



# Throw of *the dice*

Reinventing a 19<sup>th</sup> Century cottage for a modern family of five gave architect, **MATT GIBSON**, quite a challenge. But, as **ANNIE REID** discovered, his clients, Sarah Carlisle and Thornton McCamish, have ended up with a colourful but respectful neighbour in a former working-class suburb of **MELBOURNE**.

The couple love their gritty neighbourhood in Melbourne's Richmond, with its cheek-by-jowl houses, cool-as-cult cafés and the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground just a stone's throw away.

They like further afield places too – Thornton's parents had a country orchard, while Sarah grew up in leafy Elwood and Kooyong. "I've got a real thing for trees," she laughs. "And if you can't have big trees, then you can at least have the colour."

For their family of five, including children Gracie (10), Jonah (8) and Hugh (5), the couple wanted to re-jig the existing building without increasing the footprint, yet connect to and create more 'green' space and light.

Local architect, Matt Gibson, started developing a clear formal idea inspired by the board game Monopoly. On an envelope, he drew three white cubes resembling dice that had been thrown. The cubes land randomly on top of each other next to a green Victorian house, as might occur in the board game.

"It was all about these cubes with large, open glass ends," Gibson says. It was also about attempting a bit of adventure, as he does with all of his projects. "I don't think we've used colour as strongly before, and colour was a real driver for the project."

The first cube comprises the new kitchen and adjoining intimate dining area, the second features the lounge, and the third is the upstairs main bedroom, ensuite and study area. Sliding glass walls at each cube end open to the rear backyard and deck, while an existing central courtyard was enlarged to allow more light into the interiors.

Structural tolerances mean the cubes don't touch and materials run flush continuously through thresholds to create a seamless look. Anything non-cubed is recessive; thick glass



PREVIOUS LEFT | THE EXISTING HOUSE IS A BEAUTIFULLY RESTORED WEATHERBOARD COTTAGE. PREVIOUS RIGHT | GREEN COLOUR ACCENTS ARE USED THROUGHOUT TO ENLIVEN THE WHITE INTERIORS. ABOVE | THE COLOURFUL STORAGE JOINERY DOUBLES AS A DECORATIVE SCULPTURAL ELEMENT FLANKED BY A TIMBER-DECKED INTERNAL COURTYARD AND THE EXTERNAL DECK.



//

*I've got a real thing for trees. And if you can't have big trees,  
then you can at least have the colour.*

//

SARAH | RESIDENT



It has a nod to sci-fi with crisp white, black and the green highlight colour.

GIBSON | ARCHITECT



walls disappear into the cubes and recycled timber floors extend into the backyard. The vertical stair chasm and central courtyard also separate the old and new structures.

“We really wanted the old and new structures to be true to their time, so it’s about storytelling as you move through the building,” Gibson says. “But we had to work hard to make it all happen, and there were a number of times we had to shorten and massage the plans.”

Protected by a heritage overlay, the Victorian front section provides a visual connection to the streetscape. Gibson cleverly re-worked two of the four rooms here: the original dining room is now a bathroom, while a bedroom has become a sitting room. For now, this extra living space houses the couple’s family and travel treasures, but could be a fourth bedroom down the track. The remaining two rooms are the kids’ bedrooms.

“If you open the front door, you expect a Victorian interior with compartments and doors. But there are no doors; everything is completely flowing and open. You move through the spaces rather than in and out of them,” says Gibson.

Inspired by Stanley Kubrick’s film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the colour scheme is not just designed for colour’s sake, but does a lot of other things. “It has a nod to sci-fi with crisp white, black and the green highlight,” says Gibson.

The exterior and landscape green spaces become the focus, through the lens of the white cubes. An apple tree – in homage to the beloved orchard – and wild salvia can be seen through

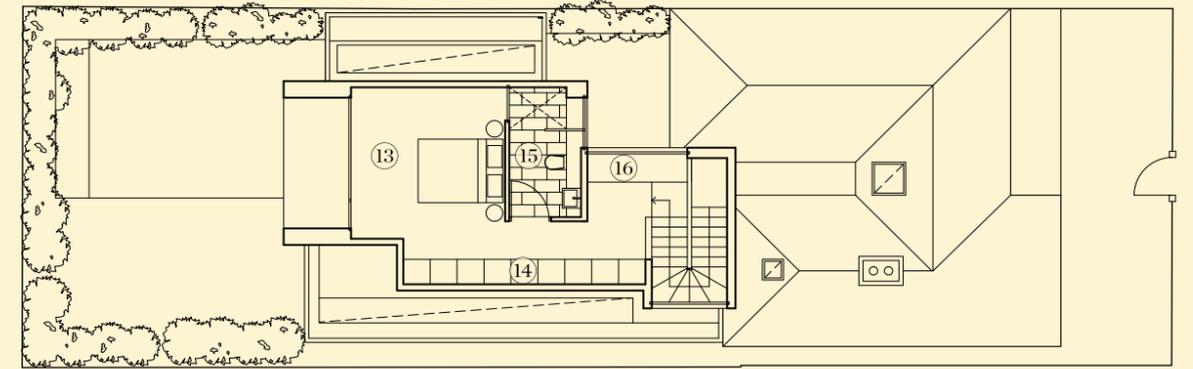
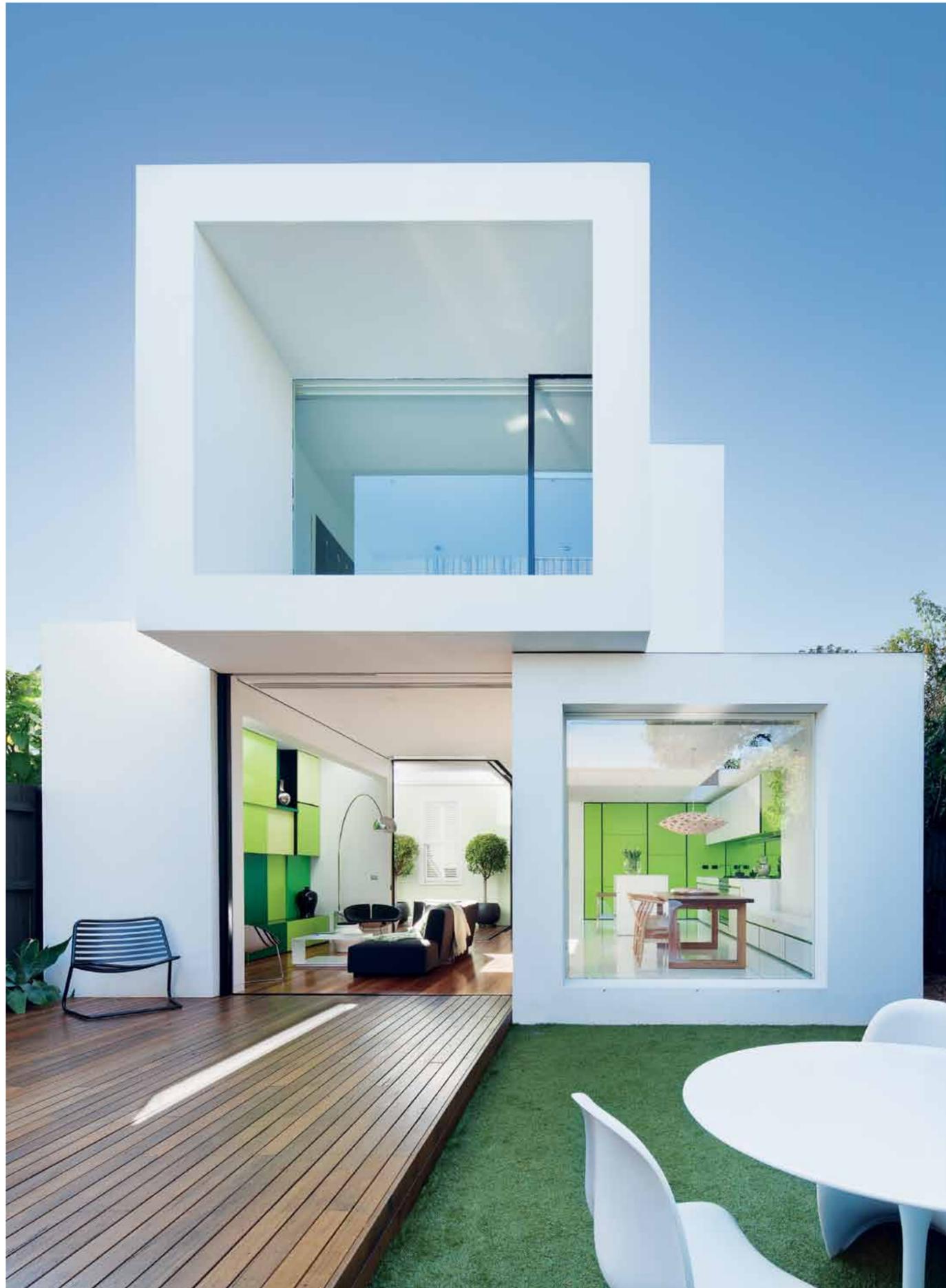
the hallway at the front, while a rich ivy-draped wall and the leafy backyard provide green views at the rear. As a result, the colour not only brings the surrounding greenery inside, it also dissolves the barriers of enclosure.

It becomes part of the interior, too, via joinery. Sarah’s favourite are multi-panelled cabinets in the lounge, in varying shades of green, which can be slid along or pulled out to store Thornton’s books, CDs and the television. There are two more green panels in the kitchen, concealing the fridge and freezer, which Sarah has accessorised with a matching KitchenAid. Finally, sliding into the cavity beneath the staircase, is a custom-made Häfele pantry.

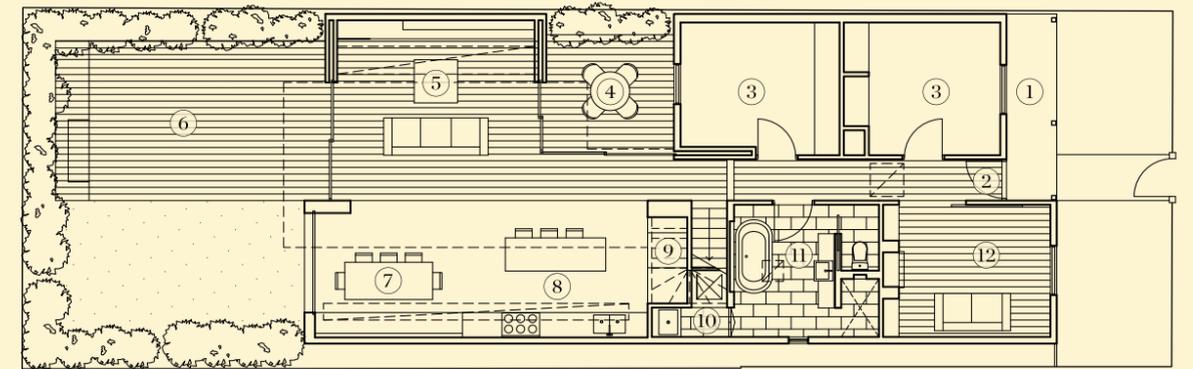
“It’s just a really smart kitchen and, because we do a lot of cooking, it makes life easier,” Sarah says. A weekly habit has become inviting friends over for ‘Sunday night tea’, and sending the kids off upstairs or to the front to watch a DVD.

It wasn’t until the upper level was built that they realised they had great views, and a chance to connect with the amenity beyond the walls of the house. Sarah loves looking out to an old factory from the main bedroom, and the Melbourne Cricket Ground from the study desk. Conversely, a glass box ensuite offers a hint of voyeurism for passer-bys. “I also love the view of Richmond’s rooftops,” Sarah says. “It’s just beautiful here at night.”

While they could have stretched the upstairs plan into two rooms, they didn’t need the space. They also didn’t want to upset the neighbours, despite not receiving any objections. “It’s



FIRST FLOOR



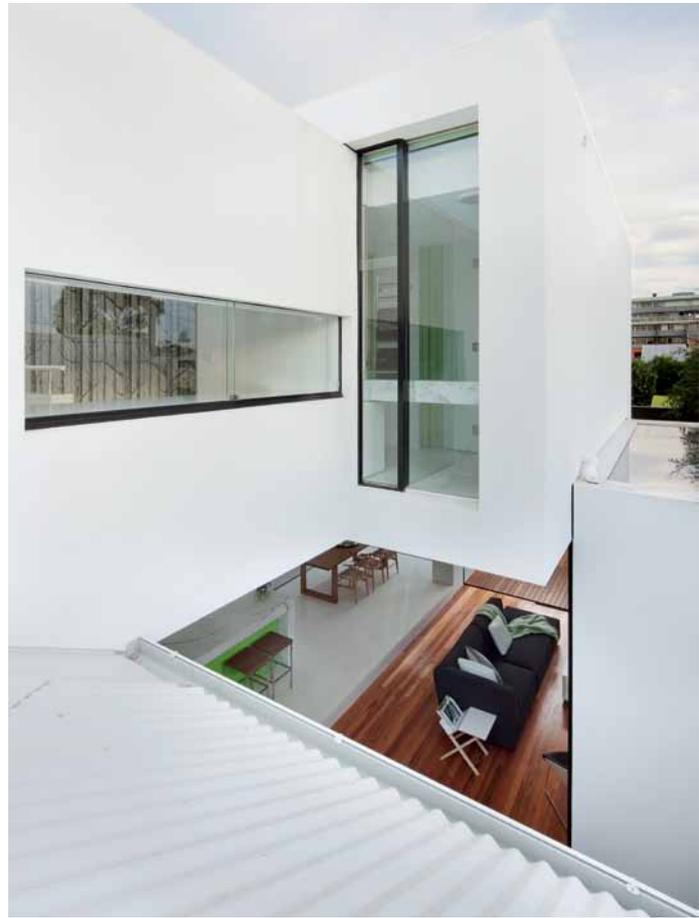
GROUND FLOOR

- |              |                 |                   |                  |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| ① VERANDAH   | ⑤ LIVING        | ⑨ PANTRY/FRIDGE   | ⑬ MASTER BEDROOM |
| ② MAIN ENTRY | ⑥ EXTERNAL DECK | ⑩ LAUNDRY         | ⑭ BUILT IN ROBE  |
| ③ BEDROOM    | ⑦ DINING        | ⑪ BATHROOM        | ⑮ ENSUITE        |
| ④ COURTYARD  | ⑧ KITCHEN       | ⑫ LIBRARY/BEDROOM | ⑯ STUDY          |

much nicer to live harmoniously in the neighbourhood,” she says. “Matt did push our boundaries a little bit, and we challenged ourselves with the colour, but it makes the street more interesting.”

While the house has many ecologically sustainable development principles, including thermal mass, low-embodied energy and a rainwater tank system, the house delivers at a macro level too. By borrowing from within and beyond their walls, the family can stay put for years to come and avoid using up planet resources and transport time. “This is the real ‘sustainability’ – a model for space that can sustain user types,” says Gibson.

The neighbourhood knows the house by its green door, – which was inspired by Welsh singer, Shakin’ Stevens and his hit song ‘Green Door’. Two nearby houses have been ‘tizzed up’ since the renovation 18 months ago, and the family is often stopped for a chat en route to their local haunt, the Rowena Parade Corner Store. “It has turned into something really vibrant and full of life, and it is totally ‘us,’” Sarah laughs.



[habitusliving.com/issue17](http://habitusliving.com/issue17)

ABOVE | GLASS ON THE SIDES OF EACH ‘CUBE’ MAXIMISE LIGHT AND CREATE SIGHTLINES FROM ONE LEVEL TO THE OTHER.

## DROP BOX

ARCHITECT *Matt Gibson  
Architecture + Design*

PROJECT TEAM *Matt Gibson, Huw  
Wellard, Erica Tsuda, Weian Lim, James  
Juricevich, Kailun Chua and Carolin Arndt*

BUILDERS *Four Walls*

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT *Don Moore  
& Associates*

CIVIL CONSULTANT *HardRock Geotechnical*

LANDSCAPE CONSULTANT *Matthew Shaw*

Matt Gibson Architecture + Design

(61 3) 9419 6677

[mattgibson.com.au](http://mattgibson.com.au)

### FURNITURE

In Kitchen/Dining Meizai Siver Platter, Which table from Zuster, Wishbone chairs and Block stool with Walnut seat and steel legs from Poliform, and Woods wallpaper from Cole & Son. In Living, Soho Sofa with high arm from Poliform, Meizai black sculptural piece, green vase and black ceramic urn. In Living and Master Bedroom Fjord chair designed by Patricia Urquiola for Moroso.

### LIGHTING

In Dining, Flos Arco Lamp designed by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglione, David Trubridge pendant and Flax Horizontal pendant from Tongue + Groove. In Children’s Bedroom Mattias Stahlbom pendant in black. In Bathroom, Mattias Stahlbom E27 pendants in green.

### FINISHES

Exterior in Dulux Natural Youth semi gloss, trim details in Dulux Antique White USA and front door in Dulux Savoy high gloss. In Kitchen, full-height cabinet fronts and

island bench insert panels in Dulux Refreshed 2-pac polyurethane satin finish with black laminate shadow lines. Back bench cupboard fronts in white satin laminate with Abet Laminati Sei 441 green laminate shadow lines. Overhead cupboards and rear side of island cabinetry in white satin laminate with green laminate shadowlines. Calacatta marble benches throughout kitchen. In Bathroom, door fronts in white Tesrol vinyl wrap satin with Abet Laminati Sei 441 laminate shadowlines and Carrara vanities.

In Entertainment area, cabinet unit with various Dulux 2-pac finishes: Paw Paw, Spandex Green, Wicked Green, Citrus Delight. In Study and on handrail Dulux Vivid White 2-pac polyurethane satin finish. Also in Study, desk has green laminate shadowlines and side panel. Rear Lawn is Ideal Grass Summer 50mm variegated pile synthetic grass.

**FIXED & FITTED**  
Kitchen Aid mixer in green and Vola 1 kitchen mixer tap in green.