



# THE DESIGN FILES

By LUCY FEAGINS

## Ramming home a brilliant idea

**Who:** Raja Rengasamy, Ruth Halls and son Nikhil (2)

**What:** A Californian bungalow with a rammed-earth renovation

**Where:** Melbourne's Brunswick East

**R**aja Rengasamy and Ruth Halls moved into their Californian bungalow in Brunswick in 2014, but always had big plans for the “wonky, draughty, asbestos-laden” property.

Rengasamy says their ambition to combine their heritage home with a rammed-earth extension emerged from a slightly ambitious starting point. “We were continuously outbid for already completed homes, and thought maybe we could renovate a home for cheaper ... we were wrong.”

While it may have cost a little more than they bargained for, the couple has created a highly resolved property that marries two unlikely aesthetics.

Their interest in rammed earth came via Halls’ parents, who had hand built their family home in the Yarra Valley in the 1970s.

Armed only with a book on rammed-earth building, her parents constructed the home over two years.

While Halls and Rengasamy weren’t so keen on doing the labour, they loved this material, with its warm, textural feel and thermal



mass properties, and they were very keen to incorporate rammed earth into their home.

Luckily, they were able to find an expert provider in Olnee Rammed Earth, along with their builders, Renovation One.

The resulting structure is filled with natural light from the adjoining bungalow, and the existing home is expanded without a typical “box on the back” renovation.

Rengasamy says engaging the architects from Steffen Welsch Architects gave rise to “ideas we never would have imagined ourselves”.

Inside, the natural tones of the rammed earth and timber details sit



alongside crisp white walls, providing a bright, contemporary feel. Rengasamy describes the rammed-earth elements as “sand dune-like”, helping the contemporary space feel relaxed and grounded.

For anyone thinking of renovating their own home, he passes on some wisdom given to him by a friend.

After hearing horror stories about living in a home during its renovation, the friend advised the couple to budget for renting a place during construction. “We were very, very lucky to have rented a house across the road,” Rengasamy says.

This meant the family could watch the building unfold, close enough to keep a watchful eye – but far enough to retreat when necessary. [m](#)

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Rammed earth, timber details and white walls create a contemporary feel. Raja and Ruth with son Nikhil, above left.

