



BREAKING THE BOX

Two Melbourne architects have rebuilt their house from the foundations up, manipulating vertical spaces to open up the living areas and bring in natural light – and a few surprises – to the building's long, narrow dimensions. PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKKEL VAND. PRODUCER: HELEN REDMOND



In the living area, PREVIOUS PAGE, LEFT, a custom-made concrete bench holds objects such as an artist's table lamp. In the living area, PREVIOUS PAGE, RIGHT, a custom-made concrete bench holds objects such as an artist's table lamp. In the living area, PREVIOUS PAGE, RIGHT, a custom-made concrete bench holds objects such as an artist's table lamp.

SITTING IN A SOUTH-BEACHING room lined with books, the most subtle of the three-story residence in a pale grey concrete is a surprising surprise. One is a Victorian-style study, complete with a blue-laminated wooden kitchen in Spanish style, it is not surprising that the owners, Melbourne architects Stephen O'Connor and Rachel Hulse, decided to build away from the foundations up. Only the original cellar, with its stone steps, has been retained from the past.

To compensate for the compact dimensions of the site – just 5.8 metres by 25 metres – O'Connor and Hulse manipulated the vertical space to the maximum. Changes in ceiling heights, from a high to low ceiling to a more standard 2.7 metres, help create an intimate feel at every level. The doors of the living areas, with an 8-metre-high ceiling, is surrounded by floor-to-ceiling bookshelves made of steel rods. On these, racks of books appear to float towards the white-painted ceiling. An old metal ladder found in a vintage yard is used to access the books and adjust the arrangement.

A study on the first floor mezzanine overlooks the kitchen and opens to the living area below. A simple laminate bench sits in front of the mezzanine above the study, and the floor area doubles in a ramp for the more intimate part of the living area. "We wanted to create a number of experiences and had to play on the vertical space to deliver these," says Hulse.

O'Connor and Hulse were keen to introduce the space with light at all times of the day. To bring light into the core of the house, the central staircase doubles as a light well. A skylight allows sunlight into the three levels through open-roofed mezzanine and grid-like aluminium louvers.

In the kitchen and living area, floor-to-ceiling glass doors were installed, and these can be pulled right back to open the interior to a rear deck and garden.



