

BASIC INSTINCTS – CREATIVE RENOVATION TURNS DRAB INTO FAB!

Mike and Clare Griggs went back to basics in transforming a down-at-heel suburban weatherboard into a thoroughly modern family home.

By Lily Zdilar

To renovate means “to make new, or as if new again, to restore and repair”. While many houses claim all of the above and on the surface look great, few would be able to compete with the top-to-toe transformation completed by a husband-and-wife building team on their Frenchs Forest house.

Mike and Clare Griggs, of MCH Building, had been applying their skills to other people’s renovations for 10

years before they decided to challenge themselves on their own ‘renovators delight’.



The suburban 1960’s weatherboard, with a late 1970’s brick veneer with a distinct lack of personality, underwent almost a year of intensive labour. Every detail has been covered – details often overlooked and which return to haunt homeowners, often soon after the house has lost its fresh looks.

“The idea of doing this house was to do it right,” says Clare.

Starting with crowbars, Mike and Clare reduced the original three-bedroom house to a shell, with only some of the façade and the floor remaining. The old super-six flat asbestos roof was removed and, as the land was substantial, they decided to extend the 100sq m house to the rear rather than up, to 200sq m.

Although the final design includes the features you’d expect in a modern home – versatile living areas, four bedrooms, large ensuite and family bathroom, massive wardrobe and storage space and a sleek kitchen, it’s the finer details that make the renovation stand out.



All internal and external walls were insulated as was the underside of the new hip truss colourbond roof and underneath the bluegum timber flooring. “Thousands of dollars are buried in the ground,” says Mike who completed most of the work with Clare over 12 months with plumbers, electricians, tilers and carpenters brought in for the specialist jobs.

“We went for quality with everything – from the solid-core doors to the 6mm tinted windows (for insulation and privacy) with commercial aluminium frames – so that the house had a feeling of strength and structure.”

Mike and Clare mixed most of the paint colours and the external walls have been painted with a primer, sealer and 4 coats of colour.

The renovation was made complete with the landscaping (also done by the couple). There is plenty of built-in seating throughout, as well as drought-tolerant plants and individually designed and built front and rear water features.

The final touch was down lighting in all the eaves of the home, ponds, gardens, spotlights in the barbeque area and even fairy lights in the jacaranda tree.

Every possibility seems to have been covered and the house is barely recognisable. It has inspired the neighbours, and even the real estate agent who sold the property, to renovate also.

A final note, the house won ‘Best Renovation in NSW between \$300,000 and \$600,000’ in the NRMA Insurance, HIA (Housing Industry Association) awards held on October 25th, 2003.

