

# st canice

## architects

Preston Lane Architects

## photography

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## text

Helen Norrie

## architect's statement

With such an ageing domestic building stock we are constantly faced with challenges to redevelop and create living spaces within the confines of existing buildings. This project involved a major alteration and extension to an existing 1920s house in Sandy Bay, five minutes drive from the centre of Hobart.

Our approach to this project began by identifying the significant elements of the original house and removing many of the 'distractions' that had gathered over the years. These significant elements included much of the house's original period detailing along with a beautiful sandstone retaining wall and its unique deep revealed windows. We then proposed the insertion of two separate contemporary extensions, which focused on contrasting and highlighting these original features.

At the rear, an inward-focused extension reveals and highlights sections of this original sandstone wall and windows, providing a new entry and gallery, along with a series of bedrooms and service spaces. At the front of the house, an outward-projecting addition responds to the panoramic view of the Derwent River and contains a new kitchen, living and dining spaces.

Another idea that was explored focused on how we could provide connections, both physical and psychological, between a series of quite disjointed spaces within the house. We proposed a simple technique that created a focal point at the end of each of the linear spaces providing interest beyond the immediate space and helping to draw the occupant through. For example, the main and secondary entries have joinery niches cut out of the end walls and the view from the dining room to the gallery space focuses in the distance on the carefully revealed original sandstone wall.

Through the honest composition of contrasting contemporary building materials a layering of history is proposed. Internally, careful detailing throughout the house provides clues to this history as well as making its own.







## st canice avenue

In some respects it seems that the dilemma of contemporary residential architecture lies in the schism between Mies van der Rohe's ideals of 'universal space' – creating open and flexible interiors that could accommodate any function – and Louis Kahn's preoccupation with the ideal that a house should establish a framework that supports specific relationships between people and environments. Both contribute to two common interrelated contemporary concerns: open-plan versus compartmentalised space and the exploration of the threshold between inside and outside.

The interest in blurring the boundary between the interior and exterior has endured as a driving architectural preoccupation over the past century. In the Barcelona Pavilion, der Rohe presented a masterful experiment in the slippery art of containment and release, with overlapping horizontal and vertical planes continuously eroding the traditional notion of threshold. While the moments of interiority are fleeting in the Barcelona Pavilion, they are almost non-existent in the Farnsworth House, built 20 years later. This glass box is frequently replicated, and the notion of the interior seems secondary. At the other end of the spectrum, Kahn's houses offer a study of the manner in which the manipulation of the window could serve to erode the enclosure of the box. Exploring the interrelationship

between the wall, floor and ceiling, the window became a crucial element in the design of the space, expressing Kahn's conviction that the "window wants to be a room".

Preston Lane's interest in domestic interiors is positioned within this field of exploration. It endeavours to make places that respond to the specific characteristics of the place, and the armature of the building acts as a mediator of the occupants' experience of the external landscape. The delineation between inside and outside is obscured by manipulating the perimeter of the building apertures, and through the contiguous use materials between the exterior and interior.

Working in Hobart invariably means that the architect is frequently faced with a tremendous site with great views, and a low budget. While the view is huge and constant, the climate fluctuates wildly, both seasonally and daily. (As they say in Tassie, "If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes.") Seeking to make a 'place of repose' within this extraordinary landscape requires a considered balance that contrasts the allure of the expansive view with the desire to make a cosy interior.

At St Canice Avenue, Preston Lane Architects was presented with a modest house on a wonderful site. The 1920s brick bungalow had been encased in a series of ad hoc accretions that were added to accommodate a growing family. The house had become a labyrinth of rooms, and the successive additions showed little regard for the internal spatial quality or the overall character of the original house. The new alterations provided an opportunity to upgrade the amenity of the house, to reorder the spaces, and to reinstate the original grandeur of the house.

Demolishing all of the layers of additions and retaining only the old stone retaining wall and the majority of the double-brick house, the architects revealed the original form and spaces. This established a clean slate in which a series of new spaces could be arranged.

The living spaces now unfold towards the sun and the view, and a more inward focused rear extension contains a gallery, bedrooms and services.

Visitors enter the house through the original hallway and move towards the light and view, sliding through the edge of the dining room to the front sitting room, which is the centre of the open-plan living space. At this point the contained formality of the original house dissolves into a more dynamic architecture of eroded planes and surfaces. The kitchen forms an alcove at the rear of the space, within the limits of the original house, and the remainder of the living room extends northward, towards the sun and the panoramic landscape. This space opens and closes to suit the season or the occasion. Bi-fold doors to the deck double the size of the living space in summer, whilst the north wall can be closed down by concealed retractable blinds and a television raises from the crafted joinery to close off the view, converting the space to a home theatre.

The bedrooms and service spaces at the rear of the house have a different character. Each is a contained box, linked by a generous corridor, which doubles as a gallery for the owners' art collection. The passage through the house is a journey from light to dark to light. Internal materials are selected for their surface quality, contrasting matte and

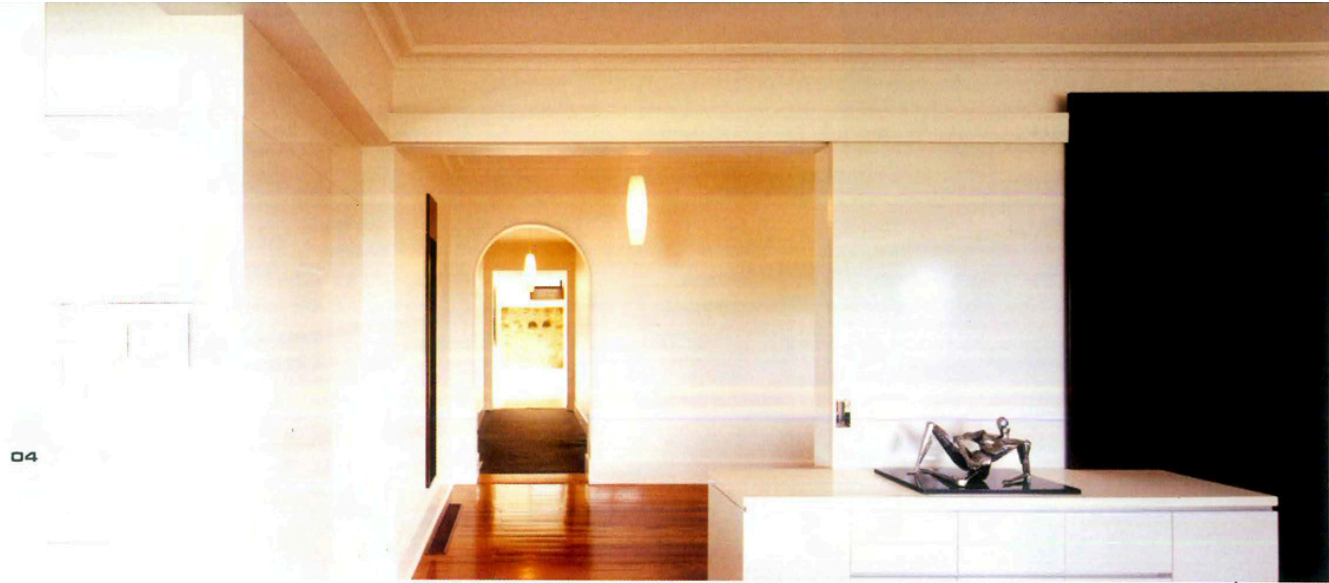
luminous finishes. Mirrors and high-gloss paint reflect light from the edge to the centre of rooms, while dark timber reveals accentuate the depth of the enclosing wall.

A niche at the western end of the gallery opens out to an external courtyard. The continuity of materials between inside and outside creates an ambiguity of enclosure, which obscures the definition of internal and external space. The old stone retaining wall flanks the southern edge of the courtyard and continues in to the interior. A niche in the plaster wall frames a section of the stone wall, highlighting the texture and colour and rendering it as a sculptural object. Externally the small gallery perceptually expands to form a garden room. The definition of gallery and courtyard, internal and external, is eroded, creating a private gallery in the garden that serves as a secondary entrance.

This project displays a clear intention to explore the ambiguity of spatial enclosure. It's early days for Preston Lane; the young practice was formed in 2004 and it has currently completed only a handful of projects, each conceptually ambitious and carefully detailed. While the external formal and material expression is limited by both the relatively tight budget and a nascent stylistic approach, the internal spaces are carefully crafted and provide a well-measured paradigm shift that has inverted the interior focus of the compartmentalised house. The new work manages to walk the fine line of completely transforming the experience of dwelling, whilst reinstating the character of the house. The formality of the original building is regained through the reuse and replication of the corridor as a central spatial device. These experiments with the manipulation of light and space within the internal spaces and around the building edge are the beginnings of an architectural dialogue that Preston Lane will continue to evolve in a range of subsequent projects.

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- 01.** The new pared back entry adjoins the existing sandstone retaining wall.
- 02.** Looking out from within the entrance, new floor to ceiling windows frame the garden.
- 03.** The passage through the house reflects contrasting matte and luminous finishes.
- 04.** The main hallway delivers the visitor into the kitchen and living areas that extend northward to catch the sun.

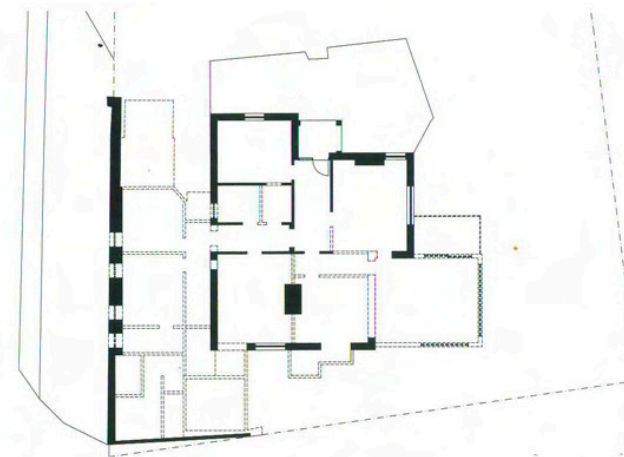
- 05.** Bi-fold doors open to the outside deck to double the entertaining space.
- 06.** The rear elevation catches the light and the view in this fabulous setting.
- 07.** Old meets new in an eclectic mix.



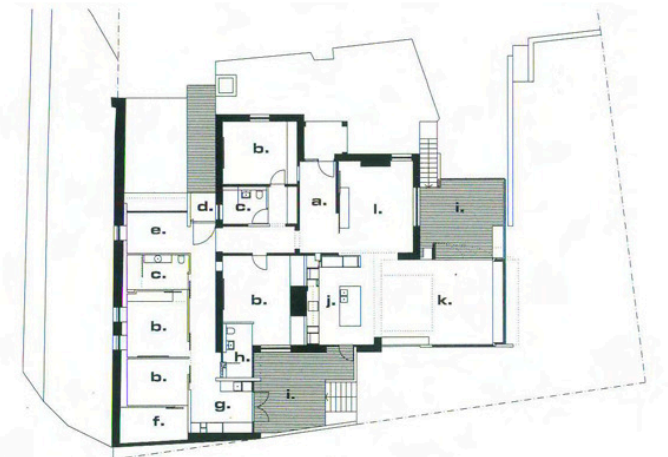
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demolition plan



ground level

#### st canice residence

**principal architects** Preston Lane Architects **project team** Daniel Lane, Nathanael Preston, Phil Ackerly, Garth Ancher **project managers** Preston Lane Architects **consultants: engineer** Gandy and Roberts Pty Ltd **builder** Cordwell Lane **building surveyor** Pitt and Sherry **size** 274 sqm **time to complete** 6 months (design and approval), 8 months construction **council** Hobart City Council **design software used** AutoCAD, SketchUp **materials: external materials** existing brickwork, new walls timber framed and rendered blockwork **wall linings** Tasmanian oak, Maddison oil finish; compressed cement sheet, paint finish **roof/guttering** Colorbond, gun metal grey **paint** Dulux **paving** exposed Aggregate concrete (white limestone and bluemetal mix) **windows/ doors** Capral 400 series **hardware** Novus **heating/cooling systems** Mitsubishi Inverter **ceiling** plasterboard, Laminex Designer Timber veneer – Perugia Rigato **internal walls** plasterboard, Laminex Designer Timber veneer – Perugia Rigato, off form concrete **paint** Dulux **lighting/light fittings** Casamonde **flooring** Tasmanian oak, gloss polyurethane finish; ceramic tiles **joinery** 2 Pak paint finish – Dulux Beige Royal; Caesarstone benchtop – ivory

#### legend.

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|------------------|-----------|
| a. entry         | k. living |
| b. bedroom       | l. dining |
| c. bathroom      |           |
| d. gallery entry |           |
| e. gallery       |           |
| f. cellar        |           |
| g. laundry       |           |
| h. ensuite       |           |
| i. deck          |           |
| j. kitchen       |           |