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THE RENOVATION ISSUE

Architects' homes

Learn from the pros, p4

 Title Deeds:
Winners and losers, p2

Smart
Beach Buys, p5

Four pages of
property results

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Great designs, tight budgets

There are lessons to be learnt from the money-saving ideas of these architects, writes Jane Burton Taylor.

When architects design their own homes they face the same challenges as the rest of us. They negotiate tricky sites, council guidelines and potential budget blow-outs. They obviously save on the architect's fee (usually about 10 per cent to 15 per cent of overall cost) but they also save by applying very practical knowledge such as choosing classic economic materials. Here they share their own stories and some of those tips they learnt first hand.

BUY A HOUSE THAT'S EASY TO RENOVATE
 For Emily Fox of Fox Johnston, keeping the budget tight was a priority in renovating the family home. Even the decision to buy the Californian bungalow on a corner block in Lilyfield was influenced by how easy it would be to renovate.

When she and husband Reiner Schuster first saw the house, it was virtually derelict. It had been tenanted for years and the toilet was outside and had to be accessed from the street. Despite these cons, Fox says the house had great bones, a north-east aspect and easy access.

"We were on a very tight budget, so I wanted it to be very accessible for the builders and a very easy addition to construct," she says. The couple reined costs in by doing much of the work themselves.

In her design, Fox also retained the original house almost completely, reinstating its two front bedrooms, revamping its bathroom and then adding a back living space plus an upstairs parents' retreat.

"We tried to retain the essentials of the house," Fox says. "Any modern intervention respects the integrity of the old." Fox designed an open-plan living room with a window seat at one end. A small playroom that doubles as a guest room was shoehorned in behind the side entry and both this and the living space open to a side deck and a small grassed area with a gate to allow for parking, if needed.

"I wanted to make lots of play areas for the kids," Fox says. "It's like we are living in the garden and

taking advantage of the north-east aspect and breezes."

The front garden was converted into play space as well, plus it now has a small but thriving vegetable plot. "I wanted to use every square metre and create special hideaways for the kids," Fox says.

Materials throughout the \$300,000 renovation were kept affordable and usually bought online or through auction houses.

DO YOUR RENOVATION IN STAGES

Richard Cole of Richard Cole Architecture says doing his renovation in two stages did not save money but it did save stress.

"It may be cheaper to do it in one hit but this way allows you to budget for two smaller hits rather than one large one," he says. "And it meant we had a better chance of getting it right because we had more years of experience of the house."

Cole tells how when he and his wife, Cilla, first visited the Avalon house, it had been on the market for a year and the garden was wildly overgrown. Others had thought about dismantling the house but the Coles saw the value in the old house and the garden.

Cole kept the original sandstone house but changed its roofline. In the first renovation, which cost \$140,000, he lifted the roof, installed highlight windows and put in a walkway leading to a new bedroom and en suite.

In stage two, which cost \$500,000, he added a new kitchen with big sliding glass doors linking it to a covered deck, plus an adjoining guest bedroom with a studio on top.

To keep the new structure in harmony with the old, Cole chose to put skillion roofs on the new predominantly lightweight addition. "They are sympathetic without copying," he says.

The overall concept for Cole's design was to create summer and winter living spaces and it works just as he intended. "The new kitchen has become the new summer zone, opening on to the garden," he says. "The old sandstone is the winter zone, where we retreat to the old fireplace and living room."



DO SOME OF THE WORK YOURSELF
 Architect Manuelle Schelp of Studio Schelp recognised the potential of a single-storey terrace in Darlinghurst on her first inspection. In particular, she saw that she could improve the home's planning and use the slope of the site to put in parking accessed via a back lane. Schelp, together with her husband, Klaus, opted to act as owner-builder. She says it was a definite saving but does not advise it unless you have a healthy knowledge of the building process. "You are avoiding the management fee of the builder but it involves a lot of work: organising trade people; ordering materials; the whole logistics."

Self-styled ... (clockwise from main) Emily Fox, inset, and her Lilyfield living room; the back window seat; Richard Cole in his Avalon kitchen. Photos: Steve Back, Quentin Jones, Brett Boardman

Like the Foxes, the couple did work themselves as well, including all the painting. Another saving was pocketed by living on site during construction. The renovation, which cost just under \$500,000, added significant value to the house. It started as a two-bedroom terrace with one bathroom and ended up with three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a garage.

Schelp explains how she rejigged the floor plan, moving a sitting room in the middle of the plan, to locate bedrooms at the front of the house and living spaces opening to the back. She also created internal split levels; this allowed her to drop the ceilings to fit in an attic bedroom and make the living area

GO FOR SIMPLICITY
 Warwick Simmonds of BVN Architecture and his interior



DARLO DREAM HOME
 Domain editor Stephen Nicholls visits architect Manuelle Schelp's beautiful home on domain.com.au/video. Also see our 10 tips to renovating wisely beneath the Property banner on smh.com.au



Simple solutions ... (clockwise from main) the back deck of the Darlinghurst home of Manuelle Schelp, inset, conceals a garage; Warwick Simmonds and Carol Sansoni; their house at Church Point. Photos: Des Harris, Warwick Simmonds

designer wife Carol Sansoni bought land in Church Point about nine years ago but had to design and document the house twice. In retrospect, Simmonds says he should have known better but mark one blew the budget. When they realised how much the initial design would actually cost, they seriously considered selling the land but reneged at the last moment, opting to try a much leaner and more affordable design.

"After some soul searching we decided to give it another go," Simmonds says. "We designed a very simple, modest house just for the two of us. It is 110 square metres internally with some decks." The modest size was just one way

of keeping cost down. The design was pared back as much as possible as well. "The whole thrust of what I had to do was keep it simple as," Simmonds says. "The house is two simple platforms. It steps down with the slope of the site twice. It is two very simple little boxes with a skillion roof."

Then there is what Simmonds describes as "the nicejoy" of the bathroom, which opens via translucent louvres on both the internal and external walls. The site is a private bush block, so they can open the louvres and let breezes flow through the house.

In building, Simmonds opted for a pre-cut steel and timber frame that went up in just four days. The house

is designed on a 3.6-metre grid so he could use off-the-shelf units of materials and windows and doors. One element that cranked up the budget of \$495,000 was the access to and excavation of the steep site. Simmonds says it cost about \$50,000 just to clear the site (which is above the road) of rocks and excavate a parking bay.

One economic value addition was the studio space for Sansoni that Simmonds added into the undercroft of the little house.

"We clad it in a material that is like milk-coloured glass and it lets in a lovely translucent light," Simmonds says. "And we put in a couple of outward-opening doors, so she can look out on to Pittwater."

Smart Beach Buys

Anna Anderson



VINCENIA
 10 CAROLINE ST
\$497,500

The architect-owners picked up this 1960s fibro beach house for a tiny \$169,000 in 1999 but they've since improved it with a smart renovation and extension. It has a north-facing deck with views over Jervis Bay and is on 664 sq m about three minutes' walk from Orion beach and 2 1/2 hours' drive south of Sydney. Caroline Cottage has been let for holiday rentals for just under a year and brings \$1950 a week through January. Inspect By appointment. Agent Jervis Bay FN 0431 454 312. More photos @ Domain.com.au



CONJOLA PARK
 14 COOLIBAH AVE
\$485,000

Binda Lake House is on 696 sq m about 250 metres from the boat ramp, 10 minutes drive from Mollymook and three hours' drive south of Sydney. The renovated 1970s house has lake views and a chic interior. The living area and kitchen have limed timber floors and a deck. There is a second living room and a guest suite downstairs. It brings about \$33,000 a year through holiday rental. Inspect By appointment. Agent Raine & Home Mollymook 0410 324 209. More photos @ Domain.com.au



KILLCARE
 16 KILLCARE RD
\$750,000+

The owners are open to offers on this 1990s architect-designed house, which has been on the market since April. It's a little more than an hour's drive from the freeway at Wahroonga. On 582 sq m, it's less than 200 metres from Hardys Bay shops and marina and less than 10 minutes' walk from the patrolled surf beach. The house next door brings about \$45,000 a year in holiday rental. Inspect By appointment. Agent PRDnationwide Ettalong Beach 0416 479 783. More photos @ Domain.com.au



NAMBUCCA HEADS
 33 LISTON ST
\$619,000

New owners could apply to council to reinstate the bed and breakfast license that brought up to \$650 a week when this house was divided into three apartments. The flexible accommodation could work for a holiday home with a permanent tenant in one section or as one large house. It has open-plan living areas and a deck with ocean views. It's on a 483 sq m block 400 metres from the beach and five hours' drive from Sydney. Inspect By appointment. Agents Valla RE 0417 394 070. More photos @ Domain.com.au



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