

AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

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& geometry*



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01 Custom steel-framed sliding doors open onto a small but sunny courtyard.

## Stray HOUSE by Pleysier Perkins

• MELBOURNE, VIC •

This beautifully crafted renovation to a single-fronted Victorian terrace is the result of a close collaboration between the architect and the owner-builder.

Words by Bonnie Herring  
Photography by Hilary Bradford

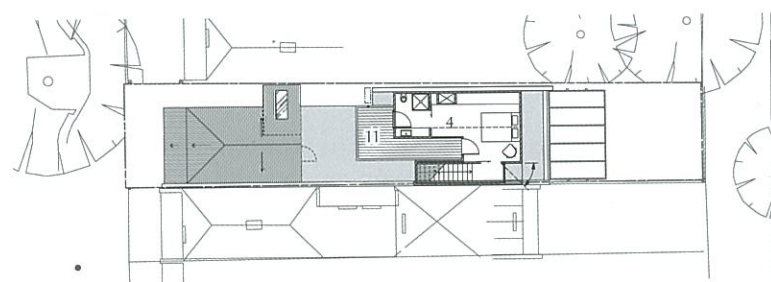
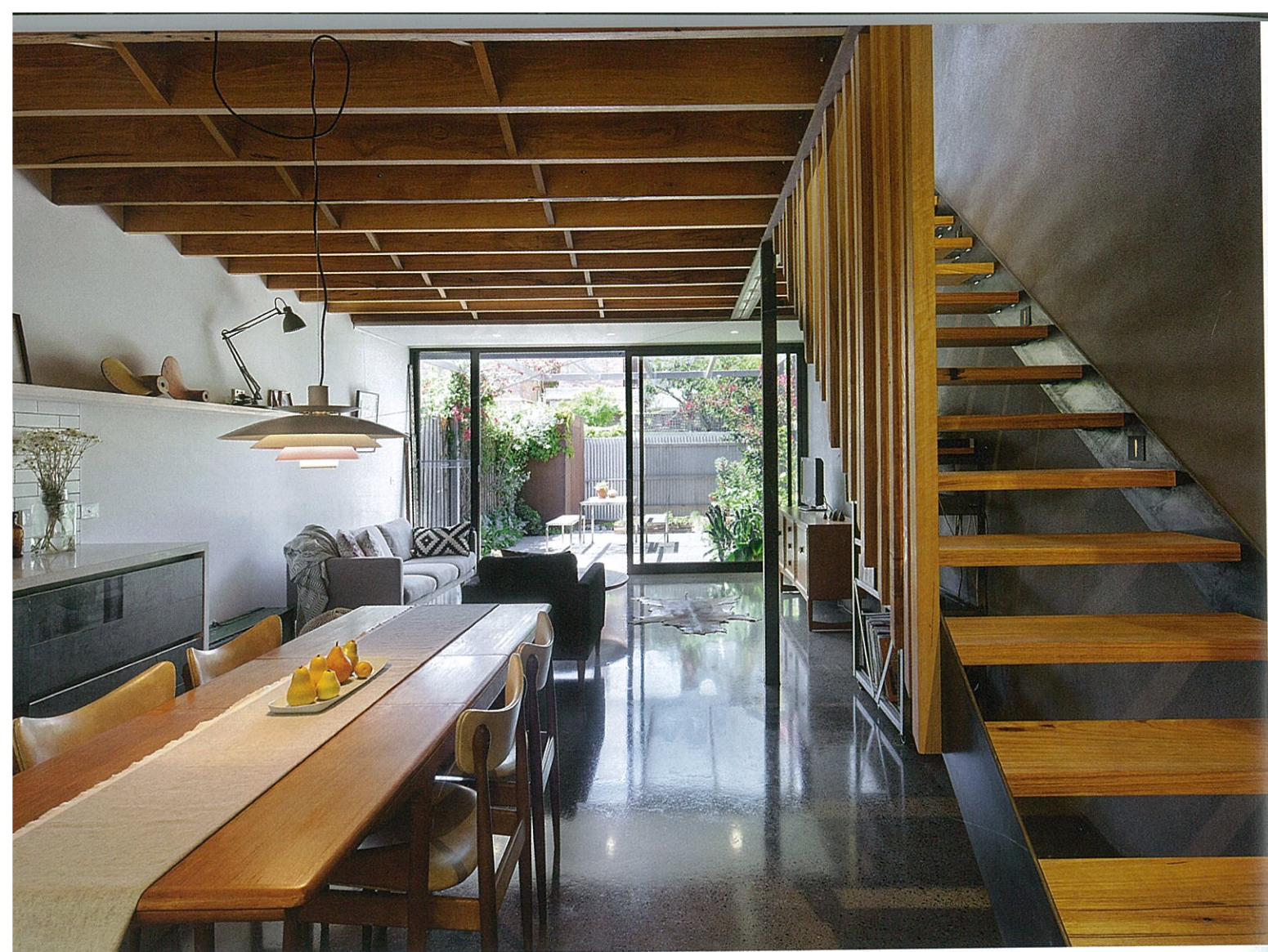
**P**ersonally building your own home is undoubtedly a worthy aspiration. Yet for an architect, there is an undeniable fear associated with designing a home for an owner-builder. In part, it is the potential for an eroded design outcome and loss of quality control, but perhaps more significantly, it is the fear of inflated client expectations regarding time, cost and expertise.

While I held these trepidations when visiting Stray House – a compact three-bedroom terrace in Melbourne's North Fitzroy by Pleysier Perkins – they were quickly and surprisingly extinguished.

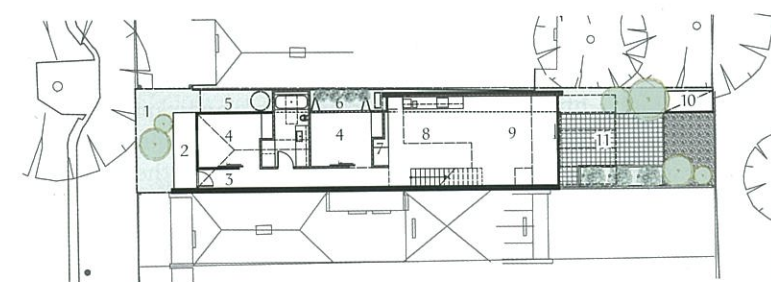
Director Ramon Pleysier had opportunely worked with owner-builder Daniel and his family on various projects, so when he took on Stray House he was already familiar with Daniel's tenacity and his trade skills in carpentry and landscaping. Accordingly, Ramon had none of my initial reservations; in their place was a sense of trust and mutual respect that served to limit the volume of architectural documentation and design advice required.

As one would expect given that he is a builder, Daniel was looking for natural light and outlook to greenery from all spaces. He also wanted the house to exhibit the craft and skill of those who would create it, roping in his tight circle of family and friends with construction experience to help build his home.





**First floor 1:400**



**Ground floor 1:400**

0 5 m

- 1 Garden
- 2 Verandah
- 3 Entry
- 4 Bedroom
- 5 Storage
- 6 Courtyard
- 7 Pantry
- 8 Kitchen
- 9 Living
- 10 Existing shed
- 11 Terrace

**02** The interior palette of white walls and concrete is given warmth and scale through expressed timber features.

**03** Exposed recycled timber ceiling joists were individually selected and embellished with herringbone struts.

The existing dwelling sat in a string of five-metre-wide, single-storey terraces oriented east to west. Despite virtually none of the derelict heritage building remaining intact, it was required that the facade be restored to the extent of direct reproduction. This was the first of numerous “battles” fought by Ramon and Daniel that shaped and moulded the final form.

Without a fence, the inviting and uncontrived front garden offers a green pocket for the quiet street to enjoy. Mounded and planted with a variety of heights and textures, accented with pale grey and green succulents, the garden spills between the footpath and the verandah’s large-format rough granite pavers.

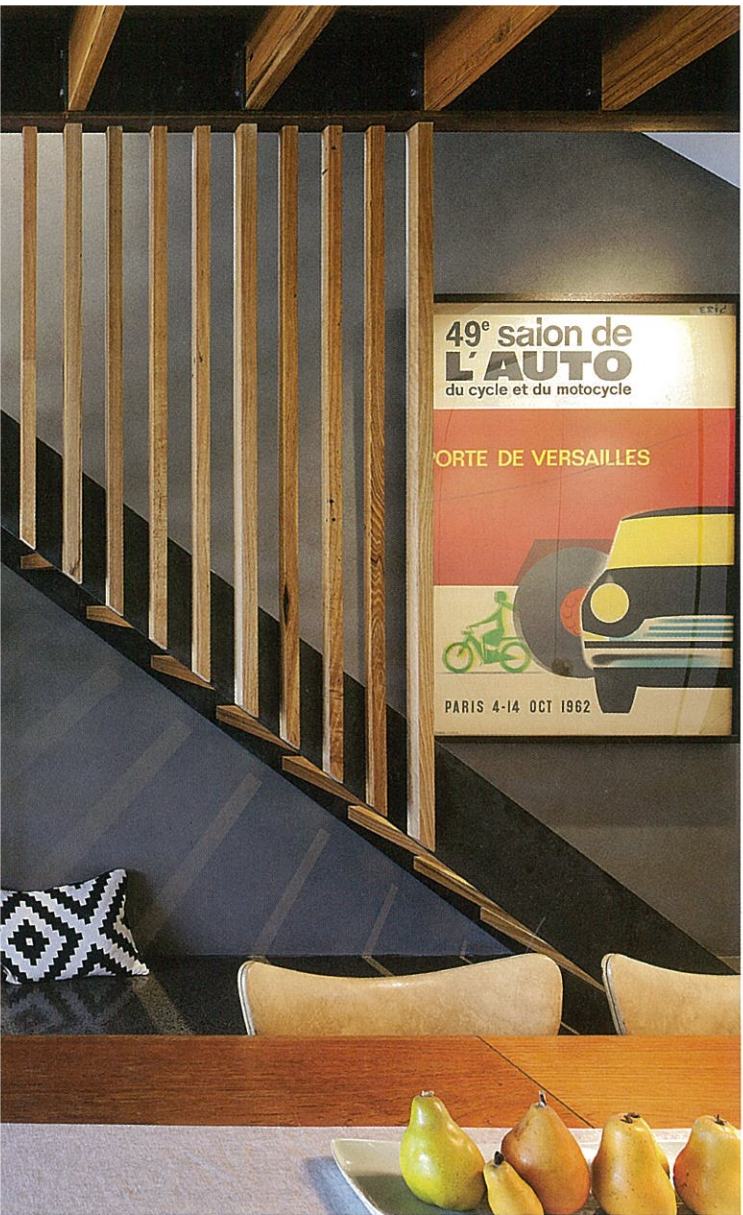
The floor plan is punctured and bookended with garden spaces and borrowed views that frame street trees, wall textures and the ornate chimney next door. In spite of the unfavourable orientation and confined footprint, Ramon has used these courtyards and

openings to feed natural light from the north boundary through to the interior.

Some of the planning is rather curious. The seemingly inverted and internally focused upper level hints at an alternate design that was evidently foiled. This does, however, present a diminutive and endearingly scaled asymmetrical peak that adds further narrative and character to the form. Multiple ceiling planes fold and intersect at curated junctions above the main bedroom, and windows are inset to screen and shade. Such unexpected moments provoke interest and stimulate engaged living.

Each space is comfortably compact, which for Daniel and his partner necessitated downsizing extensive collections of miscellaneous objects. This cathartic process enabled a refinement of their style and finding locations for their favorite pieces, as they cumulatively inhabited their new home, gave them joy.





- 04 The owners' eclectic collection of furniture and objects takes pride of place in the new extension. Artwork: French poster from Galerie Montmartre.
- 05 A large skylight in the ensuite gives the impression of space within the compact room.
- 06 New windows and a balcony have been added to the bedroom on the first floor.

As a skilled owner-builder, Daniel kept an unusual level of control, taking on several trades typically outsourced. Daniel recalls, "I dug the foundations, I demolished it, I poured the concrete, I laid most of the brickwork, my brother and his business partner framed it, and my uncle built the cabinetry."

Maintaining sympathetic directions in aesthetic and style, Ramon and Daniel were able to work quickly during construction to make refinements along the way. As the construction unfolded, opportunities were taken to further the detail and express a greater level of craft.


Admirably, the proud architect and owner took the time to individually select the recycled timber joists and embellish them with herringbone struts, install full-height expressed doorjambs and custom steel-framed sliding doors, and recess support brackets for unimpeded views through the open stair risers to the garden beyond.

The interior palette of white walls, concrete, timber and charcoal carpeted floors is given warmth and scale through expressed timber

features, white subway tiles and black formply joinery.

The iterative process of navigating neighbourhood and authority constraints was less predictable and more taxing than it should have been, and Ramon and Daniel's recounting of the process is indignant at times. "Initially we didn't start here," Ramon explains. "Sometimes you're given a 'secondary brief' from a host of other peripheral people, and your finishing point is [consequently] a long way from where you began."

That said, the outcome has been rewarding and lucrative enough to convince Daniel to take on the challenge again. Reflective as he prepares to undertake another project as owner-builder, he now holds more ambition and patience to push regulatory limitations to find the right solution.

Ramon and Daniel have built an understated, textural and engaging home. Stray House is a product of a rigorous, aligned and considerate design-build team. Without these ingredients, my trepidations would have remained. 

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**Practice profile**  
 An architecture and interior design practice specializing in bespoke new homes, renovations and prefabricated architecture via collaboration with Prebuilt.

**Project team**  
 Ramon Pleysier, Kate Aitken, Aleksandra Wojtowicz

**Builder**  
 Owner and Deco Carpentry

**Consultants**  
**Engineer:** Hive Engineering  
**Lighting:** Lights and Tracks  
**Town planner:** James Livingston  
**Joiner:** The Cabinet and Furniture Shop

**Products**  
**Roofing:** Lysaght corrugated iron in Zincalume  
**External walls:** James Hardie Scyon Linea cladding, painted; recycled bricks and render  
**Internal walls:** Recycled bricks and render; Boral plasterboard, painted  
**Windows:** Capral Aluminium frames in black powdercoat; period windows from McKay Joinery  
**Doors:** Custom full-height sliders with recycled

hardwood cladding from Deco Carpentry  
**Flooring:** Grind and Seal polished concrete  
**Lighting:** Recessed downlights from Lights and Tracks; Louis Poulsen PH 5 pendant  
**Kitchen:** Miele oven, cooktop, rangehood and dishwasher; Reece mixer; subway tiles in gloss white from National Tiles; formply joinery in black with exposed edges from Maxi Plywood; reconstituted stone in gloss finish from Olympus Marble  
**Bathroom:** Reece Scala tapware and white undermount basins; floor tiles and subway tiles from National Tiles; formply joinery in black with exposed edges from Maxi Plywood;

reconstituted stone in gloss finish from Olympus Marble  
**Heating and cooling:** Mod Cons reverse-cycle airconditioner  
**External elements:** Lysaght pergola in DuraGal steel; crazy paving in bluestone  
**Other:** Recycled hardwood beams to living area from Shiver Me Timbers

**Floor area**  
 162 m<sup>2</sup> site  
 120 m<sup>2</sup> floor

**Project cost**  
 \$550,000

**Time schedule**  
**Design, documentation:** 18 months  
**Construction:** 9 months