Make Architecture responded to space constraints with deep window reveals and integrated joinery, which allow for substantial openings.
In seeing the constraints of an Edwardian house as stimulus rather than barrier, *Make Architecture* developed a series of creative brick solutions that combine old and new to shape a highly liveable space.

In architecture, the best work often emerges from the most difficult and restrictive sites. Constraints force architects to develop solutions and make concessions without compromising on design. When Melissa Bright of *Make Architecture* took on House Rosebank – an Edwardian home in Melbourne’s well-to-do suburb of Kew – the challenges were manifold: a relatively tight budget, a poor existing rear extension, an outdated swimming pool close to the house, drainage issues, different levels... the list went on. ‘This substantial house had this tiny lean-to which really wasn’t wide enough for a lounge room, and that’s where the clients spent most of their time,’ Bright recalls. ‘The room that looked out onto the beautiful part of the garden was actually the laundry.’

While Make could have done a lot more, the budget and brief required them to keep things as modest as possible, so it was decided the pool would stay, meaning they needed to squeeze the new living spaces – kitchen, lounge, bathroom, laundry – between the pool and the existing house. The overall challenge became abundantly clear: ‘We had to try to make it feel spacious without much space. We had to be really efficient with what we did, but so that it still felt substantial enough and right for the existing house, and that it didn’t look like a compromise.’

Make’s response was to activate ‘the edges’ of the project, through integrated joinery and deep window reveals. This clever use of the building’s walls results in substantial openings, without compromising usable space. ‘We’re always trying to think about edges that are useful and functional, where walls become more than walls,’ Bright explains. ‘So a really deep window reveal, becomes shade outside, becomes the place where you can hide external blinds, becomes an outdoor seat, and internally becomes another seat or a spot to put the telly, your books or a nice plant. A lot of the edges in this project are “fattened up.”’ Many of Make’s small-space projects employ extensive joinery in this way, helping them become more efficient by ‘fattening and activating’ the edges.

The relationship to the existing, Edwardian house was also extremely important to Bright, and heavily informed the material choices for the project – from the black joinery, internally separating the old and new structures, to the warm timber windows and ceilings, and, finally, the brick. ‘The charcoal brick was about what felt right with the Edwardian red brick house. We thought it should be different to the existing house, so it seemed like the natural, obvious choice.’

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P.36 The site’s Edwardian history informs the material palette of the home: timber windows add warmth and contemporary charcoal brickwork sits boldly against the building’s original red brick.

P.37-1 The plan reveals the way that Make Architecture has worked with the constraints of the site to create a home that feels spacious and substantial.

—2 The edges of the new living area – formerly the location of the laundry – open up to create the illusion of a much larger room.
However, the choice of the glazed grey brick threw up its own unique set of challenges. ‘We did love the solid grey brick with these chunky window reveals. What’s interesting with the brick is the little details that maybe a lot of other people don’t really notice.

The plan is on an angle, and the question was ‘how do you reconcile or join [two walls of] glazed brick?’ Well, you can’t just cut them because you see the inside colour. Working through little details of how you turn a corner nicely, we learnt about what’s called a bird’s beak detail [see diagram page 35]. There’s a lot of joy in resolving bits like that and thinking about those little moments.’

Despite becoming known for their outstanding work with brick, Bright explains that no brief starts out with the idea ‘let’s use brick.’ ‘We’re motivated by delivering context-driven, site-specific buildings that respond to the client brief and budget but also with a real desire to build things that last – and so brick and masonry are a pretty good answer to a lot of those things in the Melbourne context.

A lot of the housing stock we’re working with is brick or the context is brick and it makes sense, but we’re not trying to solely use brick.’

The firm’s interest in a diversity of materials was borne out of their part in the 2013 Melbourne Now exhibition, which consisted of an array of material tests, exploring how different products could be used in new and interesting ways within their work. ‘I feel we gave the impression of a practice that is engaged with and excited about using different materials that are appropriate for whatever context or project, and that there’s more of a material engagement and sense of delight in pushing materials to do something more – something surprising.’ House Rosebank is just another example of Make Architecture’s fascination with the marriage of materials and liveable space – always with the clients and their way of life at its core.
The reinvention of this Edwardian residence was dependent on Make's creative use of brickwork. The architects contrasted existing red brick with the bold charcoal 'Graphite' brick from the Austral Bricks Elements range, to striking effect. Bricks were used to address some of the challenges presented by the site, and proved to be a versatile and effective solution. The inclusion of a bird's beak detail [see page 35] for joining two walls of the Graphite brick not only demonstrates the architects' innovative approach to design, but speaks to the adaptability of this material. For more information on the Graphite brick and Austral Brick's Elements range, see page 115.