

The Daily Telegraph

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Helping hands built this calm beachside oasis **18**

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A Designer Rocco Raso **B** The kitchen and living area flow out to the balcony on the second level
C Travertine tiles were used around the pool



FACT FILE

THE BRIEF

To turn an old duplex into a stylish family home without compromising on quality

THE OWNERS

Tony and Anna Pacitto and their children Alexander, 15, and Isabella, 10

THE DESIGNER

Rocco Raso,
Plan Ahead Designs

THE BUILDER

Agro Building Construction



Friends lend helping hand

Inspiration and recommendations lead the way to success

You could say that Tony and Anna Pacitto get by with a little help from their friends. Actually they do more than get by, as their stunning renovated house in Coogee in Sydney's east shows. Located on one of the suburb's busiest streets, the contemporary timber frontage invites you in and opens up like a Tardis to reveal a spacious tri-level family home and lush backyard.

But it wasn't always like this.

House hunting

Tony and Anna were about to put a deposit on another house a few years ago when a friend phoned with an interesting opportunity.

"A friend called to say he had found a duplex in Coogee," Tony says.

"He said [renovating] it was a bit beyond what he could do."

A quick trip to inspect the property was all the prompting Tony needed.

"As soon as I saw the big backyard, within 10 minutes I went to council to see if there were any issues in terms of heritage and views," he says.

"Then I made an offer."

Set on a bit more than 600sq m, the duplex needed major modifications to convert it into one house. Tony was confident he could pull it off.

"I thought once you have space, you know you can do anything. You just need the space," he says.

A little negotiation followed before the deal was sealed without Anna even seeing the house.

Double life

Although the building was two separate dwellings, the Pacittos and their children Alexander and Isabella moved in and lived in it for 14 months before making any changes.

This allowed them to understand the way

light moved across the property and the nature of the topography of the site.

Although it was a valuable experience, it was not without its inconveniences.

"When we moved in, we slept downstairs and lived upstairs," Tony says.

"So when it was raining, you still had to go outside [to move from one level to another]."

On the recommendation of another friend, Tony contacted building designer Rocco Raso from Plan Ahead Designs to discuss the design options.

High on the wishlist was off-street parking, plenty of living space and a pool.

"It needed a total work over," Rocco says.

"They wanted parking off the street and a pool at the back. We changed the facade, but I wanted it to have a little more character and they needed the room."

Over the eight months it took to design the tri-level renovation, they settled on separate living areas on street level, the floor below on the same level as the pool, and three bedrooms positioned on the top floor.

Change of plan

Given that the old duplex offered no connection to the backyard, opening up the new family home to the light and views of the mature trees was paramount.

Along with the landscape plan designed by Clint Watton from Toil With Soil Landscape & Design, they submitted the design to council.

Although the changes were well within the floor-to-space ratio, an objection from a neighbour forced Tony and Anna to





D The “floating” timber stairway **E** Mature trees provide a backdrop to the house **F** Timber floorboards connect with the timber used in the facade **G** A large mirror reflects light and opens up the bathroom **H** The original duplex was converted into this contemporary three-storey house



reconsider their design. With building costs temporarily low during Australia's brief financial crisis and a relationship with the neighbours at stake, Tony and Anna decided to pull the house back 1m and change the position of the pool.

“We could have fought it and we probably would have won but I wanted to start building so we reworked the design and in the end it all worked out,” Tony says.

On the recommendation of a friend, Tony called in builder Chris Portocalli from Agro Building Construction to pull off the 12-month build.

Tony was on site every day to check progress and help out where he could, as well as to choose everything from the materials used in the kitchen to the glass mosaic and travertine floor tiles from Cerastone Gallery used in the wet areas.

Tony's choices of building professionals and materials are based on the idea that only the best will do.

“I will not take short cuts,” Tony says.

“I think you have to do it right and do it once. I didn't want any dramas with things breaking down later on.”

Simply stylish

But while everything about this house is top shelf, it has a relaxed elegance well suited to its position close to the beach.

Entry from the street leads visitors into the new kitchen and living areas with views directly over the pool and backyard below.

New off-street parking simplifies access to the kitchen when moving groceries.

Downstairs, the brushbox timber staircase leads into a stylish lounge and bar area with mirrored walls concealing a tiled laundry and shower as well as a separate toilet.

This leads directly on to the new pool with steps down one side leading to the new sunken garden.

Garden delights

Capitalising on the mature trees, landscape architect Clint Watton designed a low-maintenance native garden using railway sleepers from Dural Landscaping to form “bridges” over dry riverbeds.

“Council liked the landscaping, because there are a lot of natives specified in the design and a number of them were indigenous to the area,” Tony says.

“I don't have a green thumb and if I had planted something it would have died.”

The result is a calm oasis, perfect for Sunday morning coffee or a quiet drink in the evening.

Tony found Clint after their children went to preschool together about 10 years ago.

“A lot of people say you shouldn't do business with friends, but I like to do business with people I know before I look for people I don't.” ■

Robyn Willis

● **MORE INFORMATION**
Agro Building Construction 9663 1594
Plan Ahead Designs 9314 0044
planahead.com.au
Toil With Soil Landscape & Design
 0401 373 997

GET THE LOOK

RUFFLING CUSHIONS

The owners went to great lengths to get the details right and when it was time to furnish the house they took the same approach. Starting with a neutral backdrop, they provided colour and texture with soft furnishings. For cushions similar to those in the lounge room, take a peek at the new Rapee range. Pictured is the Morocco Can Can cushion in red (also available in orange, turquoise, plum, black).

● MORE INFORMATION

Rapee rapee.com.au



STAR IN STRIPES

Hallways are a great place to make a first impression. For maximum impact the owners wallpapered their hallway in bold stripes. Porter's Paints has an extensive range of beautiful wallpapers that are easy to hang. Use them to create depth, texture or just to make an ordinary room extraordinary. Pictured is Stripe wallpaper in Classic Pearl. It is priced at \$150 per 10m roll.

● **MORE INFORMATION**
Porter's Paints 1800 656 664,
porterspains.com



Photos: John Fotiadis