



Moulded by Mies

Text
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Photography
Maiorana and Associates

Sydney's North Shore is not celebrated for a proliferation of houses that pay homage to Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe. But then, nor was Plano, Illinois, exactly a hotbed of Modernism when the former Bauhaus director designed the Farnsworth House in the late 1940s.

This house in Willoughby, with a new extension by Utz Sanby Architects, dates from the same era as Mies' masterpiece – although you wouldn't know it from the street where it presents as a typical post-war bungalow. The only hint of the Modernist manifestation is the paved and landscaped entry at the rear that draws visitors in from the street, past the old front door, to a concrete blockwork wall. It terminates the path and serves as a divider between old and new, indoors and outdoors.

The original house now incorporates two bedrooms, a dedicated living space for kids with TV and study nook, a new full-sized family bathroom where the original kitchen was, and a second smaller bathroom. It is characterised by traditional planning with rooms that are strictly compartmentalised and accessed via traditional hallways.

In stark contrast, turn right at the front door and descend three steps to enter the new addition, which is Barcelona Pavilion-like in its openness and simplicity. The combined dining and living spaces are separated from the kitchen only by a large joinery unit, which appears to be inserted into the space without touching the ceiling. The horizontal plane of the roof hovers gently above the single solid platform. The lightness of the structure, and its connection with the garden, are accentuated by sliding glass walls on the northern and western façades.

According to architect Duncan Sanby, the client, whom he met playing soccer, was happy to go along

with the design team's thoughts about how the new extension should look. "There are not too many clients who would stick with the exposed blockwork," Sanby says. "Most would want it rendered and painted, but Nick was happy to leave it as is. For the cost, it is an extremely well finished product."

Notwithstanding the client's willingness to experiment, this project is typical of the firm's approach, Sanby says. "Within the practice, we have a will to succeed at producing rational, simple structures that cover open plan living spaces, and that are ordered without being overbearing. We very much want them to form a backdrop to the way our clients live their lives."

This inspired design earned itself the nickname 'The Servo' from the builder, in reference to the cantilevered roof and the full-height openings that resemble tilt-up garage doors. That's not to say he didn't like it, Sanby says. He did. And so does the client, who says that his 1940s cottage, and its 1940s influenced extension, result in an extremely simple place to live.

Architects Utz-Sanby Architects
Builder Steele Associates
Structural Engineer Richmond and Ross
Surveyor T.J. Gilbert Associates
Landscaping Landscape Design Viridian Designs

Utz Sanby Architects
(61 2) 9904 2515, utzsanby.com

Furniture
David Trubridge 'Ruth Rocker' and 'Flip for Ruth' from FY2K. Custom-designed joinery with limed plywood to island bench, cupboards and drawers by Slice of Design who also designed the entertainment unit.
FY2K (61 2) 9281 1771
Slice of Design (61 2) 9979 7097

Flooring
Concrete slab with 'Azuvi' 600x400mm vitrified ceramic tiles from Bisanna Tiles.
Bisanna Tiles (61 2) 9310 2500