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think outside the box

A search for something unique resulted in a striking floating box that defines Ben and Sophie Doyle's beautifully practical renovation.





Above The box, which overlooks the living area downstairs, has been designed as an office and parents' retreat for Ben and Sophie.
Opposite page The red brick wall was lovingly restored during the renovation; above it is the narrow skylight that connects the old and new sections of the home.
Previous pages A view from the back yard shows off the size and scale of the box, designed by Glasshouse Projects. *Photographs Aaron Citti*

The huge wooden structure appears to almost float at the back of Sophie and Ben Doyle's eastern suburbs home.

"The box" – as the family call it – is the cantilevered creation of Adelaide architect Don Iannicelli, owner of Glasshouse Projects. Ben and Sophie approached Don in 2016, when they were ready to renovate their historic home and were looking for an out-of-the-ordinary design.

"We had seen some of the properties that Don had done and we knew he was very skilled at combining the old and the new seamlessly and interestingly, so that really appealed to us," Sophie says.

"We also loved the warmth of the materials Don used, the timber, brick and stone, rather than a clinical, modern feel, and we also liked the uniqueness of the designs.

"There wasn't a lot of toing and froing in the early stages. The box was in the design straight away and we loved it because we did want that point of interest, rather than just the big rectangle at the back."

"The box" sits above the new kitchen and utility areas of the home and provides a striking connection between inside and out, extending outside into the back yard and protection for an outdoor dining area. The floating room also features huge retractable doors that open to a large balcony overlooking the lush, landscaped garden. The room is minimalist but inviting, with comfortable couches, built-in bookshelves and stylish cabinetry. Ben, a barrister, has set up his desk overlooking the garden, making the most of the light aspect.

While Ben and Sophie's children, Adelaide, 10, Rupert, 8, and Arthur, 5, love being upstairs in the unique room, the area has been built more with parents in mind.

"When we were thinking about renovating, friends told us to build a space for ourselves, not for the kids, because the kids will end up using the main living space. That was good advice," Sophie says.

"So, we built the box as an office and a parents' retreat".

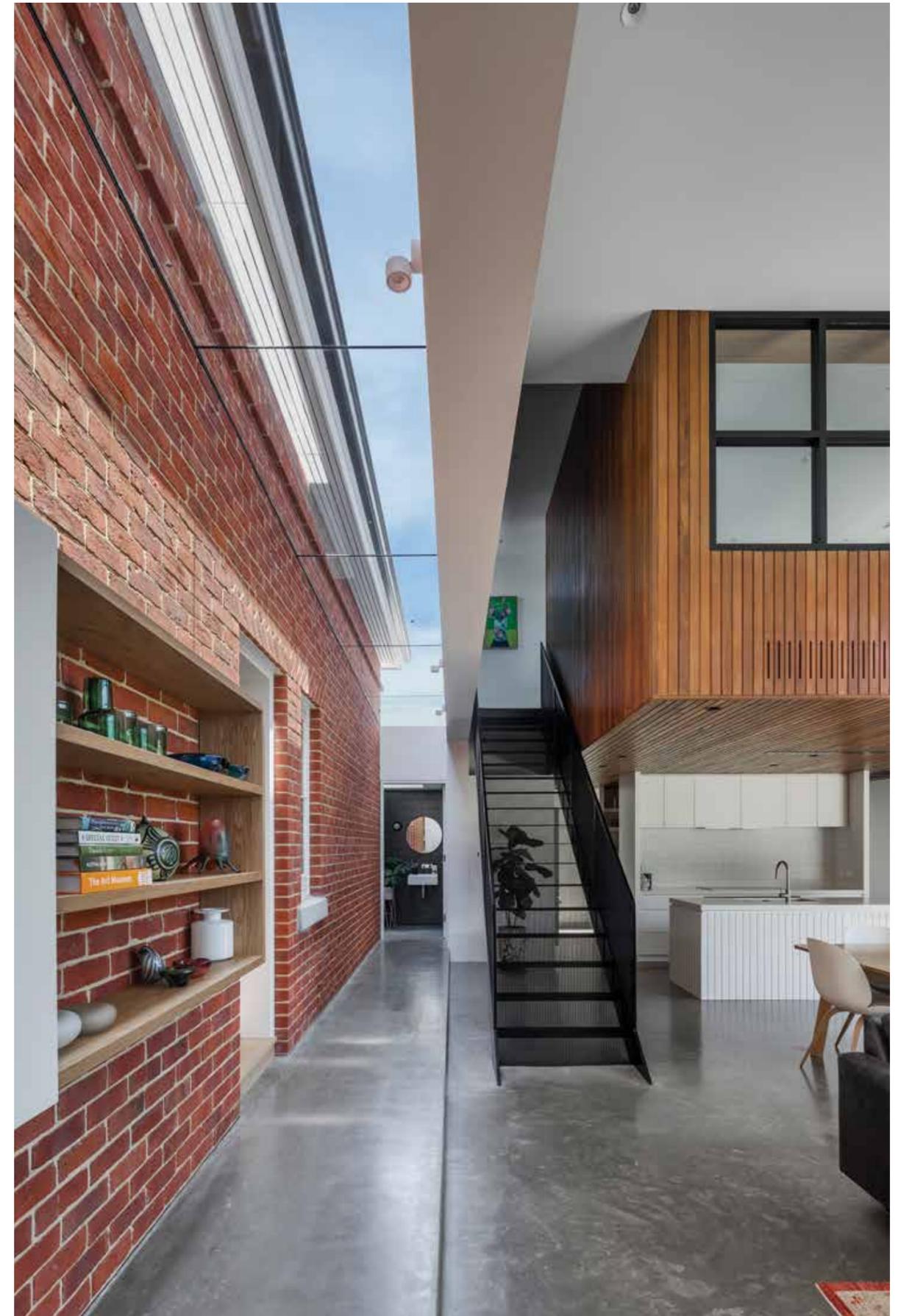
Sophie says the key to the success of the space is the expanse of windows looking down onto the main living room, maintaining a connection between upstairs and down, while still providing separate zones.

This historic four-bedroom home, built in 1927, had been in the same family for decades before Sophie and Ben bought it in 2010. Back then, it was in a state of considerable disrepair and Sophie admits they were somewhat daunted at the task ahead and possibly even a tad naive.

"We were really drawn to the history of the home, the character and the lovely tree-lined street," Sophie says. "We could see the beautiful potential but it was still quite overwhelming."

The couple put their faith in the advice of Sophie's father, Harley Hooper, a property developer, who assured them it wouldn't take much to bring out the beauty of this residential gem.

"He said, 'Don't be put off by the job ahead, it won't take much to fix it up,'" Sophie says.





Above The view from inside the box, which is a relaxing office space and second living area. The balcony also provides a perfect spot for sunset drinks with friends and overlooks the landscaped back yard. *Photograph Aaron Citti*

Opposite page The couple like to support emerging and established artists and a variety of works hang in the hallway, including a standout splash of colour by artist Zoe Kirkwood, on the left. *Photograph Peter Hoare*

“I was pregnant with our first child, so at that stage we decided to knock off the back and put on a sunroom and a deck and a new kitchen and see how we felt just living in it. That lasted us until 2019.”

At that initial renovation stage, the couple also repainted, reroofed, rewired and recarpeted the home and converted a bedroom into their en suite and walk-in wardrobe.

But what really came to the fore during those early years in the house was their love for the outside space.

“What we gained from living in it during those years was the love of the garden and the space and we knew we wanted to maintain as much of that as possible,” Sophie says.

“Our brief to Don was to maximise the garden, and not go out too far, we only went a couple of metres beyond the footprint of the old deck we did in 2010.”

Luckily for Ben and Sophie, their good friend is Tim Keenihan, owner of garden design company TKG. Describing it as a “labour of love”, Tim has spent the past 11 years gradually transforming both the front and back gardens of the home. The front yard has a more formal feel with plantings of buxus, pink crab apple and choisya, while the back yard has been planted to withstand flying footballs and plenty of running around. Tim also wanted to soften the straight lines of the box extension with curves and colour in the garden.

Two large ornamental pear trees were salvaged from the previous extension and a concrete kitchen sink rescued from the original house now sits framed by a vertical herb garden. A tall heritage streetlight is also the main garden light, lovingly saved years ago by the previous owners. It used to sit in the middle of a grass median strip on the leafy street.

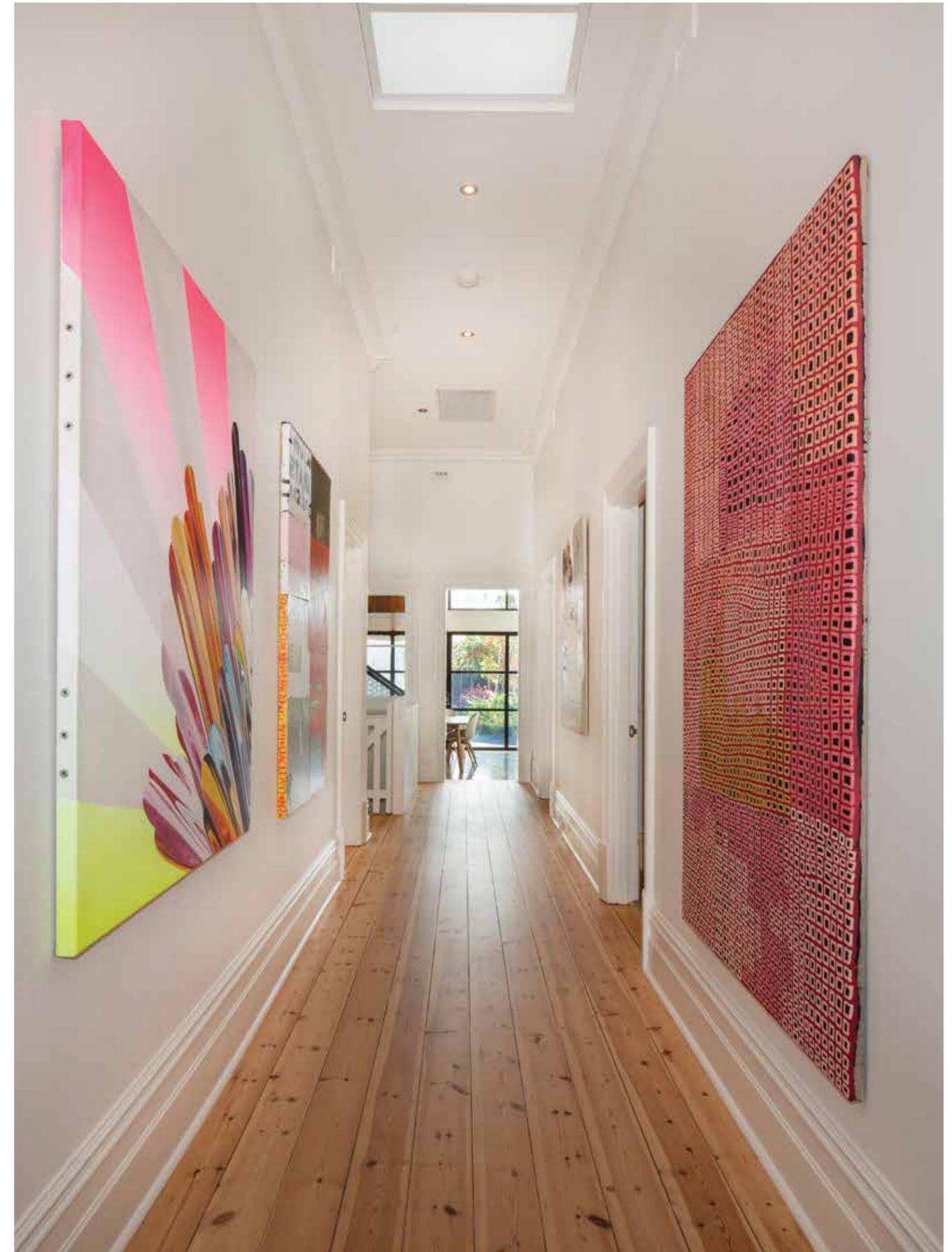
Salvaging old items was also a theme inside the house. Ben and Sophie have restored the original clawfoot bathtub that was left behind, and the previous owners also gifted them a large antique dining table that sits in the formal dining room.

An original red brick wall, now a stunning feature piece of the new extension, also holds memories of the past. The wall was painstakingly remade, brick by brick, during the renovation process, to maintain the original aesthetic while adding structural stability.

“They had two pallets of bricks here, one with our old original red bricks and one with recovered old red bricks,” Sophie says. “The bricklayer was amazing, he rebuilt that entire wall to make it look original, doing original brick then purchased brick, one by one. It was quite extraordinary.”

A long, narrow skylight runs along the top of the red brick wall and is the defining point between the old and new parts of the home.

The expanse of red brick is softened by bespoke wooden shelving displaying family photos, books and treasured ornaments, and an





Above, left The master bedroom is a haven of muted tones; Arthur's bedroom (**right**) has a painting by artist Michael Jeffrey above the bed. **Opposite page, top** A Marimekko-inspired painting by Ben hangs above Adelaide's bed; The master en suite (**below**) was designed in the first stage of the home's restoration. *Photographs Peter Hoare*

integrated door slides back to reveal the television on the other side of the cabinet.

Towering steel windows allow plenty of light and warmth into the extension, adding an industrial-yet-inviting feel. Huge automated louvres on the windows, underfloor heating, double glazed windows and ducted air conditioning also keep heating and cooling costs affordable.

"This gives you an example of Don's attention to detail," says Sophie, pointing out narrow slots that have been drilled into the side of the wooden box.

"He didn't want too many vents showing in the ceiling so he drilled holes in the side of the woodwork of the box, and the air conditioning vents sit hidden behind there," Sophie says. "The air-con guys weren't sure the air flow would work but Don said, 'Let's do it anyway', and it works."

Sophie, who used to be on the board of the Helpmann Academy Foundation, is also an avid art collector, and she and Ben like to support emerging artists.

"I grew up in auction houses, working in the family business, Theodore Bruce Auctions. My stepdad, James Bruce is an auctioneer and my mum Diana had an amazing eye for design and fashion – she always said 'If you love it, buy it!'"

"So, a lot of our artwork and furniture has been bought from local emerging artists and designers or at auction."

Colourful, eclectic pieces hang on the white walls in the original part of the home, including works by Zoe Kirkwood, Michael Jeffrey, Laura Wills, Louise Vadasz, Angus Hamra and Peter Drew.

"People often ask, 'How do you know what to buy?', but we just buy what we like," Sophie says.

"It's more that we like the individual pieces rather than how they work together."

A lovely personal touch is the artwork in each of the children's bedrooms, created by Ben.

"He's actually pretty good," Sophie says. "He just really enjoys creating them and he wanted to do something for each of the children."

The entire renovation process was stress free, Sophie says, thanks to Don being "a perfectionist" and a good communicator.

"We had a very high trust relationship," she says. "We knew Don would only contact us when it really needed our input, and he didn't do that much."

"And if we came up with suggestions that weren't going to work, he would tell us straight away. For example, I wanted the sink on the back bench but there was not enough space and it's been fine in the island bench."

Sophie, who used to work in marketing for law firm MinterEllison before moving into the not-for-profit sector, also has an astute eye for detail and a passion for the practical. She and Don were on the same page when it came to keeping clutter to a minimum, while





Above The home's original concrete sink was salvaged and incorporated into the garden design. The previous owners also salvaged the old lamp post which used to sit on the tree-lined street decades ago.

Right The front garden was designed by Ben and Sophie's close friend, garden designer Tim Keenihan.

Opposite page Sophie and the children in the back yard, which includes plenty of large play areas for kid-friendly games.

Photographs Peter Hoare

I am quite conscious on a daily basis of how lucky we are, and I think it is so important to give back



designing a home that was liveable for a large family.

"Don's design is modern but it's not clinical and it is so practical for a family of five," Sophie says.

That practicality can best be seen in the way the family enters the home. Coming through the garage at the back, there is a short stone path that leads directly to the back door, opening straight into the mud room, where each child has a large "pigeon hole" where school bags, hats and blazers can be hung. Each pigeon hole also has overhead storage and lower drawers for sporting gear and other bits and pieces.

The mud room leads straight into the laundry where dirty sports gear can be dumped directly into the hamper, and the laundry leads straight out to the clothes line.

Another bonus of the build was that it took 10 months, not the allocated 12, and the family moved back into their beautifully renovated home on January 6, 2020, just before COVID hit.

As well as running this busy household, Sophie also works as the philanthropy and engagement manager for Foundation SA. The new community foundation has been set up to allow individuals, families or corporate organisations to donate to South Australian charities without having to establish their own private foundation. This role aligns perfectly with Sophie's ethos of giving back.

"I am quite conscious on a daily basis of how lucky we are, and I think it is so important to give back" she says.

"I often ask people at parties, particularly if they are a CEO or

have their own business, 'What do you do about giving back?'

"I just love getting people to think about it, because it's not just money, we talk about time, talent or treasure and I think people just don't realise how rewarding it can be."

Sophie was also one of the women behind Adelaide charity MumKind, set up to support disadvantaged families, and she is also on the board of Windmill Theatre.

It all makes for a busy life but hopefully at some point this year there will be time to host a party in their newly renovated home. Ben and Sophie's combined 40th was due to be held in 2020 but was cancelled three times due to COVID.

Sophie says when they finally host their party it will be a combined birthday and house warming celebration.

"We've done lots of smaller things, family gatherings and we open the doors right up and the space works really well," she says. "We've also had drinks up on the balcony of the box, too."

Sophie says her favourite aspect about her newly-renovated home is being able to retreat upstairs with Ben for some quiet time.

"We don't do it every night, it depends how long the children take to get to bed," she laughs. "We just love the way the house works now. We wouldn't do anything differently."

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