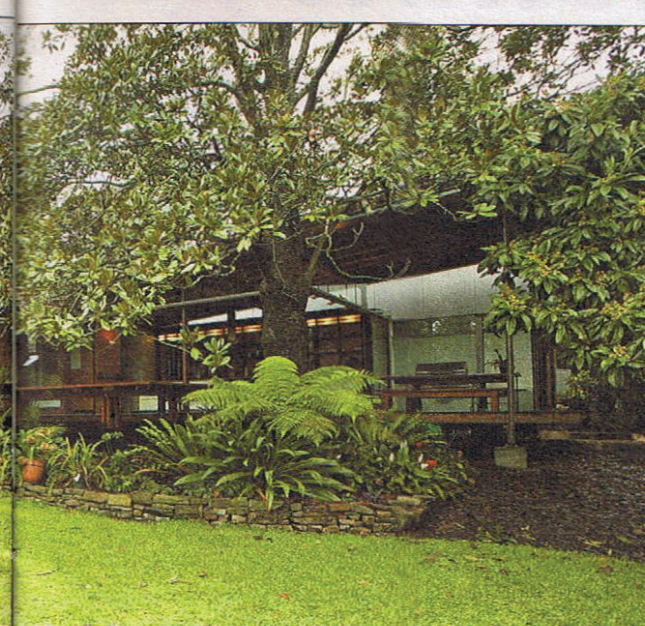
## OUT OF SIGHT

Stylish storage boxes that work wonders

## Hidden gems

The dramatic transformation of a neglected seaside retreat





# Heart of stone

For architect Richard Cole it was a matter of adding to the past in order to build his family's future, writes **Robyn Willis**. Photos by **John Fotiadis**.



There must be a few Northern Beaches house hunters kicking themselves these days. When Richard and Cilla Cole came across the sandstone residence in Avalon they now call home, it had been on the market for a year. "I think everyone in Avalon had been through it," Richard says.

Priced out of the eastern suburbs market they were living in and unable to find anything large enough in Newtown that they could afford, the couple happened across the house by chance.

"Cilla's parents came from Avalon and she grew up here," Richard says. "We saw this in the paper and stopped by for a look and then could not go past it. It was such a unique place, but it looked terrible."

Built in the 1930s as a holiday house, the original two-bedroom dwelling was made of solid stone, with a large stone fireplace in the central living area and sandstone floors throughout. Aside from providing excellent thermal mass keeping it naturally cool in summer and warm in winter, the house's greatest asset was its position on a double block. An architect, Richard could see possibilities other house hunters could not.

"There was potential to have this wonderful link to the past but add on to it in a way that was quite contemporary," he explains.

After a year, Richard got approval to raise the roof and convert the existing attic space into an office (now the main bedroom) accessed via a timber walkway. The gap between the old and new roof lines was filled with windows. At ground level, a timber deck was built out to the base of the magnolia tree dominating the backyard.

"We raised the platform so it does not hurt the tree and we have maintained drainage," says Richard. "We plan to put some bladder water tanks under the deck later on but have been advised to wait a couple of years for the tree to recover [from the building work]."

Entry from the house to the deck is provided by a garage-style lift-up door with matching windows on either side. A pond running underneath the walkway is fed from an almost sculptural downpipe with overflow running into a stormwater retention tank.

## Working with nature

With the first stage complete after a year, the Cole family prepared themselves for the second stage of their renovation. This included a new kitchen and outdoor deck, as well as a new bathroom and expansive home office.

Richard says he was conscious of using durable materials that would not impact too heavily on the environment. He opted for a father-and-son



building team open to working with different materials. "They were carpenters by trade but they could do anything with timber and they were very sensitive to the environment," he says. "They were real craftsmen and they loved what they did."

Richard chose plywood panelling for the new extension, with steel beams sandwiched between planks of jarrah for support. They were fixed together using bolts or screws with external cladding provided by flat Zincalume sheeting.

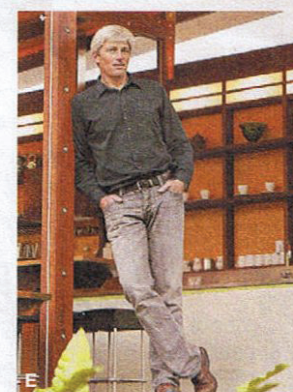
"We tried to screw and bolt everything so there was the potential for it to be taken apart and used again," Richard says.

Underneath the office and behind the kitchen at the rear of the property, the new bathroom

A The kitchen opening on to the deck B A magnolia tree offers natural shading C Access to the attic is via wooden walkway D Sandstone is a natural insulator making for very cosy winters and cool summers E Richard Cole F Plywood panelling was used for the extension with steel beams between planks of jarrah for support G The main bedroom attic space was created by lifting the roof H The bathroom opens on to the garden

## MORE INFORMATION

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Have you renovated a home? Tell us about it at [home@dailytelegraph.com.au](mailto:home@dailytelegraph.com.au)

retains privacy thanks to opaque walls. A bath rescued from a country paddock and re-enamelled is situated next to sliding doors opening on to the leafy backyard.

"When it is raining, you can lie in the bath and listen to the water coming down," he says. It adds an exotic touch to bath time for children Christopher, 9, Julia, 7, Fergus, 5 and Claudia, 2.

The new extensions mean there is plenty of room for everyone with the separate living areas offering winter and summer zones. Areas such as the kitchen can be opened up or closed down to the decks thanks to large sliding doors, while solid sandstone walls ensure the original living room is snug in winter. At the same time, Richard says



there is plenty of flexibility built into the design. "The house was built around three children but we ended up having four," he says. "There is plenty of room so it can adapt to family changes."

Clearly, turning this ugly duckling into a modern family home has impressed the Royal Australian Institute of Architects with the home shortlisted for its 2007 awards.

For the family, designing for adaptability to long-term changes using innovative materials was a gamble that has paid off.

"As an architect it is a fantastic opportunity to work on your own house but it is quite a challenge," he says. "There is a desire to get it right and often you are your own worst critic."