

No Place Like Home

Homes & Gardens
Special Feature

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Level 1, 22 Arthur Street, Fortitude Valley

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The sun is the architect

By Nic Webb



The sun always shows up.

It arrives at every site. It sets the brief long before we draw a line.

At NW Design Studio, we simply listen.

In Queensland's subtropical climate, the sun determines how a home performs long before materials or finishes are considered. It controls heat gain, glare, comfort, shadow, and the quality of light throughout the day. Designing without acknowledging this is simply decoration.

Northern light should be drawn deep into the heart of a home. Western exposure must be controlled through considered massing, shading and layered thresholds to reduce summer heat load. Openings are positioned to encourage cross-ventilation and minimise reliance on mechanical cooling.

Outdoor zones respond to seasonal sun angles, not just passing trends.

This approach is not stylistic. It is environmental.

Architectural movements will continue to evolve – minimal, coastal, Mediterranean, modern. But solar logic does not date. A well-oriented home will always outperform one designed for image alone.

When the sun leads, form becomes purposeful. Eaves are proportioned with intent.

Materials are selected for durability and thermal performance. Geometry becomes disciplined.

Our philosophy – Bold with Balance – is grounded in this principle.

The boldness is confident form. The balance is restraint shaped by climate.

When the sun becomes the architect, a home doesn't just look resolved.

It performs.

At just 24, Nic Webb is the young designer at the helm of NW Design Studio. Find him at nwdesignstudio.com.au.

Start with curiosity

By Emma Butterworth

A good brief sets the foundation for any design project. Reference images play a role in the briefing process, but they often tell someone else's story, not yours. Some of my best briefs have come in the form of artefacts and curiosities.

Artefacts may be things collected over a lifetime, waiting patiently to become part of something new. I once had a client hold onto the doorknob from their family home before we finally incorporated it into their cellar door.

Curiosities are the things you love. My favourite projects have been built from them. An obsession with El Camino cars. A passion for Chinoiserie wallpaper. A single piece of artwork that a client has carried from home to home for twenty years.

So, if you are struggling to find the perfect image, start with the objects in your life. Or perhaps take a walk through New Farm instead. Photograph a garden bed, a colour palette on an

old fence that you've always loved but never quite known why. These things can often tell me more about you.

What I hope to do in my practice is take the stories and layers that have led you to this point and weave them into new ones. The brief is just the beginning of that conversation.

If you would like to start a conversation, you can find Emma at ebarchitects.com.au.



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What is the secret to turning around a complete transformation of a colonial Queensland home to modern character home in only two years?

Doug Bretherton, Director of **Brisbane Boutique Builders** in Ascot, knows that it lies in collaboration with your builder from the very beginning of your journey.

For his outstanding work on this Clayfield house, Doug stepped onto the Housing Industry Association podium in 2024 to accept the **Award for a Renovation Project Over \$2 Million**.

Doug explains that people often take 12–18 months consulting with an architect before the builder even gets involved.

Meanwhile, he has engaged a professional to provide a transparent budget verification,

all based on current market rates, achieving the final design much sooner and within budget.

Waiting to hire a builder also means clients are limited to builders available to start immediately, but Doug says selecting a builder is like a marriage – they have to be the right fit, with the skills and experience to suit you and your project.

With 32 years' experience in domestic building, Doug works with sub-contractors he screens personally.

“I focus on quality by getting others in to do what they do best, so that I can do what I do best – manage and achieve your expectations,” he says.

Step 1 when embarking on a renovation or build – select your builder early.



The second chance gardener

By Lucia Jimenez

In the neat rows of social housing in New Farm, one modest home stands apart, its fence framing the extraordinary, decade-long garden of Kerrie Harrison.

Ms Harrison's garden is more to her than just food – it is her therapy, her hard work and her way of connecting to the earth.

"Some days, the whole day is just lost in the garden," Ms Harrison said.

The garden at her house was just dirt when she arrived 10 years ago, but with her drive to make her new place not just a house, but a home, she got to work creating.

"I'm just making my home as pretty as I can with what I've got," she said.

Her garden is also her way of connecting with the community around her, and she loves when people stop to chat and so she can share her produce with others.

Having battled cancer for a decade, Ms Harrison became very aware of the

potential health effects of the produce she was buying at chain grocery stores and decided to grow her own.

Some of her gardening tips are: knowing where your sun is, observation is key, and give all plants a second chance from the compost.

Recently Ms Harrison has been struggling to do the hard labour necessities of the garden and is looking for a helper in the area that she can also share her produce with when she travels.

If you are interested, send Ms Harrison an email: spareroom@hotmail.com



"Anyone can do this," Ms Harrison said.

**"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."
– Audrey Hepburn**



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Village Gardening

By John Hawkins



It's a time-honoured tradition to grow herbs in gardens of their own. These days, I've seen lots of herbs planted amongst other garden plants

or used as edging plants. Today, herbs have become plants that are suited to all sorts of pots and containers. Small gardens and units with a balcony are perfect places to grow herbs.

Number one – herbs have to have sunlight, at least for half a day.

Some varieties will grow in a little shade, but the majority prefer full sun. Herbs love a really good-quality potting mix that provides excellent drainage. Use a liquid fertiliser once a month.

Most nurseries sell herbs as seedlings in six-packs or twelve-packs. If you want your seedlings to be big and strong, plant the little seedlings into 100 ml pots. Two to three weeks later, they'll be a lot

stronger and should grow very quickly. Remember to put them out in the sun and water daily.

Sometimes I plant only half of the 100 ml pots, then three to four weeks later I plant the balance. That helps the crop last longer.

My favourite herbs

Parsley – the most popular herb.

Rosemary – grows like a shrub. Roast lamb? Yes!

Thyme – lemon thyme has a beautiful lemon aroma, great with chicken and looks good in pots.

Tarragon – French tarragon has a licorice-pepper flavour. Amazing.

Mint – loves water. Perfect for summer cocktails and dressings.

Vietnamese Mint – a different flavour. There is also chocolate mint.

Ginger – slow growing but worth the effort. One of nature's great gifts.

Sage – the purple variety adds wonderful colour to your garden or pots.

Oregano – Greek oregano is a favourite.

Coriander – great in Asian food. Don't grow it in summer heat.

Basil – a must-have for homemade pizza and many other uses.

Marjoram – sweet and peppery flavour. There are hundreds more.

Whatever you choose to plant in the garden or in containers, don't make them too far away from the kitchen door. Nothing is more frustrating than finding you need a sprig or two for the dish you're cooking and having to make an expedition to the bottom of the garden.

Today, we most often use herbs when preparing food. Any cook knows how useful it is to have fresh herbs on hand. Herbs straight from the garden add flavour and scent that make a dish something special. Restraint, however, is advisable – add a little at a time, tasting as you go.

You don't want to taste the herb before you taste the food.

Enjoy your gardening and your cooking.



There are many herbs to choose from

Character family home restored

This recently completed renovation at Hamilton, designed by Nicole Weston Architect, has brought back to life an overgrown, deteriorated cottage located on a prime inner city corner site. The project renewed the property, establishing a family home for the owners and their young children to relocate back to Brisbane, designed to accommodate their immediate needs and facilitate their changing needs. The home needed to be a place for the children grow, for extended family to stay and support their work from home commitments.

The original house was lifted and restored to contribute to Brisbane's unique Queenslander setting. The new extension captures significant views, opens up to light and ventilation and is modernised for its new future.

The bedrooms and family spaces are located on the upper level with the new kitchen, living and outdoor entertaining spaces alongside the garden and swimming pool. The L shaped design unveils the restored wrapping verandah to address both street frontages, with the extension positioned at the rear of the property, overlooking the open corner.

An open, central stair joins the zones of the house so that the family are always connected. The interiors are respectful of the heritage of the original house, reinstating and incorporating traditional federation elements. New finishes create a subtle, neutral backdrop to the outdoors. There are strong connections to the natural surroundings with the ground level able to be fully opened up to the garden.

The landscaping, by Ecrú Landscape Architecture, achieves privacy and security whilst establishing a subtropical garden shared with the street.

Nicole Weston Architect is a New Farm practice grounded in principles of integrity, functionality and sustainability. Visit nwarch.com.au to get in touch.



Renovation designed by Nicole Weston



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Est. 2003, NWA is dedicated to delivering personalised and professional service throughout every stage of a project, specialising in residential, commercial, and industrial architecture.



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The biggest renovation regret



David Langley, founder of Alter Office

Are you thinking about renovating? Are you worried about making the wrong decision? The wrong layout, the wrong finishes, the wrong appliances? When I look back at conversations with clients, the most common regret is not a design choice, it is waiting.

Waiting for the market to settle, waiting until the budget feels more comfortable, or waiting until life feels less busy. Waiting feels responsible and it feels safe.

It's completely understandable to hesitate, I do the same when the outcome feels life changing.

However, while we sit with the decision, life keeps moving. Construction costs rise, your children grow older, and your home stays the same.

If waiting isn't the answer, what is?

The information you need to begin rarely lives on a Pinterest board. Clarity and confidence arrive through conversation with someone who has delivered homes like yours, for people like you. That conversation could be with an architect, interior designer or builder whose work you admire.

Reaching out to an architect while feeling unsure does not mean you are unprepared. It means you are at the beginning, and beginnings are allowed to be messy. You do not need refined words, and you certainly do not need a finished brief, but what you do need is to take the first step.

If I could offer one piece of advice, it would be to start small. The first step is not a design; it is a question.

"We're thinking about renovating and want to understand what's possible. Can you help?"

David Langley is a Brisbane architect and founder of Alter Office. With over two decades in residential design, he leads a small practice

and works directly with every client. Not sure where to start? Dave is always happy to talk.

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