

PRESTIGE LIVING

THE SECRETS OF LUXURY HOME BUILDING

ISSUE 3



Bespoke & Brand New Beats Reno



Courting the

Turramurra professional couple Ian & Andria Clarke saved more than \$300,000 by demolishing and rebuilding their 1970s three-bedder rather than renovating.

Along the way they created a virtual resort in the heart of the suburb, with their only regret being a job transfer to the US that has meant they will never get to enjoy their piece of paradise that was purpose designed by Chateau Architects + Builders to make the most of the existing pool and tennis court.

Ian and Andria bought the 2100m² property at auction five years ago after a long search that saw them inspecting homes virtually every weekend for six months.

“We were looking for a property that we could improve. We really didn’t want to buy someone else’s reno,” Ian said.

Their find was on a big, well wooded block almost completely surrounded by homes and accessed via a right of way.

With a renovation in mind, they went first to an independent architect but when the build estimate came in they decided to seek alternatives, settling next on a builder specialising in extensions.

“We paid a deposit to get up to council plan stages but when they sent us the contracts there were large discrepancies between the salesman’s



promises and the document.”

Ian said that both extension proposals were still compromises.

Regardless of whether they went with the architect’s expensive design or the renovator’s, the finished result would still have been a compromise with small rooms and low ceilings.

“We decided to look at a knock down and rebuild and approached a few builders but most didn’t want to touch it because our desire to retain the tennis court and pool made it a difficult project.”

Remembering that during their house hunting period real estate agents had made much of the build quality of the few Chateau-built homes they had inspected, the pair contacted Chateau Architects + Builders.



They were the only ones prepared to have a go at it and the plans their in-house architects came back with after our initial briefing were very close to our concept of an open plan, flowing property with a resort feel.

Where the original house was just three single bedrooms, one with an ensuite larger than the master bedroom, a kitchen, lounge and dining room, Chateau’s concept was a veritable mansion.

Despite the restrictions of the available building area the concept afforded much.

It comprised five bedrooms, four with ensuites and one with a dedicated bathroom, kitchen, dining, lounge, family room, wine cellar, office and rumpus room.

Ian admits that Chateau had to convince them of the merits of increasing their budget by about \$100,000 to ensure that the house did justice to the site and neighbourhood.

But now that the couple have been forced to sell as a result of Andria’s appointment to senior HR role with Thales in the US, they are more than pleased that they took the advice as agents have valued the house accordingly.

In fact, quite apart from the way in which Chateau managed to address design and building difficulties, the couple were particularly impressed with the quality not only of the building, but the standard of fixtures and fittings.

Not only were the amounts they allowed for such things as kitchens and cabinets realistic, there were no hidden surprises, and from the quality of their inclusions it’s obvious that they only design and build quality homes.

“In fact at least three lots of suppliers’ tradesmen remarked that the build quality was far higher than they were used to seeing,” Ian said.

Key Asset ..



Ian and Andria had to go the United States as the frame was going up, yet they had few qualms about leaving the building solely in Chateau's hands.

"At the start of the process we spent a full afternoon with them sorting out colours and selections so that they could be ordered months in advance to ensure they were ready when needed.

"Things like that give you confidence," Ian said.

"Plus, we had seen two or three of their houses and had never heard a bad word about them.

Andria said that not only were there very few variations, but in a few instances Chateau actually saved them money.

The company even includes design and colour consultant services.

According to Ian, the home has drawn nothing but praise since it was completed.

But it's the bottom line that tells the story. The final price was easily a million dollars less than the initial architect's renovation proposal and within 10% of the extension specialist's price; a price that would have blown out once extensive white ant damage was discovered.



Clever Architecture Abounds

The risk of marginalising spaces that could not address the tennis court was overcome by creating a courtyard specifically for the formal lounge and providing courtyard access for both the ground floor guest room and study.

A long corridor that was always going to be a fact of life was turned to a stunning advantage. It is glazed, provides vistas of the tennis court and extends the length of the house to a large southern window with an external water feature. Walls accommodate several large pieces of art and stacking sliders along the length open to the tennis court.

Because the ground floor sits 1.5m above the tennis court there was a risk of the wall overwhelming the external space. This challenge was met by creating a planter around the edge of the court to act as a 'plinth'.

The north facing family living space looks up the length of the tennis court and receives tree-dappled light for the majority of the day.

Quality Staff Builder's Best Asset

There's hardly a suburb on Sydney's north shore where Lois Aalders can't point out a house she knows intimately and walk in to be greeted as a friend.

The Contracts Manager at Chateau Architects + Builders, Lois has been with the firm for 15 years and been involved in more than 200 projects.

With a further 10 years in a similar role with another builder and a long period with a Melbourne architect, Lois knows building and design inside out and is perfectly suited for her role interceding with the clients.

"Contracts Manager is probably a misleading title," Lois said. "I am involved with the client from the day the architect finishes the design until we hand over the key.

"In many case the relationship continues for years afterwards and that's particularly satisfying," she added.

Indeed, it has proved so satisfying that Lois has determined she will not retire completely, but rather she will just reduce her working week to three or four days.

Far more than an intermediary between builder and client, Lois goes to great lengths to ensure that clients are not lost in the technicalities of a project as she keeps them updated with progress.

"During my 15 years at Chateau, I have built my own home with the company and gained a significant amount of hands on experience which has helped me understand and relate to the feelings of clients faced with large and often daunting decisions," Lois said.

"I like to think I am able to explain in lay terms what is happening on their building site and help them understand the process."

"My first contact with the clients begins as the Architect completes the design and obtains Council approval for the project.



Chateau's offices at Chateau House, 56 Cecil Ave, Castle Hill.

For 15 years Lois Aalders has been the intermediary between Chateau Architects + Builders and the firm's clients. She is regarded as a friend still by those clients, even to receiving their baby photos and all of the latest family news years after the home has been built.

"I prepare the contracts and negotiate any of the clauses and conditions with which the clients may have queries.

"Communication with the client is my responsibility from this stage, right through construction, to the completion of the home.

"I assist with the co-ordination of the finishes and inclusions for the home and answer any queries they may have throughout the construction process."

To ensure a stress-free building experience, Lois is always available to take calls or to respond to e-mails, addressing client concerns during construction.

She meets with the construction team weekly in order to keep completely

up to date with the construction programs and discusses construction issues with the site supervisors.

Any variations to the contract requested by the clients throughout construction are also co-ordinated through Lois who is responsible for ensuring their implementation.

"I'm now nearing retirement age but I really am reluctant to leave this place. It has been my home for the past 15 years so I plan to keep working three to four days a week in this job I love, rather than retire completely.

"I have had the privilege of working with some wonderful clients, and felt great satisfaction in assisting them to achieve their dream homes.

"I treasure the updates from past clients who keep me informed about family news. I even get baby photos of the new additions.

"From the clients' perspective, I think it's also reassuring after a number of years, when they call about a blocked gutter or some other maintenance issue, to find that same familiar Chateau voice at the other end of the line - someone who knows their home and them so very well."

Lois' reluctance to retire is not unusual at Chateau.

More than half of the company's employees have been with Chateau for more than 10 years.

Lois said that apart from being a good work environment, there was a lot of personal pride to be gained from working for a company that is widely recognised for its quality designs and master built homes.

"Working for Chateau is a bit like driving a Mercedes, people recognise and respect the badge and what it stands for, a symbol of quality and prestige," she said.



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