

Front-row seat

How a 1980s Mornington Peninsula farmhouse was transformed into The Seat, a family haven with the landscape as a focal point.

By JOANNE HAWKINS



ARCHITECTURE

When the owners of an '80s brown-brick farmhouse set on 9.3 hectares of Victoria's Mornington Peninsula first saw what was to become their weekendender, they pretty much bought it on the spot.

But, while they loved the landscape, an extended stint staying at the four-bedroom property during lockdowns opened the semi-retired couple's eyes to not only the house's failings but its potential.

They turned to Atlas Architects' directors Ton Vu and Aaron Neighbour for help in overhauling the house to create a home that could also be enjoyed by their children and grandchildren.

"They desired a home that was unapologetically for living, where the living areas are prioritised above all else, creating a space that welcomes family in and encourages connection and shared experiences," says Vu.

"Our clients wanted to renovate the existing home and build a large family-room extension embodying a new kitchen, living and dining area. The home needed to connect with the panoramic landscape, bringing it inside as the focal point of every moment."

Other items on the clients' wish list included a new entry that created a sense of flow throughout the house. A seamless integration of the original house and the new areas both inside and out was also key.

There was only one problem with the desire to embrace the views. The best vista – with rolling hills sloping down to a dam and the sea in the distance – were on the western side. And, in the original house, this view had been given over to the kitchen, bathrooms and bedrooms, with the living areas taking advantage of the east-facing light on the other side.

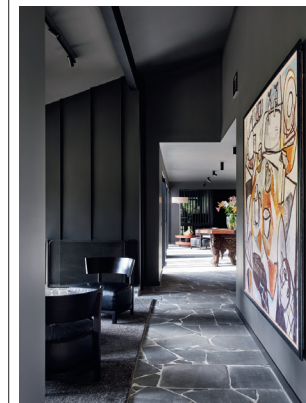
Flipping conventional thinking regarding orientation on its head, Atlas decided to position the new extension so it directly faced and framed the view (the summer western sun was mitigated with deep eaves).

"This rotation also creates pockets of open spaces," Vu says. "Our vision was that wherever you went in the home, you would be drawn to the landscape [through windows or doors]."

The kitchen area of the new extension features an oversized island bench for gathering around and has a gentlemen's club aesthetic – complete with a hanging bar – reflecting that it will primarily accommodate family gatherings.

The existing house now has two separate accommodation wings – with a living area, bedrooms and bathrooms – creating more private, breakaway spaces for extended family.

Externally, Atlas solved the problem of how to marry the old and new by creating a steel fascia pergola that envelops the existing house and seamlessly flows into the new roof structure.



The Seat by Atlas Architects flips conventional thinking on its head.



The pergola also creates a sheltered northern courtyard near the home's relocated entry.

"The pergola plays a big part in uniting the existing and new roof forms but also creates some quite interesting outdoor spaces," Vu says.

"The pergola's skeleton structure suggests an overall simple gable, while the folding origami roofline represents the undulating hills and valleys of the site."

The new roof also allows for the creation of some dramatic cathedral ceilings inside the new extension as well as a sculptural feature in the entry hall where the old building joins the new.

"What's the point of creating this interesting roof if you can't actually experience it?" Vu asks. "Our design approach is to always think about the experience on the inside of the building as well as the outside."

Unlike a lot of Atlas' other projects ("We tend to use a lot of white, timber and concrete," Vu says), The Seat features a cocooning palette of charcoals and greys.

"The clients wanted to experiment with a darker space," Vu says. "But it's not as simple as painting everything black because the colour varies depending on the quality of light that hits it. So, it did feel as if we literally went through 50 shades of grey making sure that everything worked harmoniously."

The moody palette also limits light reflection, creating less strain on the eyes and elevating the expansive windows, views and natural light.

Externally, the brown bricks of the original house have been transformed with more grey, which allows the texture, but not the original colour, to shine.

Another striking feature is the bluestone paving which has been used both externally and throughout the living areas. "The crazy paving was a total experiment that we opted for rather late in the project after struggling to find any timber flooring that worked with the colour palette," Vu says. "It was the last piece of the puzzle that worked out so well."

Vu says he and Neighbour couldn't be prouder of the finished result, which has nailed the clients' brief and delivered considered spaces that embrace the spectacular landscape they sit in. And it seems others agree; the project was awarded the Resene Total Colour Landscape Award for 2022. 🏡