

A CLIFF IN THE CITY, SOUTH MELBOURNE

Petersen Cover Creates a Cliff in The City



This beautiful extension to George Street House in East Melbourne offers a little piece of nature in the middle of the city, resembling a rough-hewn rock monolith.

East Melbourne has a large number of late-19th-century listed buildings, which are quite old by Australian standards. One of them is a red-brick house with intricate detailing, a fine example of the Arts and Crafts style's emphasis on good craftsmanship and simple, high-quality materials. In the

1980s, an extension was added to the rear but with no redeeming architectural or craft features. It has now been replaced by a new extension that boasts its own distinctive architectural idiom while also entering into a subtle dialogue with its surroundings in and around Melbourne. The original red-brick house has also been renovated and partially restored to its original condition.

"We wanted to design a building that was materially distinct from the red bricks of the original architecture while maintaining a degree of affinity with it," says Nicholas Byrne, founder of Byrne Architects. "Petersen Cover gave us a ceramic material produced in the same traditional manner as brick, but with an entirely different expression. The resulting extension is emphatically modern, while also conveying overtones of traditional building methods."

The two-storey building wraps around three sides of a courtyard, framing views of the city centre to the west. The ground floor features a living room, a bright, spacious kitchen and a garage. The first floor has two bedrooms, a terrace and an office with windows on three sides, almost like a huge bay window.

"The idea was to create a monolithic structure. Although it matches the neighbouring buildings in terms of scale and proportions, it also stands out, as it has the character of a solid object into which beautiful openings have been carved," explains Byrne. This solidity enables an interplay with the openings in the brickwork, in the form of large windows, a loggia and a built-in balcony.

The new façades are clad in charcoal-grey Cover, which helps make the wings look like part of a harmonious whole. The choice of colour was inspired by the surroundings. Melbourne is known for narrow, cobblestone streets in



charcoal-grey basalt – a naturally occurring material in the state of Victoria. The extension is adjacent to just such a street.

“The basalt-covered street was interesting in terms of materials and influenced how we approached the building’s materiality overall,” says Byrne. “The level of contrast with the red brick, along with the connection to the immediate environment and the basalt, works well. The building feels like a bit of a cliff in the city – and looks almost natural given the dark rock formations in the area around Melbourne.”

Detailing and profiling were kept as minimal as possible in order to highlight Cover’s colour and textural effects. The window frames are made of anodised aluminium, while the zinc flashes interact with the brick’s colour and materiality. However, it is the Cover bricks that take centre stage. “Their texture is the most prominent element,” explains Byrne. “I love their handmade quality. Their materiality is not homogenous but rich and diverse. Softer light really emphasises the varied colours. But the bricks can also cast long shadows and change

dramatically as the sun moves across the sky, which means we experience the building differently throughout the day.”

This blog is written as featured in *Petersen* 45, pages 22-23. To keep updated with current Petersen projects, worldwide, subscribe to the *Petersen* today.

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