

WISH

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing large hoop earrings and a black off-the-shoulder top with a zipper detail, posing against a light background. She is holding a red bag. The magazine title 'WISH' is printed in large red letters at the top.

IN THE FAST LANE

24 HOURS OF LE MANS, 100 YEARS OF BMW,
VIKTOR & ROLF, STRATEAS CARLUCCI, LOUIS
VUITTON'S NEW SCENTS + THE \$5 MILLION CAR

LITTLE SISTER

SEPARATED BY TIME BUT UNITED BY SANDSTONE, A FEDERATION QUEEN ANNE BEAUTY AND A VISION OF CONTEMPORARY LIVING SIT SIDE BY SIDE ON THIS MOSMAN PROPERTY, RESTORED AND DESIGNED BY THE SAME MAN.

STORY **KAREN McCARTNEY**
PHOTOGRAPHY **ROSS HONEYSETT**





The influence of Jorge Hrdina's South American heritage can be seen in the 15m concrete cantilever roof over the indoor/outdoor room next to the pool area. Below, an entertaining space and the roof garden



It is not often that an architect is commissioned to restore a house from the 19th century and design one fit for the 21st on the same block of land.

Jorge Hrdina worked on the two projects sequentially, beginning with the restoration and extension of the existing Queen Anne house, then designing a new one: the pavilion, which in August won the the Master Builders Association award for best building over \$4 million.

"This area of Mosman in Sydney was favoured by shipping merchants as it is a high point and they could view the ships coming in through The Heads," Hrdina says. The land around the existing property had been subdivided in 1919, so when the house next door came up for sale the client saw the opportunity to acquire it and restore something of the original curtilage of the house.

"One of the key discussions with the local council was our desire to reduce the number of buildings on the two sites, which between them had two garages, a shed, two swimming pools and two houses," the architect tells WISH. "We planned to consolidate and rationalise the site while creating a pavilion that appeared to float, had a transparent quality and integrated greenery into the footprint."

The first task was to address the existing heritage-listed house, which had a "poor-quality" 70s extension tacked on the back. This was removed and the house extended in the style of the original façade. To the

untrained eye it is impossible to tell where old ends and new begins. This style of house, more accurately known as Federation Queen Anne, was a popular architectural genre in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide between 1890 and 1910, defined by intricate fretwork on generous verandas, motifs such as circular windows and a penchant for turrets and towers.

"It was an exercise in research and discovery," says Hrdina, who engaged heritage experts to help with the restoration and to find tradesmen skilled in working with slate roof shingles, lattice, turned timber, parquet and intricate plasterwork.

"What I learnt from the exercise of the restoration was this tremendous respect for craftsmanship then and now," the architect says. "It is one of the connecting forces between the two buildings."

The house features painted brick, timber and singles in tones of mushroom and off-white, which mitigates some of the decorative flourishes. The use of sandstone in the house and the pavilion links the two across time.

The intention behind the pavilion was to expand contemporary family living; designed for entertaining by the pool, it has a large media room, a small self-contained apartment, amenities for showering and a roof garden that maximises the view.

During the excavation to create a wine cellar, the builder hit a water table, which put paid to the original notion that the garage would be subterranean. The cars are now in the southwestern wing in a transparent parking area enclosed by unframed sliding glass panels.

Hrdina's idea of a pavilion was informed by his heritage – the South American tradition of the handmade working with the modern – and his early training in the Sydney School of organic architecture in the office of Neville Gruzman. Hrdina's bespoke buildings combine new technologies, a sense of materiality and a focus on honest, expressive materials – wood, stone, concrete – that create meaningful connections.

The pavilion's media and dining rooms, with extensive windows framing views of the old house; the underground wine cellar; and a bedroom with a wall of rough-hewn sandstone, a material that creates a link with the sister building.



Hrdina arrived from Chile in 1971 with his parents, who, looking for a home that mirrored the architectural sensibility of their homeland, bought one of very few houses by French modernist architect Jean Fombertaux in Sydney's upper north shore. "There was an incredible purity of structure to the house. I would be doing a university assignment and look at these details that were both well resolved and avant-garde at the same time."

He acknowledges that much of Australia's architectural influence draws on European heritage whereas climate-wise we are much closer to the subtropical climate of Brazil. Hence the driving idea of the pavilion was to be open to the elements and views as much as possible. "There is nothing new about the idea of indoor/outdoor but I wanted to take it to a new level," he says of the massive 15m cantilever that forms the roof of the living space adjacent to the pool. It is the grand architectural gesture of the 45m structural façade that defines the pavilion and which could, Hrdina says, double as the hull of a submarine.

The story of its installation is a lesson in client-architect trust and the requirement for steady nerves. "It took some time to find someone capable of making the moulds for the concrete and in the end it was a shipbuilder in Nowra who used MDF lined with fibreglass to make four separate moulds," Hrdina says.

It is hard to guess which would be more stressful: the day of the concrete pour, which lasted from early morning to 2am, or the day the moulds were taken off six months later. "We consulted widely, including engineers who had experience in bridge construction, and as a result the post-tension steel cables laid [before the pour] were so tight you couldn't fit a 20c piece in there," Hrdina says of positioning the 90-tonne super beam. "The propping was insane as we couldn't afford any degree of slippage. The whole exercise was very tense."

A tour of the pavilion reveals how his ability with enduring materials defines the space. The concrete

beams are dappled and imperfect; rough-hewn sandstone cladding dresses the structural core while slabs of smooth, honed sandstone are laid throughout the ground level. Stained blackbutt timbers, oak treads for the stairs and bluestone for bench tops, form the limited material palette keeping the pavilion unfussy and a touch raw. "I didn't want it to feel overly luxurious in terms of the finishes and fittings", says Hrdina.

The apartment is small and streamlined, taking many of its cues from boat design. Doors slide, the toilet is hidden in a lidded bench, storage discreetly lines the perimeter with bluestone ledges and perforated copper panels, while a wardrobe wall seamlessly segues into the kitchen space. Sunlight streams in from the windows overlooking the street while north-facing glazing provides pleasing framed views of the original house.

"We were determined that the pavilion would be a significant piece of modern architecture in what is essentially a conservation area," Hrdina says. And it was clearly the subject of plenty of community debate. "The tradies could hear the comments of locals walking by – some were for, some against – but as it neared completion we like to think it swung in our favour."

The original house had a roof garden, so the council gave the nod to one on the pavilion roof. It is a simply designed space, reflecting the building's slimline footprint, and is generously planted to soften the architecture and the views over the surrounding rooflines towards Sydney's eastern suburbs. From the opposite aspect the spire of St Mary's Cathedral comes into view.

A kitchenette in the media room is designed so that drinks can easily be brought up to the roof garden. "Yes, we have tried to think of everything," Hrdina says, "but in a way that is serviceable and honest. We want it to be enjoyed by family and friends, to be robust and to get better with time and use." With a over a century's age difference between the two buildings, it has some catching up to do. **W**

