

Fundamentally family

When children are involved, showcasing takes a back seat and practical living, such as sunny playrooms, heaps of storage and a swimming pool, becomes the priority, writes **Robyn Willis**. Photos **John Fotiadis**.



Emma and David Coogans could write a book on the right way to renovate. After living with a renovation they were never really happy with, they decided it was time to look for something large enough to comfortably accommodate them and their four children. Having searched in vain for a finished home to fit the bill, they called in Duncan Sanby of architectural firm Utz-Sanby to advise them on buying something they could expand on.

Apart from his experience in designing contemporary additions for heritage homes, Emma says she chose Duncan because he and his partner, Kristin Utz, also had children and understood the demands of family life.

"For me it was very important to work with an architect who had a family at a similar stage and understood the things that are important to you," says Emma. "With children, it does not work to have a showcase home." A priority for the Coogans was to create a laid-back home using clever design. After a few false starts, which Duncan felt would cost too much to bring up to scratch, they came across a post-Federation sandstone cottage sitting at the front of a 96sq m block in Musman on Sydney's North Shore.

"Friends in the street tipped us off that this was about to go on the market and we bought it three days later," says Emma. "Duncan saw very quickly exactly what he eventually built."

Kristin says it represented a much better investment for the Coogans family than other more expensive properties.

"It is quite unusual to have a large back garden, and the fact it was flat meant there was no excavation work needed," she says.

"That was the sort of thing Duncan could see straight away and he saw its potential."

Old meets new

Although they initially meant to build a new home, the sandstone cottage was solid enough and required little help to be converted into the children's wing, complete with three bedrooms, a bathroom and a brightly lit playroom.

The main entrance at the side of the house provides the bridge between the old and new.

"It was so clear, because you had the old house at the front and when you walked through the new front door, it was a case of children to the left and adults to the right," says Emma.

Service rooms such as the laundry and a walk-in children's locker room with individual spaces for each child have been tucked away 'here too'.

"I wanted to create a haven for all their stuff," says Emma. "I appreciated very quickly how much they have and how much mess they create. That space was already there and it was always going to be a storage space."



GROUND FLOOR

- 1 Covered veranda
- 2 Sand bedroom
- 3 Sand bathroom
- 4 Entry & Locker room
- 5 Bedroom 7 (Boys)
- 6 Bedroom 7 (Boys)
- 8 Bedroom 9 (Boys)
- 9 Play room 11 (Boys)
- 10 Laundry 13 (Child)
- 11 TV room 15 (White office)
- 12 Playroom 16 (Play)
- 13 Kitchen 18 (Living)
- 14 Living 20 (Pool)

FIRST FLOOR 21 Deck

- 22 4th bedroom
- 23 Main on site 24 (Deck)
- 25 Study 26 (Store room)
- 27 Ensuite

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Play house

The living area leads onto an L-shaped garden accessed via a series of stacked sliding doors.

And while Emma was not initially keen on having a pool, it has proved a popular addition, thanks to solar heating that has considerably extended the swimming season.

In fact, she has noticed some significant changes since the family moved into the completed house a couple of years ago.

"The kids do not watch the TV as much because they have space," she says. "They can ride their bikes on the street and they are out in the backyard playing soccer at 7pm."

With their ages ranging from 11-year-old Hannah down to five-year-old Harry, it is still important to maintain some supervision.

"This has been daffy handled in the parents' suite upstairs with a balcony running off the main bedroom, which also provides essential cross ventilation."

Kristin says there was quite a bit of "structural gymnastics" involved in creating the upper level, which appears to be a timber-clad floating box.

"It is about keeping the mass of that second storey respecting the space of the original house," she says. "We never really look at it as the two being in competition."

MORE INFORMATION
 ■ Utz-Sanby Architects 9904 2915, utzsanby.com



▲ A big backyard and pool to play in means less time in front of the television ■ The breakfast bench in the practical but stylish kitchen ■ The second living area opens out to the garden and pool ■ The Coogans decided to use the solid bones of the sandstone cottage in Musman ■ The main bathroom opens on to a deck, one of several surrounding the house