

Dream Home

Your world's a stage

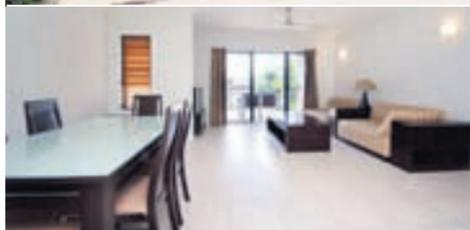
Ease the financial squeeze with careful planning, writes **Judy Barouch**.



Greater than the sum of its parts ... (clockwise from main) the Barbagallos enjoy their open spaces; lighting is creative; entertainment areas are plentiful; the house blends in with its surrounds.

Ray White

Cairns Beaches



Earlville Cairns, North Queensland

10 Exciting opportunities being offered by genuine vendor! 2 & 3 Bedroom apartments to be immediately cleared! Each of these modern and spacious apartments, some with strong tenancies in place, is being offered for sale by public auction. Floor areas range from 107-150m² with a current rental return of up to \$375 per week - located in a highly convenient position; walking distance to Stockland Shopping Centre and under 5kms to Cairns City. The near-new, secure gated complex features: Lift access to majority of apartments. Lock-up and basement car-parking. Multiple floor-plan designs.

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The reinvention of Cathy and Robert Barbagallo's two-bedroom, one-bathroom, 1950s red-brick house in Rodd Point was done in two distinct stages due to budgetary constraints. With two children, Laura, 8, and Daniele, 6, the Barbagallos say they had always planned to build up when the time was right.

But there was one proviso. "We didn't want the final house to look like it was a staged development," Robert says.

The couple's brief to architect Mark Szczerbicki of STUDIO [R] Architects was that initial alterations to the single-storey house should be congruent with a first-floor addition they intended would follow later.

THE PROCESS

The first renovation, in 2005, cost \$88,500 and involved the much-needed modernisation of the kitchen and laundry plus the addition of a bathroom. All was meticulously planned so that these rooms could be fully retained and integrated with the proposed upstairs level.

The second, more extensive stage of the project was done last year and cost \$561,000. "We told Mark that due to the prominent corner site, we wanted the house to appear unique yet still be sympathetic in scale to the neighbouring houses," Robert says.

AIM

To maximise the downstairs connection between inside and outside spaces and then to add bedrooms and bathrooms within a new first floor.

HOW LONG

First stage, three months.
 Second stage, one year.

FAVOURITE FEATURE

Robert: The way the garden lights up at night. After a long day it's relaxing looking out over the garden.
 Cathy: I love everything, especially that it is so open and feels spacious.

GREEN POINTS

- ▶ As much as possible of the original house retained.
- ▶ Ecoply used is a renewable plantation-grown timber.

COST

STAGE ONE		
▶ Structure		\$18,500
▶ Kitchen		\$35,000
▶ Bathroom and laundry		\$23,000
▶ Electrical		\$12,000
▶ TOTAL		\$88,500
STAGE TWO		
▶ Structure		\$325,000
▶ Garage and fencing		\$32,000
▶ Plasterboard		\$22,000
▶ Render		\$14,500
▶ Electrical and plumbing		\$48,000
▶ Painting		\$25,000
▶ Joinery		\$24,500
▶ Bathrooms		\$36,000
▶ Doors, windows and gates		\$34,000
▶ TOTAL		\$561,000

Szczerbicki added only 1.5 metres to the house's footprint for a new staircase, positioned on the western side. Downstairs, existing rooms were reconfigured: the children's bedrooms and a small sunroom were converted into a living room and the main bedroom was transformed into a guest bedroom/study. The kitchen remained

- ▶ Double-stud walls with double insulation have been used for the first-floor extension to maximise thermal mass.
- ▶ Extended eaves provide solar and rain protection.
- ▶ Louvres above a light well create a stack effect.
- ▶ LED lights.
- ▶ 2500-litre rainwater tank for laundry and garden use.
- ▶ Flourishing veggie and herb garden.

INSIDER TIP

Be realistic and always allow extra time for the completion date.

ARCHITECT

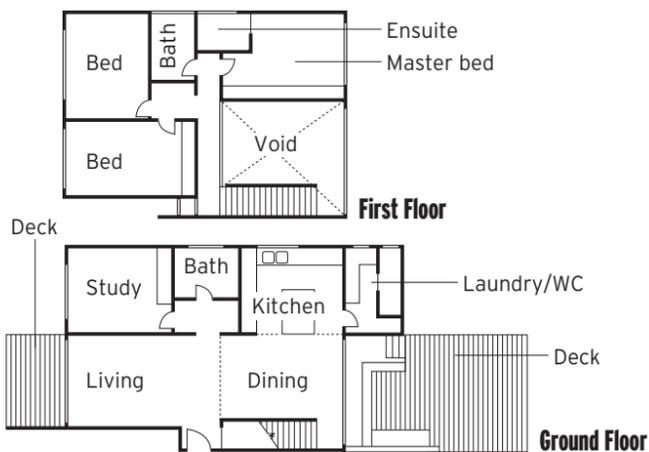
Mark Szczerbicki, STUDIO [R], 9291 0000, studior.net.au.

BUILDER

Ferrocon, 9712 2273, ferrocon.com.au.



Illusions ... the dining room ceiling appears to hover above the side walls. Photos: Glenn Macari



accommodate large numbers of visitors. "We're a big, extended, Italian family and we have regular festivities entertaining up to 40 adults and kids," Robert says. Despite this, the architect adds that there was a desire to be modest about the spaces and to keep features simple. "The clients didn't want loud details," Szczerbicki says. "They preferred the attraction to be the family aspect. When it is filled with people, the house really comes to life."

SMART DESIGN
 The design features reveal themselves subtly. "For instance, the timber front door was custom-made with strips of acrylic inset to let light shine through," Szczerbicki says. "And the dining room ceiling appears to hover above its two-storey-high blade side wall. In reality, there's a 50-millimetre gap between the top of the wall and the ceiling."

Stairs, neatly hidden behind the blade wall, lead up to the new level, where a bridge connects to three bedrooms and two bathrooms. Dashing to the top of the stairs, Robert points out an intriguing narrow vertical space where the blade wall doesn't quite meet the footbridge. "The kids can peek down at us through here," he says with a laugh. Robust materials that are timeless and need minimal maintenance were chosen throughout. Ecoply painted in handsome charcoal grey clads the exterior upper level, culminating half a metre from the eave line to create a floating effect for the roof. Like the house itself, all the special details blend into a harmonious whole. "One of the best compliments is when someone says that this house doesn't look like a renovation," Szczerbicki says smiling.

unaltered but was given a handsome black CaesarStone-wrapped island bench where the dining table had previously been. A central dining area was established from the former combined dining-living room. "This is a loud, active family area," Szczerbicki says. "A two-storey void was created above it to provide a sense of space and openness within the limited floor area."

INDOORS-OUTDOORS
 An important request for the living areas was that they have an ease of connection to the outdoors. Stacking sliders were installed, leading out from the indoor dining area to a compact, south-facing outdoor dining zone complete with built-in merbau seating, barbecue and bluestone paving. A white vertically slatted screen shields its western side. Directly opposite, on the north-facing side of the house, sliders were installed, leading from the living room out to another deck and small garden. Both sets of doors can be left open so that the indoors and two outdoor areas merge to become one large, free-flowing space. Szczerbicki says stacking sliders were chosen in favour of bi-folds as they take up less room and cost less. Although the site is a tight 360 square metres, the house needed to comfortably



Noise problems plane as day

How to make open inspections work for the vendor and what plants to leave after you've sold.

We live under the flight path – not so close that it is a permanent problem but close enough that for a few hours of each day the aircraft noise makes conversation stop. How do we time inspections to avoid the noise?

Gareth, Sydenham

You live in Sydenham, Gareth. The gig is up. That's why your suburb's median house price is \$50,000 less than the Sydney median of \$600,000 while being only six kilometres from the central business district. Unfortunately for you, Airservices Australia has long made it difficult to plan for weddings, parties and inspections due to its insistence on basing flight-path decisions on weather and traffic volumes. Recently, though, the corporation launched Web Trak, a real-time map that shows where air traffic is concentrated. It won't help you plan, and certainly you could probably hear the noise just as easily as watch it online, but at least those out of hearing range can log on to airservicesaustralia.com/aviationenvironment/noise/webtrak to see whether your inspection was timed well.

When we sell, can I dig up any of the plants in the garden and take them with us?

Molly, Turramurra

No. You sold them, remember? To paraphrase a property lawyer and the chief executive of the Real Estate Institute of NSW, Tim McKibbin: It all comes down to what is defined as a fixture

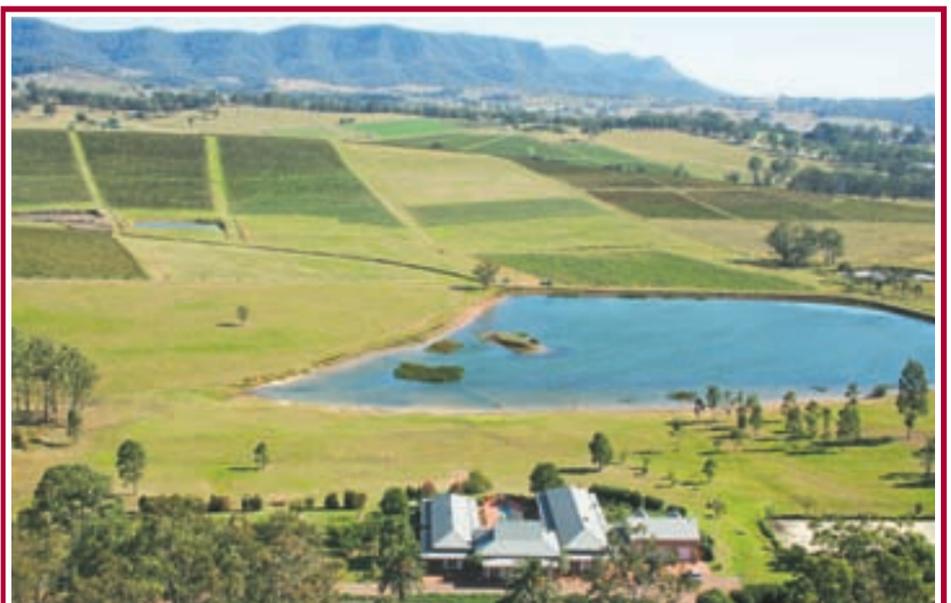
(part of the house, so leave it in place) and what is a finish (a nice touch but not attached, so feel free to haul it away when you go). So in the case of plants, anything with roots buried in the soil should be thought of as part of the property. But based on that premise, you could successfully argue that any plants in pots are not fixed and so are all yours.

It seems all our neighbours are selling after an international burger chain bought a vacant lot at the end of the street and even though its application for a 24-hour restaurant was rejected. Still, shouldn't the selling agent tell prospective buyers about the company's plans?

Linda, Haberfield

Ideally, the agent would work this development into the conversation during the inspection. Much as they let slip about the fabulous Italian eateries on Ramsay Street, they could mention the other neighbours, the ones known around the world for their burgers. But given the vacant lot remains just that, with no approval, then such a conversation is unlikely to take place. It makes sense that the neighbours are selling before the multinational takes the fight to the Land and Environment Court and things get ugly, though. For the rest of us, buying near a vacant lot is reason enough to extend our due diligence to include a call to the local council or even a Google search for site plans.

Send your questions to Lucy at macken.lucy@gmail.com.



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