

# Upstairs downstairs

A stately home combines heritage features upstairs and modern conveniences downstairs in a studied renovation. Story by **Laura Stead-Churchill**



Traditional features are reflected in a gold mirror found on eBay

**W**hen faced with the challenge of how to renovate and modernise their 1915 Spring Hill home, owners Amanda and Malcolm McBratney put in place a team of experts sensitive to both its history and its future.

When they bought it, the Queenslander had seen myriad lives pass through its doors and it had served as flats for many years, but it was rundown and its new owners wanted to transform the building back to a stately home – one that would suit an eclectic style and accommodate a family of three children. “It needed a lot of TLC but it was a bit of a bargain so we snapped it up,” says owner Amanda McBratney. She also needed an architect with heritage experience and she turned to Andrew Watson.

For Watson, the research process included taking paint scrapings from the internal and external walls to help determine the final colour choices throughout which became a

modern interpretation of the property’s past colour scheme. “My view for this project was that we should try to maintain those aspects that were original and intrinsic to the understanding of the building,” he says.

Fortunately, over time, features such as original floors, chandeliers at the entry, pressed metal ceilings and some double-hung windows had remained intact, despite the property being converted to flats in the 1960s, reverting back to a single residence in the 1980s then changing hands several times over the years.

“The principal character and significant components were all on the upper level so we maintained the traditional features but added a new bathroom and revised two of the bedrooms to smaller rooms which allowed us to put in a walk-in robe and ensuite which sits as an insertion to the main verandah deck.”

The lower level was converted from a four-car garage to accommodate a media

Clockwise from right:  
An indoor spa with Moroccan daybed; carved console table and a collection of chandeliers reveal the owner's personality



room, entertainment room, two bedrooms, kitchenette, bathroom, laundry and interior spa. "My favourite part of the downstairs area is the laundry because we put another chandelier in there and it looks out to the indoor spa," says McBratney.

She turned to interior designer Luba Kazovsky at La Verandah, Milton, for innovative ideas in each space. "I had some grandiose ideas of making the spa area look Italian but Luba had the idea it would be nice to make it look like a grotto and I do feel it's a warmer, nicer looking spa now." It also gives the home a unique personality, clearly differentiating between the traditional Federation style of the home's origins and the new work.

"We had lots of discussion about what we could do and shouldn't do but we thought the new work had to look new. It could be compatible but not a replication," says Andrew Watson. "I had a bit of a problem with the idea

of trying to make something look of the same era when it's new. That would be essentially falsifying the original building."

Kazovsky took the same approach with the décor. "You have to be able to change the space according to your lifestyle," she says.

Items that personalised the interior include a contrast rug, a black carved console table, Aboriginal art and a beautiful lamp at the entry.

Colour, art and history are all important to the owners, who have developed a mix of classic and modern art for their collection. "Around the time of 1800 to 1900, which was a bit earlier than the home was built, art was all bunched together and you'd have different frames and different styles of art and we wanted to reflect that style in a more modern way," says McBratney.

Work by contemporary Australian artist Adam Cullen adorns the walls alongside artworks bought at auction, other works



inherited from family or created by the couple's own children. Favourite decorative pieces include a gold mirror that sits above the fireplace bought at auction for \$200, which Amanda has since discovered is worth substantially more. The Moroccan day bed in the spa area was bought on eBay. Black wrought iron light fixtures original to the home incorporate unique motifs of ships, lions and roman warriors.

"In some respects it's still a bit of a work in progress but it's certainly much more livable now," says McBratney. "It feels like a home."