

## PROPERTY DESIGN

# Paint it black

Dark hues are making a dramatic statement on the exterior of homes, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

Architects are no strangers to black – they often dress head to toe in it and tend to gravitate to anything of that shade, including houses.

"Black houses generally don't scream for attention, being recessive in both urban and rural settings," says architect Amy Muir, who recently completed her own black house with her life and business partner, architect Bruno Mendes.

The Muir Mendes house, which was the recipient of a Victorian Architecture Award this year, is in a narrow one-way street in South Melbourne.

Wedged between a Victorian worker's cottage and a two-storey 1980s brick townhouse, the house features an all-black painted steel facade.

The steel front door is also painted black, along with what's referred to as a "drawbridge" style front window that allows a slither of light to enter the front bedroom.

"We wanted to create a 'blank' facade, something that would speak to both neighbouring homes of different styles," Mendes says.

Black also features strongly inside the house. Charcoal-black felt eco panels frame the passage leading to the open-plan kitchen, dining and living area. These panels also appear on the kitchen joinery, partially located under a black folded steel staircase.

"The eco panels are like the black cross-sections you see on architects' plans," says Muir, who was keen to exaggerate the folded ceiling in the living areas.

The black theme also extends to some of the built-in furniture, designed by Muir and Mendes, including a built-in steel desk for the first floor study, and as covering for the heating units and bookshelves.

"We wanted the black facade to have the opposite effect to the interior. The white walls in the passage appear more brilliant

when you walk in," says Muir. Architecture firm Terroir has designed a number of black houses in Tasmania. One of these is located in Acton Park, a short drive from Hobart airport. Built on a two-hectare site, the single-storey house is about 45 metres in length.

The house is clad in black cement sheeting with extruded aluminium bands across the facade. It has a black steel roof and black anodised aluminium framed doors and windows.

"We were inspired by the established pine trees that extend across the southern boundary. In a sense, this house was designed to appear in their shadows," says Terroir director Scott Balmforth.

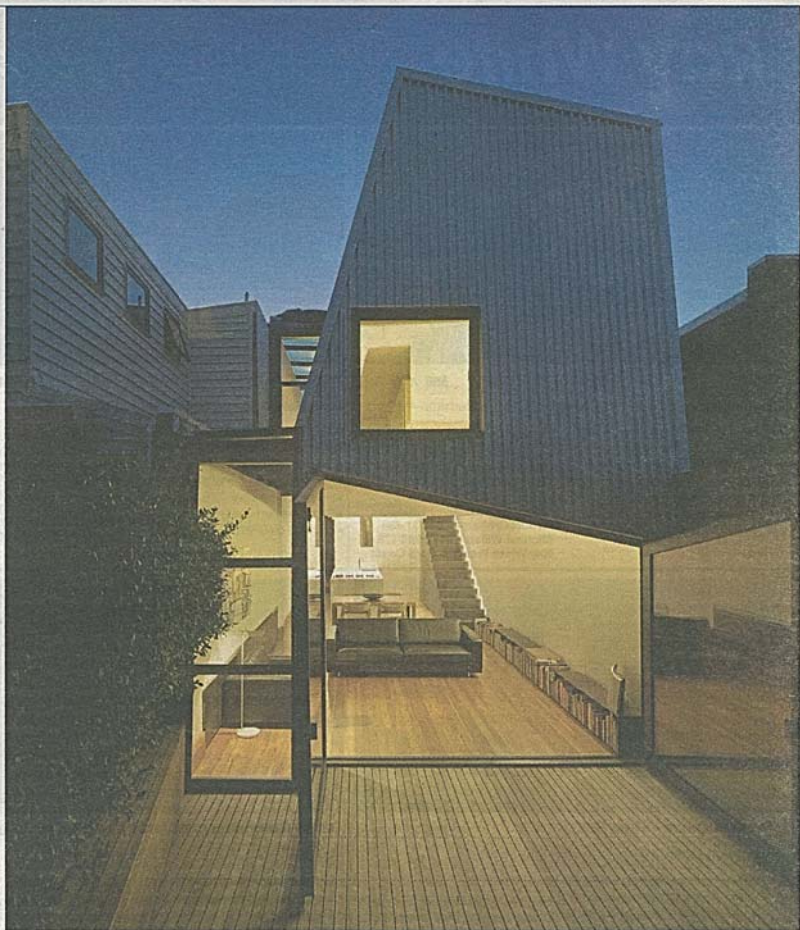
The three-bedroom home is partially broken up by large floor-to-ceiling picture windows, one set framing the dining area.

"We wanted to accentuate the landscape as well as making the house appear recessive," Balmforth says.

In contrast to the home's black exterior, the interior is predominantly white, with polished concrete floors throughout.

"The interior is quite rich compared to the home's exterior," says Balmforth, who was also mindful of surrounding homes, many quite lavish in their adornment. "Not everything has to be seen from a mile away. There should be that element of surprise."

F2 Architecture also used black, in this case zinc, for a substantial extension to a house in Toorak, Melbourne. The home was built in the late 1920s in the English Revival style but the new two-storey wing is sharp and contemporary. The new wing includes the kitchen, living and dining area at ground level. And on the first floor, accessed by a secret stair, is a second living area and north-facing terrace.



We wanted to accentuate the landscape and make the house appear recessive.

Scott Balmforth, Terroir

"There's quite a lot of black oxide in the original brickwork," says architect Franco Fiorentini, co-director of F2 Architecture. "We also thought that the black zinc would create a strong contrast to the original house."

F2 Architecture used black window frames and doors for the new wing and painted the original timber-framed windows black.

"Black works beautifully with the landscape [designed by Jack Merlo]. It makes the garden more intimate and it doesn't reflect too much light, in comparison to an all-white house," Fiorentini says.

"Black makes even large extensions appear more recessive, particularly in residential areas, where scale is important."



Top: the Muir Mendes house in South Melbourne.

Above: Acton Park house near Hobart, Tasmania, designed by Terroir.

Left: Dining, kitchen and living area of an extension to a 1920s house in Toorak, Melbourne, by F2 Architecture.

Photos courtesy Muir Mendes, Shania Shegedyn, F2, Terroir