

# RENOVATION

By CARLA GROSSETTI | Photos by DEREK SWALWELL



## A contemporary change

Nearly 100 years on, a house built in Melbourne's suburbs during the Edwardian era felt dark and dated. However, the beautiful thing about the red-brick and stucco residence in Melbourne's Elwood was that, with a bit of imagination, architect Nathanael Preston was able to transform it and take it into the next century.

"The Edwardian era was a significant period in the 1900s in Australia," says the award-winning architect and director of firm Preston Lane.

"There are many such weatherboard and brick Edwardian homes and they have a lot of character.

"This particular home had a lot of decorative timber-work in the hallway defining the entry, amazing old leadlight doors, beautiful detailed cornices and just so much detail that characterises this architectural era."



Architecture practice Preston Lane respectfully transformed this Edwardian home.

### Bridge between eras

The charm of the house and its facade was evident from the street; however, inside it was dark and cold with tiny windows and disconnected rooms. Preston's brief was to open up the interior and create large connected spaces and an indoor-outdoor connection.

"The downside of homes built during the early 1900s is they were not built with the Australian climate in mind," he says.

"These types of houses are beautiful ... but they don't work with our climate and way of life.

"The brief from the client was to respectfully adapt the fabric of the existing house, retain the existing lean-to addition to house a new study and laundry, and to accommodate the needs of a family with two growing boys."

### The lightness of being

Now, behind the conservative demeanour of that facade, the original two-bedroom, two-bathroom house is a four-bedroom, three-bathroom light-filled home.

The Preston Lane team worked closely with a structural engineer and builder to preserve elements of the Edwardian era's detailing as they opened up the house.

"We had to get creative to keep the home's street facade," Preston says.

"To do that, we tucked the extension behind the roof line of the existing house, keeping the majority of the original roof intact. Upstairs, we adapted an attic space into two bedrooms, a children's playroom and a bathroom, while downstairs a former dining room was transformed into a bedroom. The open-plan ground-floor extension has doubled the size of the living space and it feels both intimate and spacious."



“Now, when you walk into the house, it’s a journey ... and an understanding of its history unfolds ...”

### New definition

Preston says the family’s lifestyle and his interpretation of their need for fun and function was crucial to the success of the design.

He says he played with the colour palette using an interplay of textures with splashes of bright paint that define that threshold between old and new.

“We have transformed this house by contrasting the modern extension with the heritage, which means the strong presence of the existing house has been maintained and enhanced,” Preston says.

“Black glazed bricks were selected for the fireplace to accentuate the drama between textures and materials. The original painted bricks from the back of the old house were sandblasted.

“That old brick wall is now the splashback in the new kitchen.

“The honesty of materials used in the extension was important .

“The new material palette of concrete blocks, brick, timber and polished concrete complement the original red-brick house.”



### All that’s old is new again

Preston doesn’t believe Edwardian homes lend themselves to being easily renovated; they can be quite complex to reconfigure.

“A lot of Edwardian-era homes are being renovated out of necessity as they are now 100 years old and require upgrading,” he says.

“If you were to tackle one without doing an extension, you would possibly have to knock walls down, which might also mean you could lose some of the integrity and very essence of these homes.

Preston says skylights, the addition of steel-framed doors and windows and a passive solar design were key

to meeting the client brief: to create a sustainable, light-filled home.

Today, the house is a collection of thoughtfully designed spaces, each with idiosyncratic touches that nod to its roots.

“Now, when you walk into the house, it’s a journey down the hallway, then you make a few turns and an understanding of its history unfolds as it opens up into the new contemporary extension.” [m](#)

[prestonlane.com.au](http://prestonlane.com.au)

### WHAT IS EDWARDIAN?

In 1915, ornate Edwardian houses were considered the height of fashion in Australia. The architectural period in Australia is also known as Federation because it coincided with the Federation of the Australian states and territories into the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901.

Edwardian architecture draws on elements of Victorian style and Queen Anne revival period of 1895 to 1910. The terracotta tile or galvanised iron roof is often designed with a steep pitch and the house is usually built of red bricks or weatherboards.

It is likely that it will include timber-framed windows, which often feature leadlighting, and ornate fretwork. In the Australian versions of the English-Edwardian house, you will often find native flora and fauna motifs and geometric designs featured in the stained glass.

The ends of the gable and roof eaves usually have ornate timber brackets. Timber detailing and fretwork is also a distinctive feature.

Plaster ceiling roses, cornices and decoratively moulded skirting and architraves are also distinctive design elements from that era.