

# MADE TO ORDER

WITH PLENTY OF EXPERIENCE RENOVATING OLDER HOMES, A MELBOURNE FAMILY WAS EXCITED TO TACKLE A NEW PROJECT

STORY SHELLEY TUSTIN STYLING ALANA LANGAN PHOTOGRAPHY SHANIA SHEGEDYN

Seasoned renovators Rachael and Alex have had plenty of practice turning ugly ducklings into beautifully refurbished swans, but their latest project, a new build in Melbourne's bayside area, was a fresh experience for the design-savvy duo. Building from scratch provided different challenges but, most excitingly, it gave them the chance to create a truly bespoke home, designed to fit seamlessly in with the way their family lives. "We've done a few houses before, so I had some strong ideas about what I wanted," says Rachael.

The first challenge for the couple, parents to daughter, Georgia, 15, and son, Charlie, 14, was finding the right block, which proved far from easy. The pair wanted something close to the water (as expat Brits, it's important for them to enjoy the laid-back lifestyle of Australia's seaside suburbs), with rear-lane access for parking, on a block big enough to subdivide and without a heritage overlay – a house that they could demolish without any visual cost to the streetscape. Their diligent hunting was finally rewarded with the perfect place: a nothing-special California bungalow sitting on 600 square metres – a palatial site for this inner-suburban area.

The original plan was to divide the block in two, creating one lovely house for themselves and a twin to sell. However, a little experience and research can be a tricky thing. With past renovations and much enthusiastic magazine flipping and Pinterest pinning in mind, Rachael admits her list of must-haves kept expanding – so much so the home's planned size swelled by a third. Yet, despite this, the couple stayed true to their original intention, which was not to overbuild on the block, and were still able to subdivide. "We were quite clear in our minds that we didn't want to create massive

rooms just for the sake of having big rooms," says Rachael. "We wanted it to be quite economical in the space."

The result is a house that feels light and airy, without being overly large. There are plenty of spaces for the family to entertain and spend time together, as well as quiet nooks to get away from it all. Most importantly, everything feels very connected, courtesy of a central void, internal windows and flowing open-plan spaces. The practical rooms – laundry, powder room, pantry – are hidden away

in two black 'boxes', removing them from notice.

Alex is the co-founder of Smarter Bathrooms, so one of the couple's major goals was to make a showpiece kitchen and two-and-a-half wow bathrooms. Setting the team loose on the spaces, they achieved designated chef Rachael's dream kitchen and an award-winning bathroom design, snagging the HIA Bathroom of the Year award in 2016.

The pair had seen enough new builds to know what they definitely didn't want, steering away from anything too shiny and new-looking, and leaning towards natural materials rich with texture. "Being a brand new house, we wanted to avoid that boxy feel," explains Rachael. Yet, building from scratch has had one amazing advantage: there's been little need to compromise. "We spent so long thinking about this house and how we wanted it to work with our family," she says.

"We drew on mistakes made in the past and things we'd seen done well elsewhere." This was in comparison to previous renovations of older houses, which left Rachael to wryly reflect that they never felt completely finished until the day they prepared to sell. "The difference with living in a brand new house that we've had complete control over is that it's completely finished and it's exactly what we wanted," she says.



### THAT LIVED-IN LOOK

While Alex and Rachael's property is a brand-spanking new build, the couple was keen to avoid a show-home look, so opted for multiple layers of matt and recycled materials. From the back, a towering chimney of recycled brick rises from a wood-burning outdoor fire, while cypress timber panelling upstairs adds wonderful texture and warmth. An 18-metre lap pool, including a splash zone for the couple's teenage children (and friends), was a must-have, while a sizeable deck (opposite, where Rachael sits with Ralph the dog) is ideal for entertaining a crowd. >



“I WANTED THE *seating* TO GO ROUND TO THE COOKING SIDE SO  
THE *chef* DOESN'T FEEL LEFT OUT OF WHAT'S GOING ON” ~ RACHAEL





**KITCHEN** A cafe-style tilt window pushes out and up to connect the kitchen (above & opposite) to the deck and barbecue area. The bar stools, inside and out, are from a homewares store in Sorrento. “Good bar stools are hard to find,” explains Rachael (pictured opposite, with Charlie, Georgia and the family dog, Ralph). For similar, try Organic Modernism ‘Taburet’ oak bar stools from Life Interiors. Inside echoes with touchable textures: Carrara marble, two tones of American oak veneer (dark stained and polished, and rough cut) and that stunning brick wall. “A few people tried to talk me out of that one!” says Rachael. “People get scared because they think of splashing on the bricks, but I’m a neat cook and I don’t care about a few splashes. It’s part of the story of living there.” The mum-of-two was not a fan of island benches, seeing them as isolating the chef, but found a solution in the cantilevered edge, which brings people closer to the cooking zone. >

FLOOR PLAN

GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

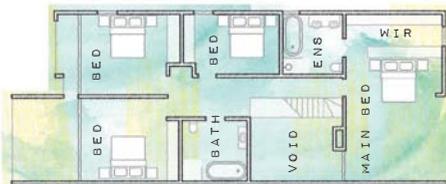


ILLUSTRATION KENZIEDSIGN.COM





#### OPEN-PLAN LIVING

This living/dining/kitchen area is where the family of four spends most of its time (above). Opposite the kitchen, a dining nook (left) has been carved out, featuring an extendable dining table bought second-hand in England. Behind this is one of the space-savvy highlights of the home, a long built-in window seat with blue cushion that juts out over the pool, giving more seating space beyond the boundary wall (above). "We added bookcases at either end to encourage lying down and reading," says Rachael. The couple chose American oak with a matt finish for flooring. For a similar look, try Polyflor Affinity vinyl flooring in Saw Mill Oak.

#### LIVING AREA

An L-shaped sofa from Sofas Direct (dressed with cushions from The Shelley Pantone Store) turns its back on the open space

to create a cosy nook (above & opposite). The unique coffee table, which could easily be a designer piece sourced from Coco Republic, is actually Alex's old trunk from boarding school. This area is made still more snug through framing on three sides by darkness: on one side, the powder-coated steel box that houses the fireplace, and on two other sides, the American oak boxes that discreetly house utility rooms (with laundry and powder room in one, and study nook and pantry in another). With the doors to each of these rooms concealed by seamless, almost black, cabinetry, these boxes give the home a clean flow – although the process of getting the panels just right wasn't easy! "We sent it to a furniture polisher to get a completely matt finish," explains Alex. "It's got a zero per cent reflection, which is very hard to get – it drove us mad, but it ended up looking good!" >

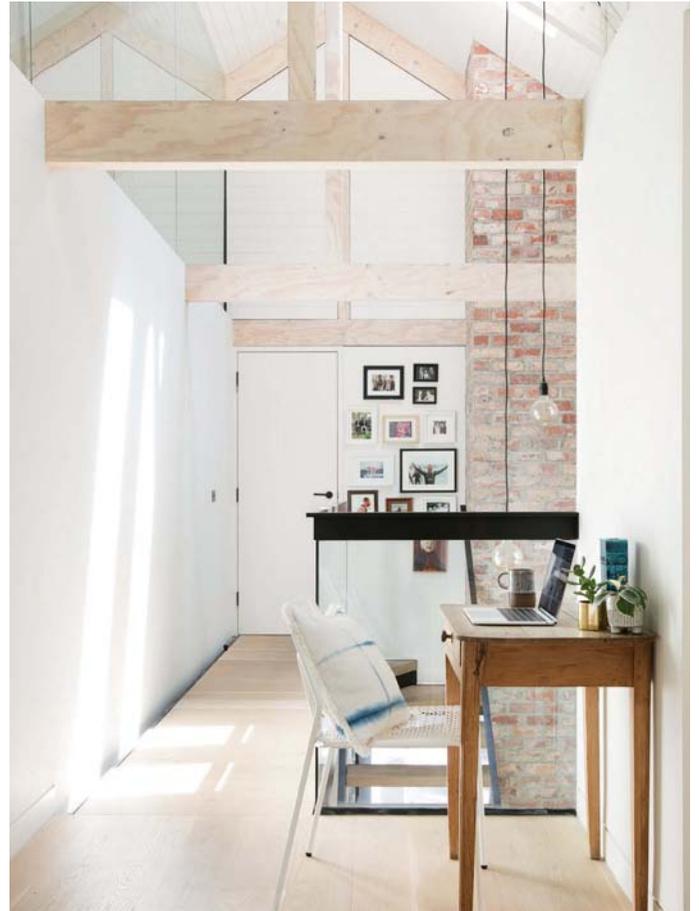


“WE WANTED  
*everything* MATT –  
I’VE NEVER LIKED  
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I’M ALWAYS TRYING  
TO FIND THE *matt*  
OPTIONS” ~ RACHAEL

WE LOVE...  
*light timber*

Rachael has a soft spot for Scandinavian-style interiors, but the room's blond timber beams weren't in the original plan. "The timber got damaged by rain when we were starting to build, so we ended up having to treat them with a lighter finish," says Rachael. "But actually, the look is really great, it feels like they were meant to be that way." This look can be achieved with specialty products such as LiteniT wood bleach (\$380/20 litres, Floorwood).





“WE WANTED THE HOUSE TO HAVE A LOT OF *texture* AND BE A BIT SCANDI, BUT *warm* AND NOT TOO BARE OR MINIMAL” ~ RACHAEL

**MAIN BEDROOM**

Pale timber beams and soaring double-height windows steal the show in Rachael and Alex’s bedroom (opposite), which needs little more by way of adornment than a simple choice of essential furnishings: bedsides from Globe West, lamps from Freedom and a striped linen duvet and throw from Cultiver. The half wall conceals the walk-in wardrobe.

**BATHROOMS**

With Alex and the Smarter Bathrooms crew on the case, the bathrooms were always going to be the showpieces of the house. Using the same tiles, fixtures and fittings in each, the rooms offer a calming continuity - both are lined in huge tiles. Combined with colour-matched (and mould-resistant) epoxy grout, Rachael says, “it reads almost as one massive tile, rather than lots of smaller ones”. Elegant Clearwater

‘Formoso’ baths (as pictured in the main bathroom, top left) and black Astra Walker tapware epitomise simple sophistication. In the ensuite (right), the Omvivo double basin combines two bowls in one piece, which leaves space in the middle for some decorative touches - a Wingnut & Co planter from Ivy Muse and hand towel from Loom Towels, in this case. It is also creatively set off centre, which helps to draw attention to the timber vanity top, in the same rough cut American oak veneer as used in the kitchen.

**UPSTAIRS HALL**

With natural light streaming in, the upstairs hallway (top right) is a spot worth lingering in, with just enough room for a seat at an antique table. Above the stairwell hang two pendant lights from Masson For Light, the same ones used in the kitchen, but hung singularly instead of in a cluster. >





#### ENTRANCE

An enormous 2.1-metre square pivot door makes a heck of a statement in the entryway to the home. "We knew that we wanted a big door, but it ended up being very big!" says Rachael. Struggling to find a door they liked, the couple decided to line it with the same matt American oak timber boards used on the floors, giving the space a pleasing visual continuity.

#### CONTACTS

##### Kitchen and bathrooms

Smarter Bathrooms,  
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##### Architect

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(03) 9428 1415, [threecarchitects.com](http://threecarchitects.com)

##### Builder

Frank (03) 9555 5677, [frank.net.au](http://frank.net.au)

## TACTILE TONES



1



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3



4

## INSIDE STORY RACHAEL & ALEX'S HOME

### Who lives here?

Rachael, a project manager; Alex, co-owner of Smarter Bathrooms; their children, Georgia, 15, and Charlie, 14; Ralph the dog and Missy the cat.

### What do you love about living in a new home?

Rachael: "It doesn't feel like a new home because of the natural materials throughout. But the beauty of it is that we don't feel the need to be doing any projects on the weekends, so we can relax and entertain our friends and family."

### What is your favourite part of the home?

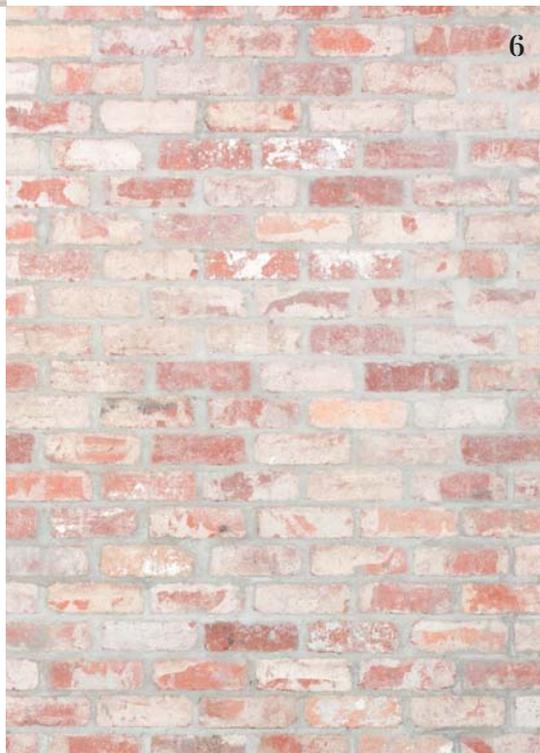
"Every part of the home is used exactly as we envisaged it. In summer we are outside in the pool and barbecuing on the deck; in winter we are in front of the fire in the sitting room."

### Where would we find you all on a Sunday?

"Sunday morning is a busy time with sporting commitments - but we reconvene on Sunday evening, often with a roast and always with a fire in the open fireplace."



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1. 'Icon' sink mixer with swivel spout in Matt Black, Astra Walker.
2. Charlie, Rachael and Georgia enjoy the easy-breezy kitchen servery.
3. Italian porcelain tiles in Venus, available from Smarter Bathrooms.
4. Replica Eames 'Premium DSW' chairs, Matt Blatt.
5. Modular sofa, Sofas Direct.
6. Recycled bricks, try The Brick Recyclers in Melbourne, The Brick Pit in Sydney, or search for building recyclers in your area.
7. Butterfly chair with canvas cover, try Terrace Outdoor Living.

ACTUAL PAINT COLOURS MAY VARY ON APPLICATION