



East meets west

Artful renovation brings a fusion of global styles to this 1970s Doncaster home

ARCHITECT John Liu didn't realise he had called on his Asian heritage in the design of his home until colleagues pointed out how Japanese the entrance appeared. Visitors to his Doncaster home are greeted by an enclosed porch and, once inside the house, a step up from the foyer to the main part of the home.

"In Japanese homes, there's always a space for you to take your shoes off at the entry and it's always one step lower than the actual house," he said. "So I guess this is an Aussie version of it. It's a transition between outside and the home; a real ritual of taking shoes off or putting shoes on."

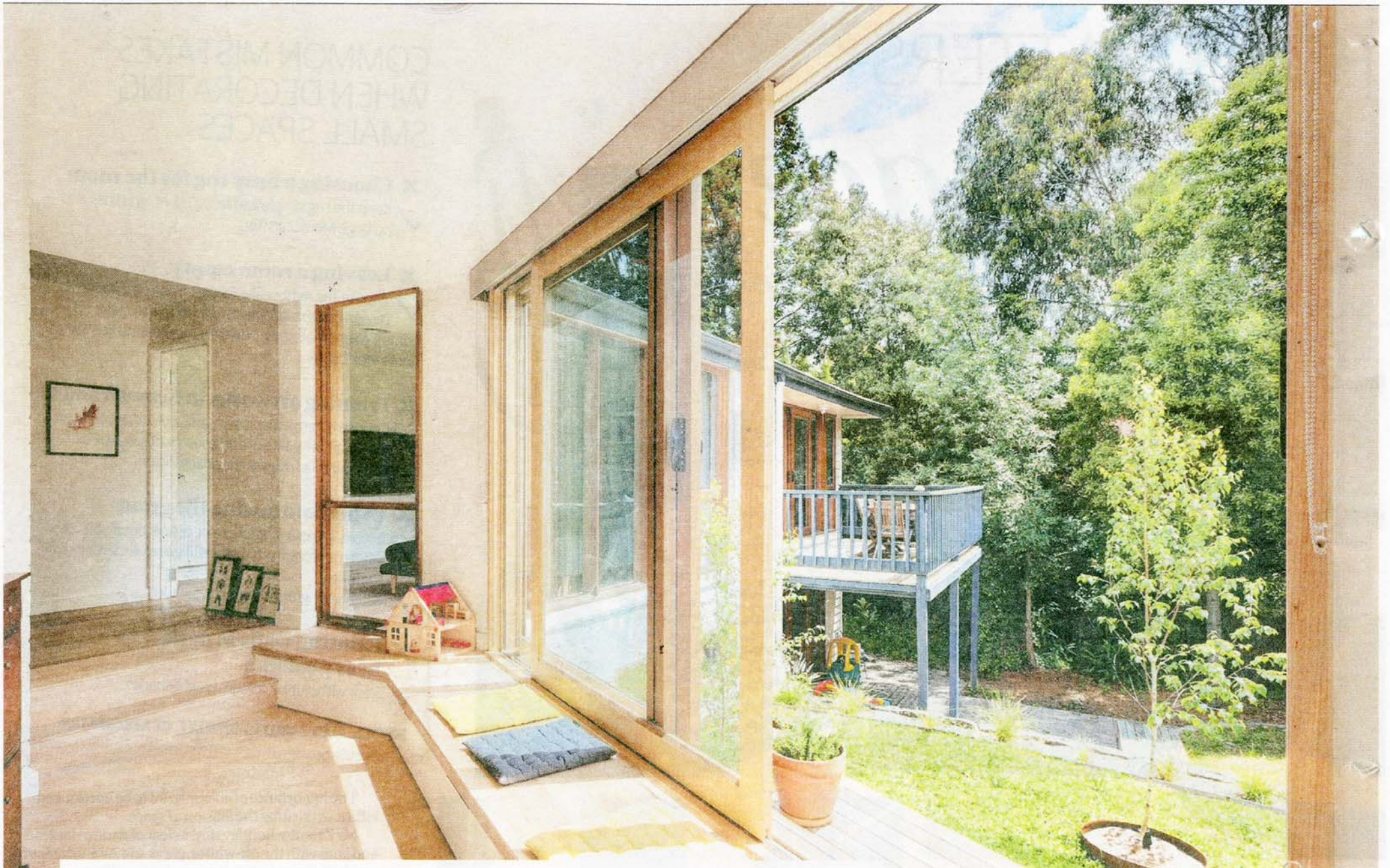
The head of his own architecture firm, Inbetween Architecture, Mr Liu spent his childhood in Taiwan, once a Japanese colony, and can see now how influenced he has been by his childhood surroundings.

Mr Liu and wife Judy bought the 1970s brick home in Melbourne's east in 2009 and lived with the 1980s update by a previous owner — "all beige, with pink carpets" — until they could no longer deny the house needed a major renovation.

"Everything was falling apart, like the kitchen splashback tiles while we chopped our chicken," Mr Liu said. "We sticky-taped everything back on and it wasn't until we had the kids and we were one room short that we planned the renovation."



ARTWORK (TOP):
HAND-PAINTED
REPRODUCTION OF
SARAH BROOKE'S
PORI PAINTING



"The kids" are twins Michaela and Zachary, 5. The home is now a four-bedroom house with ensuite, main bathroom and living areas upstairs and an office and large multipurpose area downstairs. While the bulk of the house has been tweaked and modernised, the entrance and main bedroom are new additions. The biggest structural change the Lius made to the original house was moving an internal flight of stairs from one side of the kitchen to the other to create a better flow throughout the home and open up space for a large kitchen pantry. The home's old carpet and the 1970s cork floor in the dining area were taken up, with Mr Liu "assuming the worst" about the condition of the floorboards under the cork, but being pleasantly surprised by the good quality of the boards. The floorboards in the original part of the house have had a whitewash oil applied for a matt, Scandinavian look. "It's a natural organic oil and the reason we chose that was to avoid polyurethane in other finishes," Mr Liu explained. "And the other benefit is if any part of it needs repairing, all you have to do is rub the oil in the spot rather than repair a whole area." The new main bedroom has an ensuite and walk-in robe, Judy's pride and joy at 3.5m long and with two sides lined with shelves and hanging rails. The new entrance saw Mr Liu move the entry door from the side of the house to the front and making what would traditionally be a simple foyer or corridor into an

airy, light space that can be used for a range of purposes. "We stepped it down from the main part of the house so there is a separation, a hierarchy between new and old," Mr Liu said. "There's no point trying to match new and old; you can't match it seamlessly, anyway. So we created something new that also complements the rest of the house." A picture window with a view to the leafy back garden is the first thing visitors see when they enter the house, and a long, sun-drenched window seat with storage underneath runs the length of the window. The original kitchen was gutted and new cabinetry and appliances put in and it's here Mr Liu tests new products so he can pass on his research to clients. The benchtops are in a textured tile that comes in 3m lengths and the splashback is powder-coated laminate he has tried to match to the wall colour so wall and splashback appear one seamless material. While the house is still furnished with pieces the Lius had pre-renovation, one new acquisition is the large round dining table found online and shipped from Sydney in a whitewash finish to match the floors. The table is a testament to the couple's shopping style. "We prefer to wait and buy things we like rather than whole sets of everything matching," Mr Liu said.

inbetweenarchitecture.com.au

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PHOTOS: NICK STEPHENSON, JACK LOVEL AND CHRIS GROENHOUT

Postscript

WITH JOHN LIU

Your favourite part of the home?

The entry area, where we can sit down and watch the kids playing outside, read a book or sip a cup of tea.

Best renovation decision?

Changing the entry-area window into a large sliding door. It was an extra expense but we never looked back after the sliding door was installed.

Does the home work well for entertaining?

Very well. There's a variety of different spaces to entertain guests, depending on the time, season and occasion.

Next project for your home?

Replace the old carport and maybe a staircase to access the backyard from the balcony.

Where do you spend time relaxing?

In the dining room, looking outside.

What does home mean to you?

A place to be with family and be yourself.

