



It is as though Sam Crawford's residences craft themselves from their surrounding materials and form. They don't conform to the pervasive 'Sydney Minimalism' but instead are thoughtful musings on materiality and site. Consider his elemental and textured Bundeeena Beach House and the geometric, sculptural addition of Wave House. Crawford's latest project in a leafy inner west suburb of Sydney is no different. It's as if the building has reconfigured itself with its own raw materials to correspond with its surroundings and its own history.

The dark brick Federation facade of Smee Schoff House is accented by painted black details, but on the whole is unremarkable; the

facade is really only the prologue to a deceptively simple interior. And this is by no means a criticism. In fact, stringent (but hollow) heritage conservation guidelines prevented any dramatic changes from being made to the front of the house. I also suspect Crawford is not in the game for showmanship – his is an articulate focus on materiality and a genuine respect for the history of a space, rather than a quest for the ideal monument to ego. Placed throughout the house are hints at this acknowledgement of history, as recycled materials from demolished parts of the original house create the handrail of the stair, the bench-top of the study, the monolithic brick wall at the rear.

Walking from the entrance through the narrow corridor, the sun-drenched rear of the house is the obvious destination. Winter sun pervades the space through the large steel-framed windows placed at almost every opportunity.

"An ongoing preoccupation of ours is getting winter sun into spaces. As this house effectively faces south and overshadows itself, we have carved out a courtyard and given the new spaces very high ceilings and windows to capture the winter sun," Crawford says.

To add to the house's unfavourable orientation, it is also hemmed in on all sides by imposing brick neighbours. Much like a sapling in a forest, Crawford's building has grown taller to capture more sun, with a higher ceiling and windows placed in the upper reaches to ensure that it is not left in the shade of its domineering neighbours. In typical Sam Crawford style, the resulting openings provide flexible indoor/outdoor spaces, easily transforming the space from enclosed music room to breezy entertaining space.

Prior to renovation the rear of the house, which extended to the back fence, accommodated a sauna, swimming pool and laundry – the horror of which is not expressed on Crawford's poker face but rather the client's constant iterations of 'appalling'. Needless to say it was demolished, its poky rooms now replaced by sprawling open-plan spaces, with high ceilings grounded by exposed wooden beams reincarnated from a previous life as telegraph poles.

Besides the re-use of materials, there are myriad other sustainable considerations in the house: buried beneath a small square carving in the central courtyard is a custom-designed 10,000L water tank; natural sunlight vetoes the need for artificial lighting during the day; solar tubes perch on the roof of the dining/living room, glowing at night like an extraterrestrial visitation.

A walk through the residence reveals other little gems. The ensuite/walk-in wardrobe area evades claustrophobia through subtle concepts like a frosted glass sliding door separating the robe and ensuite, high cupboards which store much more than the eye can see,

and steel-framed windows that draw light in from the central courtyard. A large mirror forms part of the sliding door that divides the space from the bedroom, which has the double benefit of being a compact solution while (paradoxically) making the walk-in space appear bigger. Another surprise comes in the form of the stairway to the loft study. Nestled next to the ensuite, they together appear, on the plan, somewhat like a geometrical yin yang.

The renovation to Smee Schoff House on first glance seems a subtle intervention, but is instead a thorough overhaul that uses materials from the existing site. It is a testament to a thoughtful architecture that reveals itself slowly and suggests an organic evolution rather than a heavy-handed intervention, despite the complexity and depth of its alteration. **Nicole Thomas**



An elevated kitchen amplifies the sense of space.



High windows capture year-round sunlight in this difficult orientation.



Outdoor spaces are inter-connected with the indoors.