



THE LITTLE THINGS

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ACCORDING TO MAKE ARCHITECTURE BIGGER
ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER, AND FOLLOWING A TOUR
OF THE FIRM'S LATEST HOUSE REDUCTION
CRYSTAL ANDREWS COULDN'T AGREE MORE.

The Australian dream is a life lived large. The dirt under our feet forms the world's biggest island, a sunburnt country thirty-one-and-a-half times bigger than the UK. With such vast expanses available to build our lives on, it's no wonder that most of us are accustomed to upsizing. A 300sqm home with a garage and a fair stretch of backyard is par for the course – where else could you fit a trusty Hills Hoist?

But as the nation's inner-city suburbs become increasingly built-up, the luxury of space has become a valuable commodity. The idea of a house reduction, then, is an intriguing one. Instead of renovating by adding a large, 'box on back' extension, reduction re-imagines the structure of each room to reduce the internal footprint of the house. It's a brilliant concept, focusing on multifunctional spaces and clever architecture to shrink the building size without making the house feel cramped or crowded. And a house reduction in Melbourne's inner-city Abbotsford achieved precisely this; a miraculous feat when you consider that its residents, a family with two energetic teenage boys, need plenty of room to move.

"Our clients didn't ask for a house reduction," explains Melissa Bright, director of MAKE Architecture, the firm behind the inspiring renovation. "We just showed them how we thought we could fit the things they needed in a small amount of space."

This bespoke approach is essential to a project like Abbotsford, as a reduction requires an intimate understanding of the client's lifestyle. Unsurprisingly, that is



part of the MAKE ethos: forgoing a set style in favour of designing directly to the needs of the client and the site.

The flexibility in MAKE's philosophy is cleverly translated at the Abbotsford house. Take the deck area for example. By separating the deck from the dining and living rooms with tall, glass doors, the internal area of the house can expand or contract at a whim. Slide the doors closed and the deck is a completely outdoors element, truly part of the backyard. But throw them open and the deck meets the house to blur the lines between indoors and out.

According to Bright, the adaptability of this space was vital to the house and the family's lifestyle. "The deck area is key to the design. It becomes an extension of the dining room for large dinners and events, and the television swivels out from the lounge room, allowing the boys to watch the cricket outside during summer."

Working in tandem with the deck are distinctive privacy screens running along the back of the house. The sliding screens, which look just like weatherboard slats, can enclose the deck area completely. When the interior glass doors are also closed, the space becomes a room that is in neither the house nor garden, yet still kitted out with its own fireplace.

It's a multifunctional attitude that applies to other areas, too. A new kitchen features a high, generous bench top that is broad enough to facilitate dinner prep on one side and homework on the other. Then there are the low, luscious daybeds built into the common areas. These become cosy rooms within rooms; little nooks to enjoy a book, hidden away in plain sight.



Reduction logic saw MAKE minimise the size of static areas like bedrooms and bathrooms in order to maximise the flexible ones. Spatial gains carried over into the backyard, where Bright and her team had amassed enough extra room to add a pool, garden and nifty studio. The latter – a petite, two-level brick building – accommodates the family car at the street level and a boys' retreat above. An inspired idea, the studio proves just how hard-working reduction design can be. "Flexible spaces such as the studio-garage can change with the needs of the family. It currently provides space for the boys but can also work as a home office, granny flat or guest room," Bright explains.

Taking in the view of the Abbotsford house from the road, the case for reduced living is strong. Nothing has been sacrificed by way of aesthetics, with intricate brickwork and the twin peaks of a glistening, galvanised roof cutting a striking figure in the street. With innovative properties like Abbotsford leading the way, will house reductions become the next big renovation trend?

For Bright, there is no question. "We see the move towards smaller, more flexible houses as an essential response to conserve resources and reduce carbon footprints. Even the smallest project is an opportunity to contribute positively to the fabric of its place." So for those about to renovate, the message is decidedly clear: good things really do come in small packages.

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