

RENOVATION

Home sweet studio



Robyn and Neil Payne in their airy, versatile living room.
PICTURES:
SIMON SCHLUTER

Rearranging rooms and functions in this Californian renovation has made a very desirable living and working space, writes **Lou Sweeney**.

NEIL and Robyn Payne make music at the front of their 1920s Californian bungalow in East Brighton. Out in the renovated rear, they let nature take the creative reins.

When they moved in 17 years ago, the brick and timber residence had that "nanna" feel about it — a house with great potential that hadn't seen a lot of love over the years.

Renovating the front section six years ago, the Payne's created music studios and an office for their business Admusic. The producers are responsible for some of the most enduring snatches of music you will hear coming from the TV.

The renovation of the rear section, finished recently, became a priority because of rotting windows in the living area.

Architect Nic Owen mused about the orientation — west facing, with a snatch of north sun, garden views and accessibility. He came to the Payne's with three sketches. "We talked about what was acceptable to us and he

gave us his ideas and we met somewhere in the middle," Mr Payne says.

It became apparent that what was needed was a better family room that offered flexibility of layout and drew the fine, under-utilised rear garden into the space. "It was a quality of life thing for us too," says Mr Payne, "we didn't want to be crammed into a dodgy space."

Which is what was there beforehand. The spare bedroom/sunroom, hidden at the rear, was opened up so that it became part of the living area.

The smart room configuration here needs to be explained.

Recessed to the back of the space, the bedroom that takes its place as part of an open-plan living area is a genuinely top idea. Blank walls, white tones and unobtrusive storage mean the Paynes can use this area in any way they chose. It just so happens that at the moment it's their bedroom.

"We didn't want it to scream 'bedroom'," says Mr Payne, "so

the surfaces are flat, storage is almost hidden and the colours are blank. It could be anything."

In front, the living area ranges down to a wall of glass and out onto the deck creating the de rigueur indoor/outdoor area. It's the versatility of the room that makes it a stand-out.

"We've been able to have meetings in here, or we'll put cushions on the floor and have friends over. Once we put a trestle table in and had 22 people around for a dinner party," Mrs Payne says.

Another plus is waking up in the morning and gazing across the living area to the verdant backyard. "When the weather's fine we open up the four doors and it feels like we're in our own B&B. It's just lovely."

An olive feature wall gives depth to the room and provides a backdrop for the projector TV screen. On the opposite wall above the dining table, a chunky rug in muted shades of green has become a much talked about wall hanging.

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SMART IDEAS

HIDDEN WALL OF CUPBOARDS



The brief was to make the space as pliable as possible. Hidden storage set into the wall by the bed means you can stash your mags, glasses and bedtime paraphernalia without making it look too much like a bedroom. This spot above the bed and another around the corner that hides the meter box continue the flat, unadorned look of the space. The built-in wardrobes don't look like dedicated bedroom wardrobes but simple storage space should the room become another living/dining/ multipurpose area.

BARBECUE CABINET

Not wanting the standard stone or granite surround for their barbecue, the Paynes wanted to keep the timber theme running inside and out. Finding a cabinet maker for something like this — a bit fiddly, time consuming and with the problem of fireproofing — was difficult. David Waterworth, a cabinet and furniture maker from Against the Grain (0403 952 634), made the handsome, functional item and also the entertainment unit and dining table inside.



TRANSPARENT GABLED ROOF

Nic Owen, of Nic Owen Architects in Carlton, (9347 1140) added this smart structure of timber and Laserlight over the rear deck to capture, filter and distribute light and allow cooling breezes to flow underneath. It hides the skillion roof at the rear of the house and enhances the period feel of the structure. He was also responsible for the hidden cupboards, furniture design and even their placement in the living room.



The handmade wooden table, entertainment unit and storage chest create an individual flavour that both lifts the space and anchors it among the abundant light and green filtering in from the backyard.

"We're sort of decorating it slowly and liking that clean feel after years of having clutter in here," Mr Payne says.

Things exterior haven't been forgotten either. The expansive deck is centred around a towering birch tree and the barbecue at its side is set in a timber cabinet that continues the fine wooden theme. The architect has fashioned an airy transparent gabled roof over the deck that allows air flow and light while hiding the flat skillion roof behind.

"We love it, because it's flexible, adaptable and we can move things around to make it what we want," Mr Payne says. In a world where multi tasking, free flow and resourcefulness rule, this could well be the template for the new millennium room.