

RED HILL HOUSE
AND STUDIO
BY ZUZANA
AND NICHOLAS





The latest layers in a gradual process of adaptation to a Queenslander explore the congruence between public and private space, work and family life, tradition and innovation.

Words by Dirk Yates
Photography by Clinton Weaver

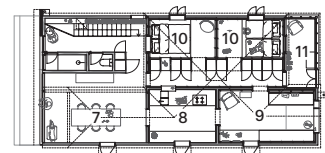
There is a certain pleasure in spotting an incidence of twinning – typically when two friends happen to be wearing clothes of similar colours and styling. The game lies in picking the similarities at the same time as the differences. Zuzana and Nicholas's Red Hill House and Studio, a refurbishment of a timber worker's cottage that provides a home for their young family and business, contains plenty of twinning. There is the architectural couple themselves: Zuzana Kovar and Nicholas Skepper met at university, later married, and now run an architectural practice that bears their first (rather than last) names. There are their twin children, whose room is adorned with matching *Tyrannosaurus rex* toys, and their two old greyhounds, fondly remembered: Max and Maggie. There is also the house itself, with its twin uses of family home (the upper level) and architectural studio (lower level) – a version of a shop-top house. And, of course, there are the layers of new interleaved with old: twenty-first-century interventions made to an early-twentieth-century timber cottage.

The first stage of the refurbishment, the family home, was constructed by the architects themselves. The existing four rooms of the cottage were reworked and reordered, flipping the placement of living spaces with those of the bedrooms to give aspect to public rooms and privacy to those for sleeping. The handmade details of these rooms reveal an intimacy between the architect-owner-builders and the fabric of the home. The use of stained timber, leather, layered wall linings and multifaceted windows imbue these modestly scaled rooms with richness. Stud framing is expressed in a decorative, joinery-like way to make walls, and finely crafted timber screens mediate daylight and privacy. It is a pleasurable reimagining of the qualities of a Queenslander, without being kitsch or coy. There is an emphasis on comfort, amenity of light and airflow rather than volume in this two-bedroom, single-bathroom home. Spaces are intimate, quirky and lovely.

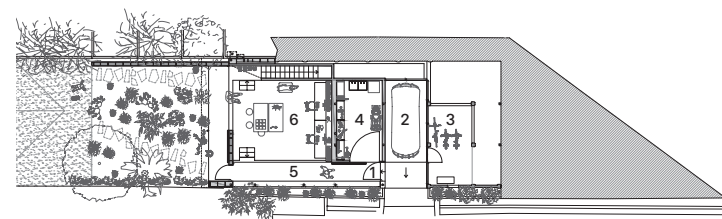
Living, kitchen and dining rooms are distinct from one another but arranged as an enfilade rather than the all-in-one mega-room of the contemporary KiDiLi (Kitchen, Dining, Living) – a pejorative architectural term that was, I think, first deployed by seminal

01 Living and work spaces are separated by levels, making this home a version of a shop-top house.

02 Large sliding panels open the entire eastern edge of the dining room, creating a verandah-like feel. Wall sculpture: Anna Varendorff.



First floor 1:400



Ground floor 1:400

- 1 Entry
- 2 Garage
- 3 Undercroft
- 4 Laundry
- 5 Breezeway
- 6 Studio
- 7 Dining
- 8 Kitchen
- 9 Living
- 10 Bedroom
- 11 Sleepout

Red Hill House and Studio is built on the land of the Turrbal and Jagera people.



Meanjin/
Brisbane,
Qld



Alteration
+ addition



4

Family



2



1



Site 491 m²
House 152 m²
Breezeway 14 m²



Design 1 y
Build 1 y
(stage 2)



Per m²
\$4,000

Brisbane architect Timothy Hill. The plan supports a feminist household, or what has now been redescribed as a post-COVID house: it makes it easy for partners to share the supervision of children when doing chores or working from home, while also providing a degree of separation and privacy between rooms.

By contrast, the rear upper level of the house and the lower-level studio, recently completed with a building contractor, are more open, with a greater connection to the backyard and the neighbourhood. Where the family rooms of the cottage are rich with deep colours, soft furnishings and intimate smaller spaces, the new dining room and studio below have a palette of white and grey, and a setting that is semi-outdoors, semi-public. Large sliding panels open across the entirety of the eastern edge and make the dining space feel verandah-like. Protected but breezy, filled with light but in shade, it offers the twin feeling of being both out in the world and supported by the amenity of an articulated room. Cleverly contrived views of the leafy neighbourhood and down to the children's play area in the garden are glorious in their simplicity.

While the dining room has the sensibility of a verandah, the lower-level studio embraces the enjoyable qualities of a traditional Queenslander undercroft. Massive, stepping concrete slabs bed the space into the ground. It's cool and protected. The stepping ground plane provides a feeling of refuge and passive control from within. The long northern edge of the house makes a hard boundary with the footpath, and so a stainless steel mesh screen and low-height concrete wall are employed to mediate daylight and breezes, and to afford both visibility and security from the street. For visitors to the studio, a separate address is made along this edge. A colonnade is formed by the posts that support the house above and the wall of the studio, and this loggia-like space signals a subtle demarcation between the semi-public address of the studio and the personal spaces of the home above.

Unlike the more common approach of enlarging older cottages with a ballooning volume affixed to the back, here the new work has been made within the footprint of the existing house. Galvanised steel posts and flashings, smooth concrete floors and walls, and roughly trowelled render to concrete blockwork express an aesthetic of utility and – unexpected for some – inherent material charm. It is the same sensibility, embedded in our shared cultural fondness for traditional Queenslanders, of the shadowy profile of timber weatherboards, the repetitive rhythm of VJ wall linings, and the varying grain of timber floorboards.

Red Hill House and Studio expresses and reinforces the values of Zuzana and Nicholas's architectural practice. Manifest spatially and materially, these twin values enjoy the inherent cultural and typological qualities of the existing house while inventively adapting them to suit contemporary lifestyles through well-crafted and sophisticated architectural thinking. ©

Products

Roofing: Custom Orb by Lysaght in 'Zincalume'

External walls: Timber chamfer-boards; concrete block in raked cement render; stainless steel woven wire mesh; galvanised steel balustrades

Internal walls: Plasterboard and plywood, painted; Tasmanian oak plywood from Sharp Plywood, whitewashed

Windows and doors: Custom timber frames from Architectural Timber Joinery in paint and clear stain

Flooring: Existing hoop pine boards in clear finish; trowelled concrete; Sarelle limestone from Eco Outdoor

Lighting: Angle-mount and Sauna wall lights, and aluminium outdoor light, from THPG; Hanging Lamp No. 3 by Muller Van Severen for Valerie Objects

Kitchen: Stainless steel benchtop; hoop pine cupboards; Smeg oven; Asko cooktop; Astra Walker Icon mixer in 'Eco Brass'

Bathroom: Sarelle limestone from Eco Outdoor; Icon tapware from Astra Walker in 'Eco Brass'; Como concrete basin from Concrete Nation (now Luna from Nood Co) in 'Nude'

Heating and cooling: Fujitsu split system airconditioning

External elements: Stainless steel woven wire mesh screen



03

03 Stained timber, expressed stud framing and layered wall linings reimagine the typical details of a Queenslander. Artworks (L-R): Josef Tockstein, Jitka Valova (on bench); Evan Hecox (black frame); Kat Shapiro Wood; Susie Duggin.

04 Kitchen, dining and living rooms are connected but distinct from one another, avoiding an open-plan mega-room. Artwork: Evan Hecox.



04



05

The long northern edge of the house makes a hard boundary with the footpath, and so a mesh screen and low-height concrete wall are employed to mediate daylight and breezes, along with visibility and security to the street.

05 The ground-floor studio is made from concrete and stainless steel, a robust palette for this street-facing space.

06 To preserve green space, all of the new rooms are accommodated within the footprint of the existing house.

07 The mesh screen and colonnade formed by posts embrace and manage the semi-public aspect of the studio.



06



07



08 Interior openings add surprise and craft, lending a warmth to domestic spaces that contrasts with the robust materiality of the studio.

09 Modest in size, the sleeping spaces occupy the southern edge of the existing cottage. Artwork: Keith Burt.

10 A basin at the end of a corridor is adjacent to, yet separate from, the wet areas of the bathroom.

11 The stair leading to private domestic space is concealed from the studio.

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