Balancing Character with Elegance – Armadale II by Studio Tate

MELBOURNE, VIC, AUSTRALIA

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With just a few simple yet key architectural gestures, Studio Tate transforms a grand turn-of-the-century house in Melbourne's inner-east into a family home that expertly balances character with elegance, and respect for the home's heritage with contemporary sophistication.

Studio Tate principal Alex Hopkins describes how the Armadale Residence II is born of the studio's design philosophy of "designing from the inside out – it's not about standing back and making some big architectural statement, but about having a sympathetic mind for how the spaces will actually be used," she says. The need for this approach was emphasised when the client first requested a design consultation regarding some joinery. "I've known the family for over 15 years; since I was at university and used to babysit their children," Alex explains. Seeking to update one of the bedrooms, the client called on Alex, who by this time had founded Studio Tate with business partner Carley Nicholls. In the process of discussing the joinery, the client mentioned the plans for a renovation and extension that an architect had proposed for the residence.

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Armadale II exemplifies Studio Tate's approach of "designing from the inside out."

Knowing the family so well, I knew that a big ostentatious extension wasn't right for them," Alex explains. "The client gave me the plans, and I took them away to see if something more sympathetic could be done." From here, Studio Tate designed a simple yet effective renovation that involved minimal replanning of the interior, but in several simple moves, entirely rejuvenates the home. Bedrooms remain in their original position, and although a bathroom was added to the side of the home, "there was precedent for this, as the same thing had been done with the identical neighbouring properties," Alex says. "Ultimately, the client loved that we didn't mess around with the floorplan too much, as it meant we could maintain the beautiful period detailing of the rooms."

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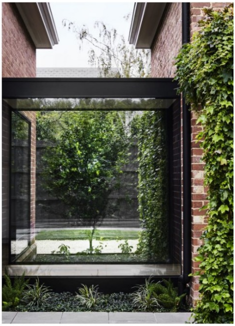
The most significant opportunity Studio Tate identified was expanding the previously cramped living, dining and kitchen space by connecting the house to a separate 'tack room', originally used to store horse riding equipment. A glazed link bridges the two structures in a gesture that is contemporary yet sympathetic – by utilising glazing on both sides of the link, lines of sight throughout the garden remain uninterrupted, a reminder of the previous separation between the buildings. The tack room, which had previously been used infrequently as guest accommodation, was transformed into an elegant living space, allowing the new kitchen, scullery, laundry and dining zone to breathe.



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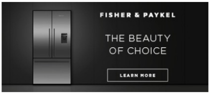
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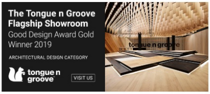
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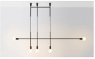

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The original aspects of the home are kept intact, and a new glazed link connects two previously separated buildings to expand the living space and allow the new contemporary kitchen and dining space to breathe.

In these newly repurposed areas of the home, Studio Tate employed a sympathetic material palette that is at once restrained and contemporary, while speaking to the home's history. Creating a connection to the landscape and bringing more natural light into the interior was very important to the client, Alex explains. "They really wanted to make sure it felt like a curated but seamless connection to the outdoors. It was important when designing the new windows and doors that they felt sympathetic, so the steel-framed French door design is sensitive but still feels contemporary and helps to frame the views."

In the kitchen, the black steel frames are complemented by a combination of black 2pac and timber veneer joinery, pared with a subtle grey natural stone. While the clients appreciate good design, Alex says that they are also down to earth and wanted their home to be liveable and functional, not showy and ostentatious. Above all, the priority was creating a design that responded to the beauty of the original home while serving their need for a practical yet sophisticated home for the family of five.

Used throughout the kitchen, living and dining areas, as well as the glazed link, the Tongue n Groove solid engineered oak flooring serves to denote the new areas of the design.

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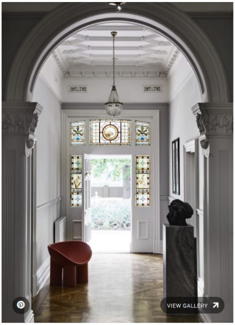

With original parquetry flooring in the entry, Studio Tate and the client were in agreement about not seeking to replicate the original – instead, Tongue n Groove solid engineered oak boards were exactly what the client was looking for.

With this in mind, "getting the right timber floor, was a major element of the brief," Alex says. With original parquetry flooring in the entry hall, neither the client nor the architects wanted to try to imitate the original. Rather, "we wanted a timber floor with warmth, texture and a more liveable finish," Alex recalls. "We worked very collaboratively with the client to select the European oak flooring from Tongue n Groove, and when they found the wire-brushed finish in the Chamoisee colour, it really was exactly what they were looking for."

Used throughout the kitchen, living and dining areas, as well as the glazed link, the Tongue n Groove solid engineered oak flooring serves to denote the new areas of the design. In this way, the flooring reflects the design's overall achievement of heralding the old and ensuring the new complements the original without seeking to replicate it. Of the decision to specify Tongue n Groove, Alex says, "I've worked with them over the years, and the thing I really like is that they offer an extremely high-quality product. At the same time, it's not cost-prohibitive; it's something we can show our clients and know it will sit within the project budget, which is really important."

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The bedrooms maintain the character of their period features, while the ensuite injects a contemporary sophistication.

Moving into the bedrooms, the area of the home that remains almost entirely original, the design relies on elements such as loose furniture, carpet, lighting, joinery, paint and drapes to imbue the spaces with contemporary character while maintaining the heritage detail. Studio Tate involved the children in the design process to select the colour of the velvet drapes for their individual bedrooms, ensuring each reflects the personality of its inhabitant. A selection of new loose furniture and vintage pieces were also specified during the design, along with some of the client's existing furniture. "The way we like to approach soft furnishings at Studio Tate is to have a mix of some classic or more eclectic vintage pieces as it brings a more unique outcome," explains Alex. "We want to break it up so as not to feel too much like a showroom. Having a more uncommon piece adds that point of difference."

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Successfully integrating the new elements of the design while allowing the original architecture to shine, the Armadale Residence II highlights that often it is not the grandest interventions but rather the more sensitive approach, working with the existing, that creates the most nuanced and exciting result.

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