



Wooden wall studs for the stairs came from a 100-year-old house



A polycarbonate sheeting wall maximises light and warmth

renewal – as the trellis itself.

“We love the idea that so much of our house has been re-used,” says Janelle. “We’ve managed to re-use a lot of the leftover material and are still using it, most recently for a small deck in the garden that catches the morning sun in the winter.”

With building materials close to hand, the project was moving swiftly until it arrived at what was to be the centrepiece of the extension, a stairwell suspended by steel cables. However, delays meant this was no longer an option. Hellen had another idea: “I knew another demolition job where some hardwood wall studs were earmarked for firewood. These studs held together a 110-year-old house so there’s a story to the stairs. We could have got standard stairs for \$6000 to

\$7000 but by recycling timber we probably saved about \$3000 to \$4000 – and came up with an interesting feature.” The finished stairs – the project’s biggest challenge, according to Hellen – hang from the first floor, using the narrow wooden studs he recovered.

A bank of louvred windows on the north-east façade, behind the stairs and beside the polycarbonate sheet wall, allows natural light into the living space, with winter morning sun penetrating deep into the kitchen.

On the top floor, windows function as doors – with the trellis forming the guardrail – and the vines can be trimmed according to the privacy desired.

The windows, doors and sheeting enable sunshine and cooling breezes to pass through the building, keeping it warm in winter and

cool and airy in summer. But the trellis and its vines are the innovative component in the home’s climate control. “Vines cover the south-west, west and north-west orientation,” says Hellen. “We haven’t painted the house; the plant becomes the paint, the colour and the texture.”

“It works beautifully,” agrees Janelle. “In summer the vines thicken. The breeze blows through them. In our bedroom, it’s like living in a forest. We haven’t calculated the savings on our energy bills but we didn’t find it super hot in the house last summer.”

The final part of the family’s brief was to gain a greater connection between the indoors and the garden. “The house now opens seamlessly onto the backyard,” says Hellen. “There’s a terrace with an outdoor fireplace

and bench seat. You can watch TV inside while the kids play outside.”

The new plywood flooring is sourced from plantation species and approved by the Forest Stewardship Council; rather than being chemically treated, it was covered with a water-based polyurethane finish.

“Before we were in just one room. Now we have more living spaces, yet the house’s footprint has hardly changed,” says Janelle. “If you like a sterile, sparse environment, this isn’t your kind of house,” concludes Hellen. “It’s a living thing; that’s what you do in a house – live in it and out of it.”

Extract from *Sanctuary: modern green homes* magazine, issue 20, published by the Alternative Technology Association. See www.sanctuarymagazine.org.au.

Photography by Scott Burrows

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