

DOWN TO EARTH AND OUT OF THIS WORLD

A modest bungalow in Melbourne is the talk of the town thanks to a curved addition made from rammed earth

WORDS LOUISE SMITHERS PHOTOGRAPHY RHIANNON SLATTER





The qualities of the original Californian bungalow are still apparent

DETAILS

HOUSE Down to Earth
LOCATION Brunswick East, Victoria
DATE COMMENCED April 2015
DATE COMPLETED August 2017
INITIAL BUDGET \$650,000
FINAL COST \$816,000

boasting thermal brilliance and flexibility as its top traits, this inner-city family home and its sweeping curved addition is a love letter to the owner's past and a celebration of the original 1930s Californian bungalow.

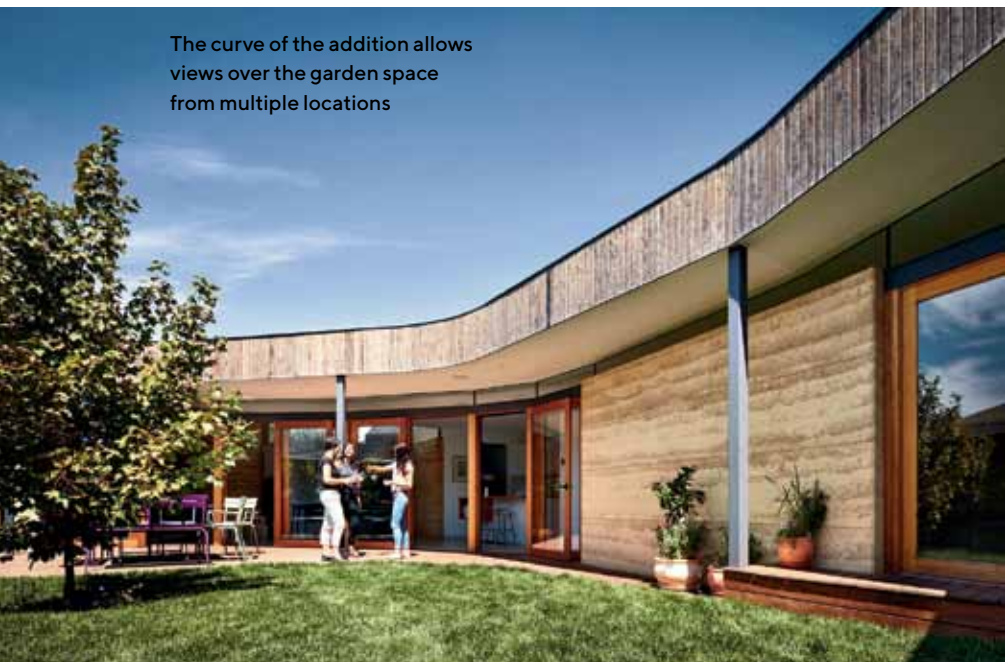
Prior to its revival, the bungalow and small south-facing lean-to was in a great location but less-than-desirable condition. Hot in summer, cold in winter and drafty all year round, the house lacked insulation or sufficient window glazing. Sporting a layout akin to a rabbit warren, the kitchen and bathrooms were substandard and the orientation of living zones was questionable. All in all it wasn't ideal. "Although it faced the 'wrong' way, the southern backyard was large enough to provide scope for a new and more energy-efficient home," says Steffen Welsch, director at Steffen Welsch Architects.

The clients, medical professionals and parents to a busy two-year-old, are first-time homeowners who had grand plans for their family home, which they hoped would be big enough to house more kids in the future and comfortably accommodate long-term guests. Thanks to the architect, these plans have been realised.

The bungalow was gutted, repaired, insulated and brought back to life with three multipurpose rooms that Steffen says can be used as play rooms, guest rooms, kids' rooms or a study. Fixing the problematic living area was done by pushing the new living zone as far south as possible to gain access to natural light. Landscaped courtyards introduce light, ventilation and clean air to the living spaces.

"We wanted to create a home that protects you from the outside, one that is more introverted, where the rooms are grouped around a big courtyard and face each other," Steffen says.

The extension was inspired by its owner Ruth's childhood home. Built by her parents, she remembers the rammed earth house with fondness and frequency. Revisiting this familiar material in adulthood no doubt



The curve of the addition allows views over the garden space from multiple locations



"IN THE NEW HALL, THE RAMMED EARTH WALLS 'SQUEEZE' AND THEN EXPAND INTO THE LIVING AREAS"
— STEFFEN WELSCH



Polished concrete flooring offsets the rammed earth walls



Three multipurpose rooms offer spaces for everyone

brings comfort to its owner and adds value and functionality to the structure.

“We used rammed earth not only for its environmental credentials, but also for its simplicity, rawness and texture,” Steffen says.

The curved extension accommodates the parents’ bedroom, study nook, open kitchen, dining, living, pantry and laundry, which doubles as a photo lab.

Favouring practicality and comfort over design fads and overdesigned digs, the thermal prowess of rammed earth is evident once inside, where the temperature always feels perfect. Indeed, the thermal benefits of this underutilised building material cannot be overstated and while it’s unusual to see this type of structural work in the inner city, it manages to perfectly fit with the slightly unusual and organic plan of the project.

In the new hall, the rammed earth walls “squeeze” and then expand into the living areas. Polished concrete floors that are simple, low-maintenance and practical offset the earthy walls. Timber doors and windows warm the material palette.



WE LOVE
THE CHARRED TIMBER BENCH IN THE HALL

EDITOR'S FAVOURITE

THE GLASS DOORS ALONG THE CURVED WALL THAT OPEN TO THE COURTYARD

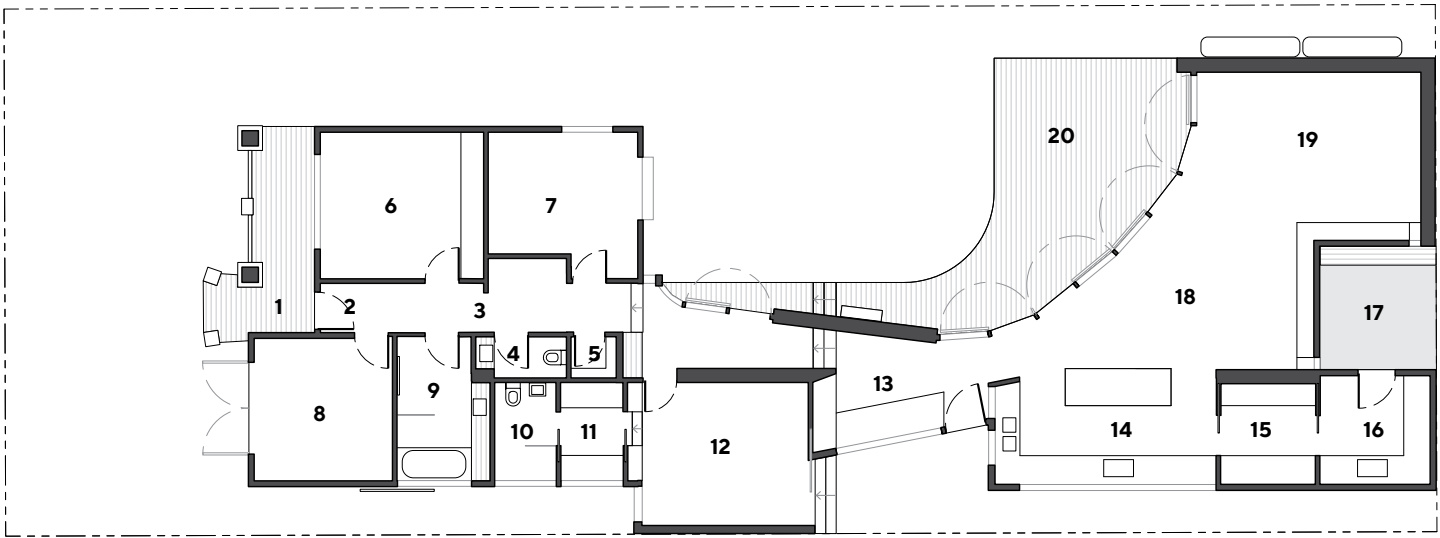
Frameless glazing separates rammed earth walls and doors from the roof, making them appear to float in place. Framed views encourage connection between spaces, such as the view from the kitchen into the study through an internal window. Or the vista of the restored house visible from the new living room.

Outdoor connection isn't overlooked either, with the new bay window in the playroom looking out onto the courtyard.

High in thermal mass and insulated to the nines (including insulation below the under-slab heating), Down to Earth reveals the beauty of efficiency and the power of thinking outside the square. 🏡



PROJECT
DOWN TO EARTH



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- LEGEND**
- | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1 Porch | 5 Store | 9 Bathroom | 13 Study nook | 17 Service court |
| 2 Entry | 6 Bedroom | 10 Ensuite | 14 Kitchen | 18 Dining |
| 3 Drop zone | 7 Play room | 11 WIR | 15 Butler's pantry | 19 Living |
| 4 Powder room | 8 Bedroom | 12 Master bedroom | 16 Laundry | 20 Deck |

PROJECT TEAM

ARCHITECT Steffen Welsch Architects, steffenwelsch.com.au

STRUCTURAL TEAM

Builder Renovation One, renovationone.com.au
Rammed earth Olnee Rammed Earth, olneerammedearth.com.au
Structural engineer Maurice Farrugia and Associates Pty Ltd, 03 9696 9073
Land surveyor Meridian Land Surveyors, meridiansurvey.com.au

SERVICES

Energy rating, Homestar Energy Rating Services, homestar.com.au
Heating Mercury Heating and Cooling, callmercury.com.au
Joinery MTR Cabinets, mtrcabinets.com

FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Oven, dishwasher, cooktop V-ZUG, vzug.com/au/en
Sink Franke, franke.com
Bathroom taps Astra Walker, astrawalker.com.au
Bath Bette, bette.de/en
Bathroom basins Rogerseller, rogerseller.com.au

FURNITURE & FURNISHINGS

Curtains Clearview, clearviewsuncontrol.com.au



TOP Clear, smooth lines ensure the bathroom — with integrated shower and bath — is an elegant and inviting space