



# Hidden from sight

The front of this Victorian cottage gives little hint at what lies beyond – a highly contemporary extension that has completely transformed the living space

*This page:* From the front, this house retains its original 1890s Victorian worker's cottage aesthetic, but at the rear it's another story. A new addition, designed by architect Nic Owen, provides family living areas that open up to the garden. The custom timber cladding references traditional weatherboards, with the play of light and shadow adding visual interest.

*Facing page:* Canopies provide welcome shade during the summer.

**It's not always how much space you have,** but how this is configured that determines a successful design.

This 1890s Victorian worker's cottage, for example, has undergone an extensive transformation involving a new addition at the rear, but the overall floor area is a fraction less than it was before. For the owners, however, the change to their living environment is immense.

Architect Nic Owen was commissioned to come up with a cost-effective plan that would open up the house to the sunny rear garden. But that wasn't the only requirement, says Owen.





“These were very adventurous clients. While they were not too specific about the design, they wanted something out of the ordinary – a little work of art to live in.”

The architect says the site was subject to a heritage overlay, so it was essential to retain and respect the period elements of the house. It was possible, however, to remove a skillion-roof lean-to at the rear and replace this with a highly contemporary, L-shaped extension.

“As is the case with most original homes of this period, the service rooms occupied the best positions on the north side.”

The addition was consequently designed to accommodate the family living area, which opens up to the garden. To respect both the traditional and modern architecture, the new box-like volume is separated from the original cottage by a small, flat-roofed linking element.

“There was also a need to differentiate the separate spaces within the open-plan living area,” says Owen. “While the main part of the extension has a 3.4m ceiling height, the dining area is more intimate. It has a lower ceiling and is wrapped in hoop pine plywood – the ply runs up the wall and folds to form the ceiling.”

**Facing page:** The kitchen is positioned to allow easy access to the outdoors for alfresco dining. A fibre-cement canopy above the opening folds at right angles to shelter the clerestory windows.

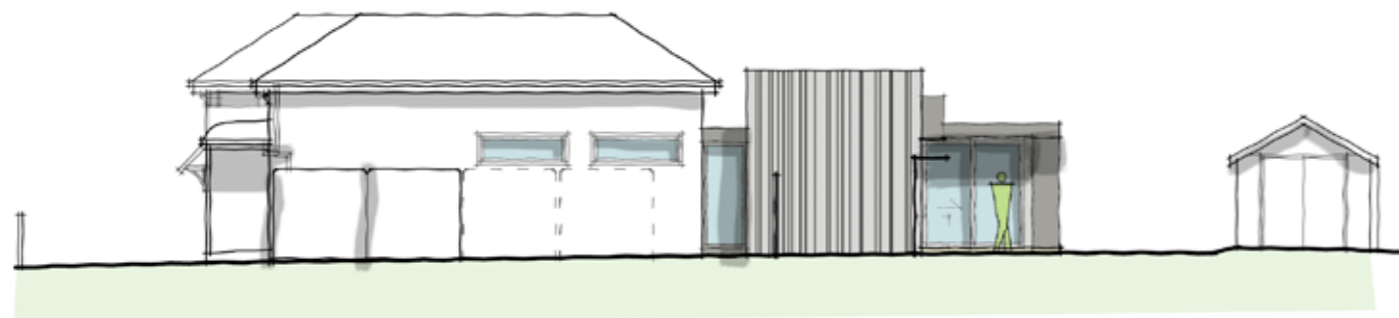
**Above:** Folding elements are also evident on the interior. A hoop pine plywood wall in the dining room folds to form the ceiling, and the mantelpiece folds up to create a bookcase.



**Architect:** Nic Owen AIA, Nic Owen Architects (Carlton North, Vic)  
**Builder:** Haynes Constructions  
**Kitchen manufacturer:** Millennium Cabinets  
**Cladding:** Rough-sawn treated pine battens, treated pine palings, 6mm FC sheeting  
**Roofing:** Lysaght Klip-Lok Zinalume Metal Dek roof  
**Flooring:** Blackbutt  
**Wallcoverings:** Hoop pine plywood sheeting; plasterboard  
**Paints and varnishes:** Dulux; Resene Cool Colours  
**Lighting:** Lampcity Lighting; Ascot Vale  
**Doors and windows:** Commercial aluminium 400 Series box section  
**Skylights:** Bell Design  
**Dining table and stools:** Custom design by Nic Owen Architects  
**Fireplace:** Canon Fitzroy  
**Kitchen cabinetry:** Laminate; hoop pine plywood; Armorpanel plywood  
**Benchtops:** Caesarstone in Osprey  
**Splashback:** Glass  
**Sink:** Clark Epure Evolution  
**Taps:** Methven Gooseneck  
**Oven:** Electrolux  
**Cooktop:** AEG  
**Ventilation:** Blanco  
**Refrigeration:** Fisher & Paykel  
**Dishwasher:** Bosch  
**Bathroom vanity:** Laminate; hoop pine plywood  
**Taps and shower fittings:** Sussex  
**Bath:** Roca Contesa  
**Basin:** Caroma Liano  
**Bathroom wall and floor tiles:** Ascot Vale from Artistic Tiles  
**Accessories:** Zucchetti Plaza

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This folding device is repeated elsewhere in the addition. It appears in a timber mantelpiece that folds up to form a bookcase, and the perimeter benchtop in the kitchen folds up the side of the vertical cabinets. And on the exterior, a dark-charcoal fibre cement canopy shades the clerestory windows and folds down to provide shelter above the kitchen.

Owen says although the new part of the house is not overly large, it feels spacious, due to the high ceiling and the light coming in through the clerestory windows.

"These windows also allow cross ventilation

that helps to regulate the temperature inside."

To maintain the modernist feel of the architecture, the material and colour palettes are essentially limited to natural wood, black and white, with a bright red lacquered door marking the transition between old and new.

Blackbutt timber flooring, and a matching blackbutt table and chairs designed by the architect complement the extensive hoop pine plywood panelling.

Changes to the existing part of the house include a remodelled master suite and a new, light-filled family bathroom.

**Facing page, top:** The lowered hoop pine plywood ceiling in the dining area creates a more intimate feel and helps to define the space.

**Facing page, lower:** A side elevation shows the contrasting architectural forms. The small building is a shed.

**This page:** The master suite has a new walk-through wardrobe and ensuite bathroom. The family bathroom (top) replaces an older bathroom in the former lean-to.