

THOMAS STREET HOUSE, HAWTHORN

Petersen D91 bricks shine front and centre at this multi-generational home



During a trip to Siena, admiring the beautiful Tuscan tower houses, the penny dropped for renowned architect Gonzalo Ascui and his wife. With two adult children mostly at home, Gonzalo realised he wanted to live small footprint, vertical house that was low maintenance, highly energy efficient and with a great outlook.

Fast forward four years and Gonzalo has built his forever home – in Hawthorn.

After buying a 345m² corner block with a run-down Victorian heritage home, Gonzalo subdivided the block into two, renovated the heritage home and sold it, then built their tower house on a 100m² lot at the rear.

Thomas Street House is a multi-generational dwelling, segregated vertically, with separate living areas for his adult family that will last him into his old age – a fair way off from now.

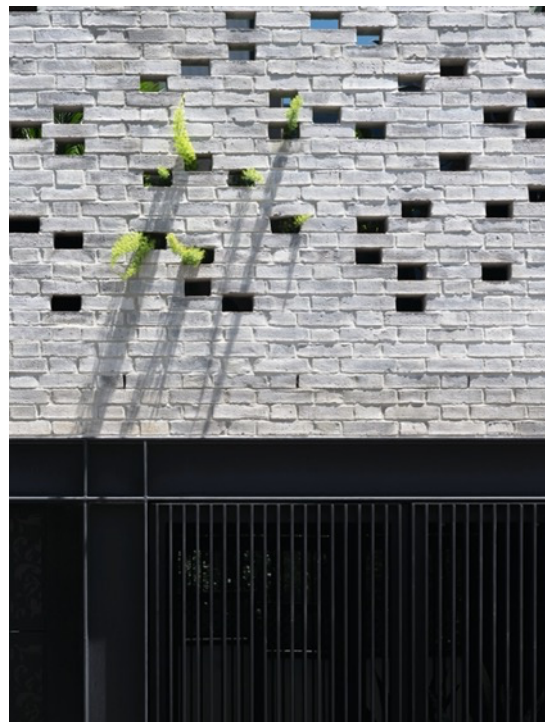
The top floor houses the living and dining space, in a large open plan room, including an outdoor north-facing terrace. The floor below has three bedrooms—all with bathrooms—and a powder room. And the ground floor has a double garage and an informal sitting room (read: man cave) – complete with TV, entertainment area, storage facilities, and a hot and cold outdoor shower.

There is no other like it on this quiet Hawthorn street.

Sitting on the edge of a commercial and heritage zone it's a robust house that's deliberately inward looking and protected: Built to the boundary and with living areas elevated to the upper levels to be at the same height as commercial buildings, instead of being overlooked or overshadowed by them, should the area be developed into medium rise apartments or offices.

And it's extraordinary.

In the detail. And in the absolute labour of love that went into its design and construction.





Thomas Street House is a brick house, inside and out, with Petersen D91 bricks the feature material.

“We love natural textures, and wanted something low maintenance but that also had a beautiful texture and colour to it. I’d seen Petersen bricks, and they have that beautiful finish of the pressed, handmade coal fired brick – there’s nothing like it. There are so

many great colour choices, but we decided to keep it simple – go for the grey ones, which goes back to our original idea of a concrete house – that’s as close as we’d get to a concrete palette. We’re so happy we decided on bricks, not only for their beautiful texture but because it gave us a lot of design flexibility, especially around screening and natural lighting,” Gonzalo explains.

The Petersen D91 brick in a Flemish bond with flush mortar joints in the brick colour is stunning. And lent itself perfectly to building the spectacular hit and miss brick screen walls. A standout feature of the facade design that’s visually striking and exceptionally clever in its functionality.

It’s both a streetscape and a street wall, replacing an old Victorian wall, and acts as a privacy screen and a filter of light. And this is where the magic begins.

From the street the house seems monolithic and windowless. But inside it’s exceptionally light, private and tranquil. The hit and miss brickwork creates hidden gems throughout. For starters, directly behind the Petersen brick screen sits a tropical garden, two bedrooms, each with sliding doors opening onto it, and the stair well. Narrow shafts of eastern light stream through the holes in the brick wall into the bedrooms each morning, creating lovely speckled light patterns.

“We’re only 1.2 m away from the street, but we’re completely private on the first floor because we have that brick screen, and we open the big sliding doors and have a lush garden right in our bedrooms, it’s really very special,” Gonzalo says.

The main bathroom is one of Gonzalo’s favourite rooms. A large back to front window with a hit and miss brick screen in front of it, can be opened while showering. From the street you’d never know it was there, thanks to the brick screen. It’s an outside bathroom experience, inside, “You hear the buzz on the street and the birds, but you’re completely private. Morning sun shafts come through the brickwork, so you’re bathing in this intricate pattern of sunlight – it’s such a beautiful thing.”



Bricks continue to work their magic throughout the home – in the bedrooms, master ensuite, entrance hall and around the fireplace – all played up in spectacular fashion. “It’s a delight to have the bricks inside,” reflects Gonzalo. “Throughout the house we’ve got this beautiful contrast of materials–slick versus rough, dark versus light–one talks to the other. The bricks are contrasted with sheets of glass and dark grey mirror, grey-stained European Oak timber and plain white walls. It’s a simple, beautiful, neutral contrast to the bricks.”



In true Gonzalo style, the design is inspiring and the detail exquisite and highly resolved.

Handcrafted black steel frames surround mirrors on shaving cabinets and shelves in the bathrooms, and recessed LED edge lighting is used throughout the house against the bricks, highlighting the brickwork surface. “At the entry we have a feature brick wall that’s got this long LED light–which is in the bathrooms as well– and it’s such a delight every time I walk in there. The lights turn on automatically and I get this beautiful shadow play on the brickwork,” Gonzalo explains.

In the upstairs living room a tent-like, folded geometry ceiling is a grand and inviting presence. Sliding glass doors open on to the terrace providing breathtaking views of the treetops and the rooftops of surrounding heritage houses. It’s completely open, yet private.

“Although we’re three storeys up there’s a real connection to the street. I love that sense of looking down. You’re high but still really connected. Our view is down the street, we can see rooftops and trees and skyline beyond, and enjoy amazing sunrise and sunsets,” Gonzalo reflects.

Gonzalo and his family love their new home, “We’re super happy. The house is a real pleasure to live in. You just can’t get sick of it – I walk up to it every day and I think “I’m so happy with this. It was a lot of work to build, but now it’s giving back to us and we’re really, really enjoying it.”

And that’s all thanks to a labour of love in the true Grand Designs style–plus a welcome trip to Italy–that produced a beautiful, liveable home that will suit this lucky family for many years to come.

Architect: Ascui & Co Architects
Product: Petersen D91 bricks
Builder: Morcon Developments
Bricklayer: David Craigie – We Brick Vic
Photographer: Justin Alexander