

01 The new living areas are minimal and clean, heightened by a three-metre-high ceiling and a deliberate lack of embellishment.



# Sheppard Wilson HOUSE by Sam Crawford Architects

• SYDNEY, NSW •

A weatherboard cottage has been restored and extended towards views of a heritage-listed Moreton Bay fig tree in the backyard.

Words by Leanne Amodeo  
Photography by Brett Boardman

02 The new two-storey rear addition is generous in scale, but not out of place in its richly eclectic suburban context.

- 1 Entry
- 2 Study
- 3 Bedroom
- 4 Sitting
- 5 Courtyard
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Dining
- 8 Living
- 9 Laundry
- 10 Garden
- 11 Carport
- 12 Main bedroom
- 13 Walk-in robe

First floor 1:400



Ground floor 1:400



There's an understated quality in Sam Crawford's residential projects that makes them appear all the more stylish and elegant. The Sydney-based principal of Sam Crawford Architects doesn't believe in bells and whistles and his signature thoughtful approach primarily focuses on the client's comfort. Homes need not make flashy architectural statements; rather they can be intelligently designed places for everyday living, as his recently completed addition in Sydney's Bronte attests.

The project's modest existing weatherboard cottage is one of the beachside suburb's original houses. When clients Neil Sheppard and Emma Wilson first approached Sam it was with a relatively ambitious brief calling for an extension that would accommodate two kids' bedrooms, at least one guestroom, a study, an open-plan living space and a kids' area.

Because they didn't have any preconceptions, Sam was free to explore different ideas; however, it was clear that there was only one solution. "With most clients we'll suggest a soft transition to the rear that's in sympathy with the existing house, but in this case the brief called for something larger than could ever be accommodated

in a form that would sit easily with the cottage," he says. "So we did something completely different and set it a long way back from the street."

The cottage is in one of a number of Waverley Council's Heritage Urban Conservation Areas and while the new two-storey addition complies with the presiding height restrictions, it's still generous in scale. This generosity of proportion is balanced by the massive Moreton Bay fig tree at the western rear of the property and the hulking three-storey neighbour on the south. It ensures that the addition is not out of place and is resolutely mindful of its richly eclectic suburban context.

A sense of cohesion between new and old was also of visual importance to the overall scheme, so first Sam renovated the existing cottage to near-original condition. The refurbishment not only restored the structure, but also helped meet the brief's programmatic requirements. He divided the large front room into the study and guestroom and inserted a new bathroom in between. A discreet bifold door in the corridor can be used to zone this area from the rest of the house, providing guests with privacy.





03 An ironbark stair continues from the corridor of the existing cottage.

04 A north-facing courtyard sits at the junction between the old house and the new addition.

05 The full-height glass doors frame the heritage-listed Moreton Bay fig tree.

It's a logical plan that aligns rooms on the northern side with the corridor running east on the south. The corridor's side wall is original, retained closer to the boundary than Sam was permitted to build. Tucked neatly behind the guestroom is the kids' area/TV room that sits within the cottage's original footprint and abuts the courtyard. "We always try to incorporate a courtyard space that's facing north and can be opened up. We thought it would be nice to have a table here and use the large window as a bench to sit on. And the windows [of the TV room] also open up the whole corner of the cottage," Sam explains.

This transitional zone gives rise to the threshold between the existing structure and the new addition, in which the corridor cleanly "extends" into the stair. Sam introduces ironbark to the material palette and uses it dynamically yet judiciously to contrast with the oak timber flooring. Applying the darker timber to the stair, three-step threshold and large window reveal creates definition and visual intrigue in a zone that would have appeared washed out without such material accents.

An expansive, light-drenched open plan characterizes the addition's living areas. The space is minimal and clean, heightened by a three-metre-high ceiling and a deliberate lack of embellishment.

A custom concrete kitchen island installed below a spotted gum panel feature, plus blackened aluminium window and door frames, anchors the space without detracting from the view.

The rear wall's full-height glass doors welcome the outside in and frame the heritage-listed Moreton Bay fig tree. "That tree is the biggest, most impressive part of the site," says Sam. "And because of the hill behind it, it gives [the plan] a beautiful sense of spaciousness." The large glass doors also capture as much sunlight as possible during the winter months (along with the high row of north-facing windows), while the tree serves to shade the house during summer.

Sam uses passive design to great effect in order to avoid airconditioning. The ceiling's concrete slab keeps the upstairs bedrooms cool, as do the reverse brick veneer and discreet sunshading. A central circular skylight offers the bedrooms and bathroom another source of light, which reduces glare on the brightest of days. The overall scheme is quietly hardworking - it's a home that is both relaxed and comfortable. Sam's attention to detail is strong, but nothing in the renovation or addition is laboured, making for an interior that is as well crafted as it is inviting. 06



Sections 1:400



0 10 m

06 A discreet bifold door in the corridor of the original cottage can be used to zone this area from the rest of the house.

07 Externally, the weatherboard cottage has been restored to near-original condition.



#### Architect

**Sam Crawford Architects**  
Level 2, 17 Federation Road  
Newtown NSW 2042  
+61 2 9519 6800  
studio@samcrawford  
architects.com.au  
samcrawfordarchitects.com.au

#### Practice profile

A design-driven architectural practice based in Sydney, specializing in residential and public projects.

#### Project team

Sam Crawford, Karen Erdos, Ken Warr, Aaron Leeman-Smith, Wendy James, Ellie Gutman, Benjamin Chan, Lionel Teh, Matthew Bolton

#### Builder

Prime Form Construction

#### Consultants

##### Engineer:

Northrop Engineers

**Landscape:** Spirit Level Designs

**Lighting:** Lighting Partners Australia

**Hydraulic engineer:** ITM Design

**Quantity surveyor:** QS Plus

**Land surveyor:** Mitchell Land Surveyors

#### Products

**Roofing:** Colorbond Ultra sheets in 'Surfmist' and 'Woodland Grey'

**External walls:** Cement-rendered cavity brick in Dulux AcraTex; Design Pine weatherboard cladding; CSR Cemintel Barestone fibre cement sheets; Western red cedar battens with Cutek Extreme oil finish

**Internal walls:** Gyprock plasterboard in Dulux Enviro2 'Natural White'

#### Windows and doors:

Alspec Hawkesbury Commercial Multi-Fold Doors, black anodized; Western red cedar windows in Cutek Extreme oil finish; recycled ironbark sills from Australian Architectural Hardwoods

**Flooring:** Nash Timbers American oak flooring in Feast Watson tung oil finish; recycled ironbark stairs from Australian Architectural Hardwoods

**Lighting:** WAF Ceiling pendant by Asaf Weinbroom; Lighting Partners Australia Logan Series ceiling-mounted spotlights

**Kitchen:** Fisher and Paykel fridge; Westinghouse cooktop and oven; Qasair rangehood; Miele dishwasher; custom concrete island bench by Concrete; Silestone Blanco Zeus Extreme benchtop; Sussex Scala sink mixers

#### Bathroom:

Viridian mirror (ensuite); Apaiser Globe stone basins in 'Graphite'; Toto Neorest Ex toilet (guest and ensuite); Sussex Scala basin mixer and shower/bath mixer; Amerind vanity drawers with American oak veneer; Silestone Blanco Zeus Extreme benchtop with integrated basin; Methven shower rail

**Heating and cooling:** Locker Group horizontal metal screen shading, powdercoated in Dulux matt black; Big Ass Fans Haiku ceiling fan

#### Area

**Site:** 470 m<sup>2</sup>

**Floor:** 240 m<sup>2</sup>

#### Time schedule

**Design, documentation:**

12 months

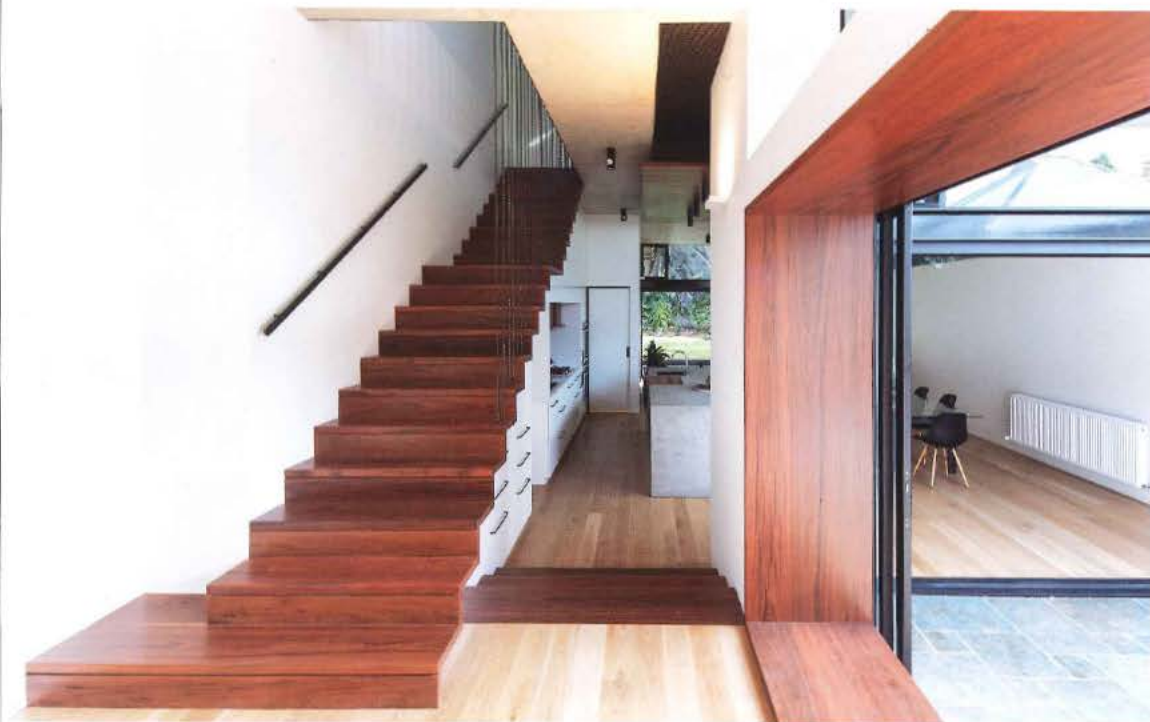
**Construction:**

12 months

# Working with AN ARCHITECT

While Emma Wilson, Neil Sheppard and their children enjoyed life in Hong Kong, their dream home was being created in Sydney by Sam Crawford Architects. Here, Emma talks about her experience of working with an architect.

Photography by Brett Boardman



## 01 Could you tell us a little about your family and your background?

My husband Neil and I have two children, Zachary and Josephine. Neil is from the United Kingdom and I'm from Australia and we have lived in London, Tokyo and Hong Kong – we've actually never lived in Australia in the ten years that we've been together! My husband works in finance and it's his job that has taken us abroad. I'm a Pilates instructor, so I can do that anywhere.

We've always planned to return to Australia – particularly Neil, who has a dream of going surfing every weekend.

## 02 Why did you decide to engage an architect?

On one of our trips from Tokyo to Sydney, we found a block in Bronte with an old cottage on it, which we were lucky to buy at auction. It was built in 1910 and not in great condition; we always intended to do some work to it. We rented it out for a couple of years and then, about five years ago, although we had

no concrete plans to come back to Sydney, we felt we should get moving with the development application. There were some neighbours who weren't happy with the new houses being built in the area and they were pushing to have more heritage overlays implemented.

From the outset we knew we needed an architect to design the house. As we went along in this process, we realized we needed the architect to manage the project for us too.

## 03 How did you discover Sam Crawford Architects?

We looked at different architects' websites and we liked the look of Sam's. The work appeared to be very authentic and celebrated simple living. It was also incredibly beautiful, with high-quality finishes.

When we first met with Sam, it felt right for us immediately. Neil is very laidback and he found it easy to have a comfortable conversation with Sam. Sam wanted to hear about us and what we wanted. Although there were ups and downs along the way, as I think there are with most renovations, we felt at ease with him and there was always mutual respect. At the end of the day, we

could have a laugh with him. Also – we liked that Sam wanted our first meeting to be at the house. All the other architects we met with in the initial stages wanted to meet in their offices to show us portfolios. That didn't feel real to us.

## 04 What was your brief?

We wanted to create a home that would last us a long time – to figure out how we thought we might live in ten years' time, rather than how we live now. We needed to be honest about how we live – you know, there is no point pretending you don't watch television when you do! We essentially wanted to create a house for our family to grow in.

Expecting friends and family regularly visiting from overseas, we were originally aiming for five or six bedrooms. In the end we decided on four bedrooms and a study that could be used as a guestroom. We could have had extra bedrooms if we'd put in an extra floor, but, as suggested by Sam, we opted for the double-height space in the living room instead of the extra level. Letting in light and the quality of space were more important.

Our brief also included making the most of the stunning fig tree in the garden. Views of the tree branches can be seen from many parts of the house and the garden has been designed to make the most of the tree.

## 05 You were living overseas during the building process. Who kept an eye on the progress on site?

Aaron Leeman-Smith, a member of Sam's team, managed the process for us on site, then another architect, Ben Chan, took over. The transition was seamless, which is a testament to the efficiency of Sam's practice.

There are so many decisions to make when building your own home. I was overwhelmed at first, but what I really liked was the way the architects would give me a few options and I would choose between them. We agreed on the look and feel at the beginning and at no point did we diverge from this. I loved the support in the decision-making. Everything that was chosen was within our set budget. This meant I didn't have to worry – or look at the cost – and if something was more expensive, the architects told us and we were able to make a decision accordingly.

We visit Sydney twice a year, and on each trip I would always meet with the architect. From these meetings, they roughly knew what I wanted, and then they went and made their selections.

## 06 Is the result achieved by working with an architect what you expected?

I couldn't picture our house at the beginning. When we worked through the design with Sam's team, they had some very creative solutions. Some of these we went with, some we didn't. It was this creativity that gave us a home that is unique. It's incredibly peaceful when you walk inside and close the door. You feel



connected to the surrounding environment, especially the fig tree in the garden. It meant that the starting budget was more than we first anticipated, but we could see that we were getting something special that was perfectly suited to us. It's a house for life that we can use in different ways, and not because of its size – it's not a big house – but because it's so cleverly designed.

## 07 What advice would you give someone who is thinking of using an architect? And would you engage an architect again?

It's important to meet with a few different architects – find someone that you would go for a drink with. Make it very clear as to who maintains control over selections – I think that it could be tricky if you weren't clear. Don't be put off by the budget, just be sure you understand exactly what you're getting. Make sure you allow your architect creative freedom in the design process because they will offer solutions that are far better than you can imagine. Without an architect, we would have made a functional house, but instead we have a home that is unlike any other. I'm actually missing the process, and I want to do it again!