

# Open to the elements

The outside spaces are an integral part  
of this single-storey suburban home

WORDS **TINA HØM**  
PHOTOGRAPHY **TOM BLACHFORD**  
AND **KATE BALLIS/LIVING AGENCY**

## IN BRIEF

**NAMES** Yolanda and Paul  
Pacella, both in their 50s

**LOCATION** Templestowe  
Lower, Melbourne, Australia

**TYPE OF PROPERTY**  
Detached new-build

**BEDROOMS** 3 **BATHROOMS** 2

**PROJECT STARTED**  
September 2014

**PROJECT FINISHED**  
December 2015

**SIZE OF HOUSE** 280sqm

**BUILD COST** \$1.1million AUD

(approx. £630,000)

Stacked concrete slabs form  
generously sized steps  
leading up to the property



**A**fter building two large family homes, Yolanda and Paul Pacella decided to downsize and construct a forever house for the two of them to grow old in.

Yolanda spotted the site, which would become their future home, while driving through the suburb of Templestowe Lower, Melbourne. A two-storey timber property that previously stood in place had already been demolished, with only the shell of a swimming pool remaining when the couple bought the plot. As the land is more than 500sqm in size, no initial planning approval from the local authority was needed to build a new property on the site.

Paul and Yolanda's brief to Figr Architects was to create a home that was more than a rendered two-storey box. As empty nesters, the couple wanted to be economical with space and avoid having any stairs inside the house. They also asked for a building that would sit harmoniously with the adjacent properties in terms of its form and the materials used.

The couple were also keen to have a basement level, which they could use for parking, but hadn't envisaged quite how long this would take. 'For us, it was a challenging aspect of the build and took a couple of months

## It was important to the couple that they felt connected to the natural landscape

before the basement was dug out of the ground,' says Paul. 'The length of the process was something we needed to be guided through, as we were very keen to see the space above taking shape.'

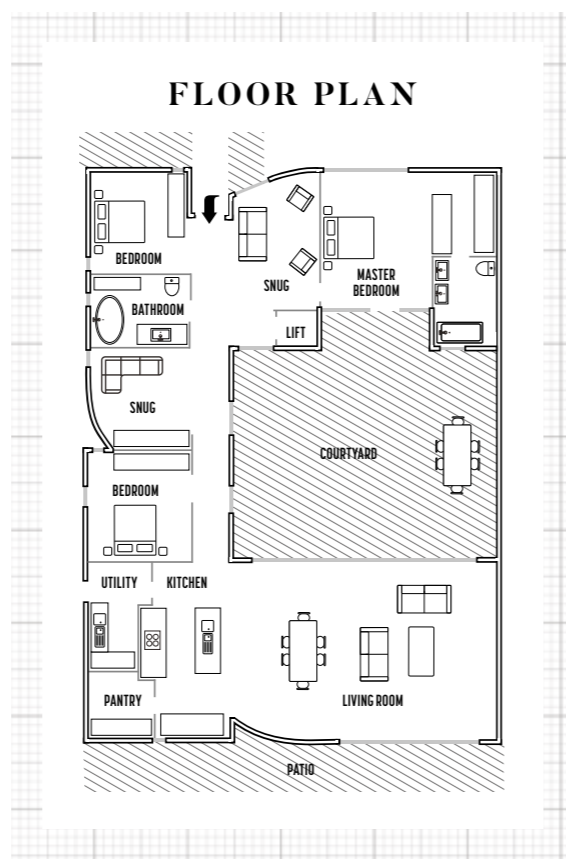
The single-storey house has three zones of landscaping: the front garden, the leafy central courtyard and the rear patio garden. Alongside the foliage planting at the front of the house, a series of large concrete slabs lead up to the entrance. The couple have a concrete manufacturing business, which Paul is still involved in, and an important part of their brief was to incorporate this material as a reference to all their hard work over the years.

Inside, there are also three zones, all arranged to have a strong visual connection with the central courtyard. On the left of the entrance is a north-facing master bedroom with an en-suite. This has views to the greenery outside in the front garden on one side and also looks into the internal courtyard. A guest wing on the western side includes two bedrooms and a bathroom, plus a comfy seating area. To the south of the courtyard is the open-plan living, dining and kitchen space. Beyond that is a shed used for storage and the original swimming pool, which the couple decided to keep – after much deliberation. 'In retrospect, I think Paul and Yolanda wish they had removed the pool after all, and freed up the space for something else,' says Michael Artemenko from Figr Architecture.

The idea for the courtyard was conceived by the couple from the outset of the project. 'It was a romantic response to our love for Italian palazzo homes,' explains Yolanda. 'We wanted it to be the heart of our home, a place for refuge and a green oasis where we could simply recharge and relax.' It had always been important to the couple that they should feel connected to the natural landscape and the courtyard allows them to take in views of the sky and the surrounding trees. They also wanted to enjoy this outdoor space all year round, while gaining an element of protection >>



The polished concrete floor provides a textural contrast to the batten timber ceiling



White, handleless kitchen cabinets maintain a light, airy feel in the open-plan space





A palette of warm, neutral tones creates a visual link between the living area and the courtyard



The batten ceiling provides continuity through the spaces, as well as creating a dramatic contrast to the concrete flooring

from the sun in the height of summer and from cold, southerly winds in winter.

Silvertop ash timber was used to clad large expanses of the house both inside and out, including the ceilings, to bring the idea of nature indoors. Yolanda initially had her reservations, and was concerned that it would make their home look too 1970s or overly reminiscent of a Swedish sauna. 'After much deliberation with our architects, we had a change of heart,' she says. The batten ceiling provides a degree of continuity through the spaces, as well as creating a dramatic contrast to the concrete floor. 'We wanted to reverse the usual colour palettes of flooring and ceilings, shifting all the focus upwards, where the tone and spacing of the battens adds warmth and a focal point to the living spaces,' says Artemenko.

Brown brick, a material common to buildings in the Templestowe area, is also used on the exterior of the property and continues inside, demonstrating that a utilitarian product used in the right way can look both contemporary and elegant. Brick colonnades, which lead to the open-plan living space, are separated with large double-glazed windows, giving glimpses in to the central courtyard from the entrance corridor and the guest wing.

This carefully planned use of concrete, timber, brick and glass comes together beautifully to create a house that has a harmonious link with the local area, while keeping its own character. 'It's a perfect combination of elements working together that make the atmosphere and quality of space stand out,' explains Atic. GD



Floor-to-ceiling glazed sliding doors open up to blur the boundary between inside and out

Pared back, Scandi-style furniture is a perfect match for the property's clean, contemporary lines and understated colour palette





'It's a combination of elements working together that makes the atmosphere and quality of space stand out'

A simple, rectangular basin highlights an uncluttered look for the bathroom



LEFT Large-format floor tiles provide a contrast with the small geometric mosaics on the walls

BELOW The master bedroom includes contemporary furniture, including this timber night table and angular bedside light

**SUPPLIERS**

**PROJECT TEAM**  
**Architect** Figr (+61 39 913 9396; figr.com.au)  
**Builder** Grundella Constructions (+61 38 388 7233; grundella.com.au)  
**Landscaping** Mud-Office (+61 41 253 4987; mudoffice.com.au)  
**Styling** Ruth Welsby (+61 45 030 9793; ruthwelsby.com)

**STRUCTURE**  
**Bricks** Robertson's Building Products (+61 38 199 9599; robertsons.net.au)  
**Timber** Radial Timber Sales (+61 39 768 2100; radialtimbers.com.au)

