



SALLY CROXTON

The sum of two halves

AN architect and his teacher wife have come up with a democratic answer to their divergent tastes in interior design.

They bought both sides of a rundown 1920-built single level semi-detached Hamilton house two years ago and have all but finished the first phase of an innovative renovation and adaptation to be followed by an upper level extension of the already large four-bedroom house.

Stephen Gray of the Newcastle office of Willoughby-based Liquid Architecture is an advocate for sleek minimalism. He says his wife, Jade, is more into antiques, craft and clutter.

Rather than try to compromise with a result that would please neither, their answer was to leave Stephen a free hand in designing the back part of the house leaving Jade with the original front section, although he joked last week that her softer taste was beginning to encroach on his domain.

The work so far has brought the two houses together at the rear and replaced an old skillion-roofed section to create a large open plan living space leading out to a deck, plus a new bathroom.

About two-thirds of the main dividing wall has been left in the front and centre of the house creating privacy for the guest bedrooms, study dining and library area on the one side and the master bedroom and theatre room on the other.

Stephen is brimming with ideas to add the finishing touches to what is already a very different creation.

The house itself is in a mixed residential, retail and industrial section of Hamilton with the brick walls of old factories on the rear and side fence line. Depending on how the mood takes him, Stephen may paint these with enormous murals of political scenes on the lines of Belfast's peace wall or with a South American-style Christ-like figure, or both.

The mixed location was part of its attraction for Stephen when they snapped up the pair of houses for just \$380,000. He says the mixed use zoning gave more flexibility to change the homes appearance.

"One of the chief appeals of the place was that were still right in the guts of Hamilton," he says. "It's where we want to be - I've been in Hamilton for almost 10 years now."

The transformation into a liveable house with loads of appeal and individuality, a sharp new bathroom and an upmarket kitchen came in on budget at about \$100,000 mates rates. Stephen estimates the same job for a client, also using builder Jonpaul De Angelis of De Angelis Engineering, Whitebridge, would come in at about \$130,000.



LABOUR OF LOVE: Stephen Gray with his wife Jade in their smartly remade Hamilton abode. — Pictures by Anita Jones

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They are enjoying the house so much they are planning to stay.

"We bought the house and I thought 'Oh, its going to be a five-year house'," he says. "But we have been here six months since it has been finished and I think we could be here for 10 years."

The rear bathroom is one of his joys. Encased in black textured tiles, the sunken white bath looks out on a fledgling fernery. A separate shower splashes on to timber decking which drains below. Olive green has been used around the wash-hand basin, tying in with the garden.

"The white polyurethane gloss finish kitchen with its stainless steel workbench was a very indulgent kitchen for me because I do the cooking," Stephen says.

"It's a decent-sized kitchen and the idea is that you can

have five people cooking together and no-one gets in each other's way."

Built by Oliveri Kitchens, the cabinetry comes without handles which adds to the streamlined look.

There's a commercial-sized Blanco oven, a round stainless steel sink, a gooseneck mixer tap and a vibrant burst of citrus green in the splashback.

A partial wall with cut-outs serves to divide the kitchen from the main living space and is used to display a range of colourful Italian Alessi homewares.

This is a large living area but there is nothing bland about the space which has two cast iron solid fuel original ovens at either end of one wall. The plaster has been deliberately lifted around the ovens to expose the original brick.

"It puts in a little bit of texture when everything is so

flat," Stephen explains. "I love exposed brickwork and anything that speaks of the history of the building I think is good."

The different uses of the room are delineated by the flooring, polished timber in the main but with an intimate feel to the cosy lounge nook where the particle board floor is painted in grey exterior grade paving paint, low cost but effective. Here two antique chairs (a council clean-up day find) sit happily with a modern lounge from Freedom.

The north-facing room leads out to a large deck with a galvanised perforated metal screen at one side, an interesting alternative to popular timber slats.

Funky now, the house is about to get more so with plans to add a totally modern second storey with parking below it splitting new and old in another direction.