

MODERN GREEN HOMES

Sanctuary

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LIGHT TOUCH

SMALL PROJECTS,
BIG RESULTS

KITCHEN SMARTS

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HOUSE PROFILE

Ardeer, VIC

WORDS

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PHOTOGRAPHY

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AT A GLANCE

- Internal rejig and a 5m² extension for hugely improved liveability
- Better light, warmth and connection to backyard
- Great results on a tight budget



Just

a tad

more

A micro-extension makes a big difference in this typical western Melbourne suburban home.



Images A beautiful mature gum tree in the backyard is a key feature of Ben and Anna's home. The newly renovated living area at the rear now celebrates the tree and provides a much better connection to the garden. "It's a simple setup, but it works," says architect Michael. "I think this kind of project is accessible to many people from a cost perspective."





When Anna and Ben bought their weatherboard home nearly a decade ago, they were delighted to have found an affordable house on a good-sized block. Located in Ardeer, just 14 kilometres west of Melbourne's city centre, there was a train station at their door and the walking and cycling trails of Kororoit Creek nearby.

What they didn't fully appreciate was the potential of the north-facing backyard and its established gum tree – a feature that had deterred some buyers because of its towering size. "Ben fell in love with the tree and then, as we were doing research on energy efficiency, we realised how lucky we were to have this north-facing area at the back," says Anna.

Despite the generous backyard, though, the rear of the house felt disconnected from both the garden and the northern light. A laundry and toilet closed off any views, while a sprawling roofed deck wrapped around the tree, obscuring most of its canopy and blocking light. "The house was cold and dark," Anna says. "We had curtains over the openings to keep everything warm and

really no natural light at all. We always had lights on. It didn't matter the time of day or the season."

A major rebuild was never on the cards. "The house was affordable for us and we wanted to keep it that way," says Ben. While a new house may have been appealing, the reality was a much tighter budget. Instead, the couple focused on making better use of what they already had.

Through their research into passive solar design they discovered architect Michael McManus, whose work often focuses on small, strategic interventions rather than large additions. "The tree was the exceptional feature," says Michael. "It's a pretty typical suburban site otherwise."

The tree has become one of the home's main features through the renovation. The internal layout was reconfigured, and a compact five-square-metre wedge-shaped extension inserted into the rear of the floor plan. "The addition is just big enough to make the living space flow," says Michael. "It's got great energy about it, the way it sits and

animates the existing home."

Rather than trying to do everything at once, the project budget was focused on the areas where the family spends most of its time. The kitchen, dining and living areas have been relocated to the north-facing rear of the house, for natural light and direct access to the garden. The former living room has become a bedroom, grouping all three bedrooms together, while the redesigned bathroom incorporates a laundry to save space in the floor plan. An angled wall in the extension creates a diagonal view towards the gum tree, helping the still-compact home feel larger and more connected to its surroundings.

The construction cost was kept below \$300,000, with decisions made carefully to maximise impact while avoiding major structural changes. Retaining the existing roofline and most of the original building helped keep costs under control. "I do a lot of smaller projects," says Michael. "We're always trying to reuse walls and not impact things greatly, working with what's there as much as possible."



Above “The brief was light, light, light, light,” says homeowner Anna of the project that saw the removal of a large roofed deck and the moving of the living spaces to the rear of the house – plus a tiny angled extension.

The project uses simple materials and colour for impact, rather than expensive finishes. The extension is clad in painted fibre cement sheeting, with its distinctive green drawn from the original gutters and trim. Inside, green laminate kitchen joinery continues the palette. “While the materials and detailing are familiar, amping up the colour creates a relaxed yet cheerful space,” says Michael.

While modest in size, the renovation has made the home much more comfortable to live in. The rear of the home was upgraded with double glazing, new insulation in the ceiling, walls and floor, and better gap sealing, while the north-facing orientation and the removal of the old roofed deck allows winter sunlight deep into the living spaces for natural warmth. “In winter, when we walk from the front door to the back of the

home, we can feel how delightfully warm the rear space is,” says Anna.

From the kitchen and dining area, Anna and Ben can watch their children playing outside, feeling connected to the garden throughout the day. “The old house was quite poky and dark, and the renovation just makes being at home nicer,” Anna says.

Across Melbourne’s western suburbs, there are countless postwar weatherboard homes with similar problems and the same kind of potential. “I think this home feels familiar to a lot of people,” Michael says. “The design is pretty approachable.” By rethinking the layout and adding just five square metres to the footprint, this renovation has delivered what the owners were hoping for. “I just wanted a warm house with lots of light, and now we have it,” Anna says. **S**



LEGEND

- ① Entry
- ② Bedroom
- ③ Living
- ④ Kitchen
- ⑤ Dining
- ⑥ Bathroom
- ⑦ Laundry
- ⑧ Toilet
- ⑨ Roofed patio
- ⑩ Deck

SPECIFICATIONS

DESIGNER

Michael McManus Architects

BUILDER

Vaynor Built

PROJECT TYPE

Renovation and small extension

LOCATION

Ardeer, VIC
(Wurundjeri Country)

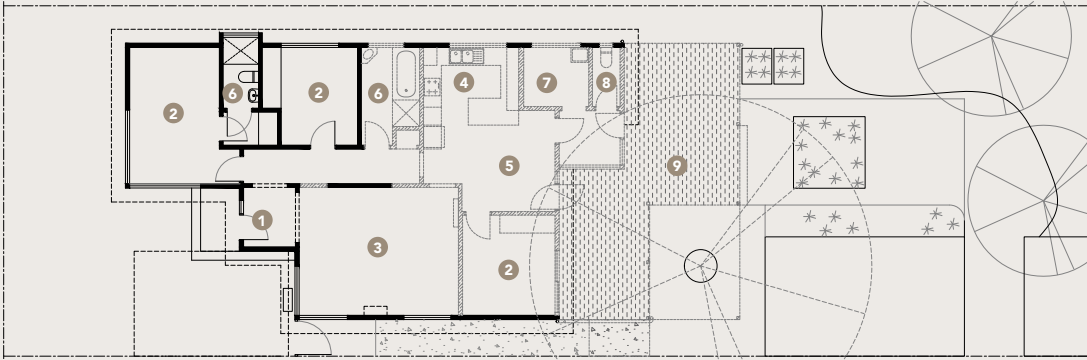
COST

\$290,000
Completed 2023

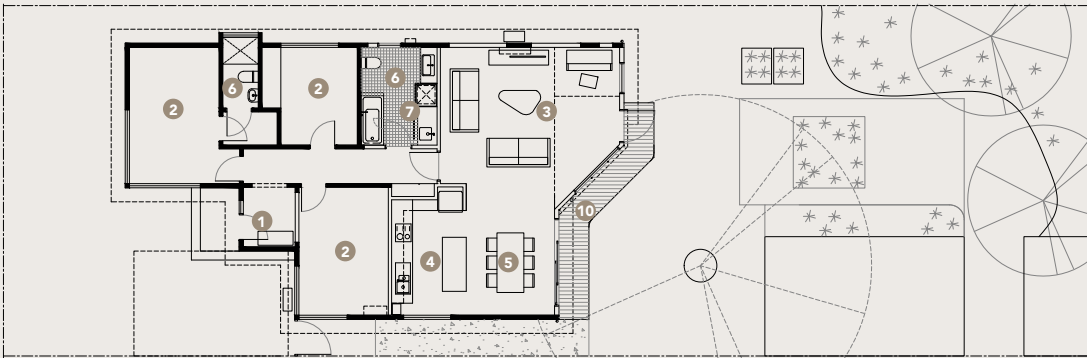
SIZE

House 124m²
Land 428m²

PREVIOUS FLOOR PLAN



FINISHED FLOOR PLAN



HOT WATER

- Existing Bosch instantaneous gas hot water system will be replaced with a heat pump at end of life

RENEWABLE ENERGY

- 4.8kW solar PV system

WATER SAVING

- Water-efficient tapware and fixtures (WELS 4-5 star)

PASSIVE DESIGN, HEATING & COOLING

- Removal of existing roofed deck to the north increases solar access to the dwelling
- Living area relocated to the rear with new north-facing glazing for solar gain
- Plenty of wide openings for natural ventilation

ACTIVE HEATING, COOLING & VENTILATION

- Reverse-cycle air conditioners: Fujitsu 5kW to living and Mitsubishi 2.5kW to main bedroom
- Whitehaven DC ceiling fan to living
- Fantech Rapid Response exhaust fan to bathroom, with non-return backdraught damper

BUILDING MATERIALS

- Existing timber-framed structure retained, with new weatherboards where needed
- Fibre cement cladding with pre-primed pine battens to extension
- Kitchen joinery in Laminex Olivine and Green Slate, with Laminex and Paperock benchtops
- Bathroom joinery in Laminex Fresh Spring
- Silvertop ash decking boards (radially cut to reduce wastage)
- Knauf Earthwool to new ceiling (R5), walls (R2.7) and underfloor (R2)

WINDOWS & GLAZING

- New windows and doors with Victorian ash frames by Aspect Windows using Viridian LightBridge double glazing

LIGHTING

- Unios LED downlights
- Pendants by Creative Cables

COOKING

- Westinghouse induction cooktop

PAINTS, FINISHES & FLOOR COVERINGS

- Dulux low-VOC interior and exterior paints

OTHER ESD FEATURES

- Extension design works with the existing roof and eaves, minimising works required
- Extension size is the minimum required to meet the brief
- Staged construction of future rear pergola considered during design stage