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STAND: OAK TUBE. MAP: RIBBED CHOCOLATE SWANSEA. BROOM: BROOMFIELD. WOODEN: COTTAGE. TABLE: SALSA. DANCE: DANCE. ELECTRIC: DANIEL. PAPER: GEMPE. SILK: CLERSON. CONTRAST: WAGER. ALL: COUNTRY. KNOX: HEMARV. ARTWORKS: LOBBY. WASHINGTON: MUSEUM. POSTERS: BUSH. OBJECT: US. PA. OF: NEW. GARDENS BY: JOHN. MAKE: BUSH. PHOTOGRAPHY: MURPHY. MORRIS. M. L. S.

# master plan

Renovating? This tale of military precision will be music to your ears

PRODUCED BY WENDY BANNISTER  
PHOTOGRAPHY SHANIA SHEGEDYN  
STORY JULIE SIMPKIN



Jewel in the ground: the green Indian limestone tiles inspired the interior of this Melbourne renovation.



**TRUE CONFESSIONS**

**NAME:** Amanda, 31, and Brendan Gonzalez, 32.  
**OCCUPATION:** Amanda's a hair stylist; Brendan's a builder/developer.  
**TO TELL US YOUR TOP RENOVATION TIP:** Brendan: Don't do any work until you know how you want it to look, including fixtures and fittings. Changing your mind down the track costs money.  
**ANY SECRETS TO LIVING ON A BUILDING SITE?** Do it in stages. We set up a kitchen in the old bathroom while we demolished the rear lean-to section. I could then renovate at my leisure.  
**WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST SPLURGE?** The Indian limestone floor. Nothing else came close. The colours were amazing, from light to olive green with shades of blue and lots of natural swirls.  
**ANYTHING YOU'D DO DIFFERENTLY?** The garage. I would have integrated it, for internal access to the house.  
**HOW DO PEOPLE REACT WHEN THEY SEE THE PLACE?** There's a definite wow factor. Our neighbour – the look on his face! I've picked up a lot of work through people having a look.  
**SO WHAT'S THE NEXT MOVE?** Perhaps building a house from scratch. But there's plenty of scope here...

before



Shaken not stirred: the super-sleek doors hide a very grown-up home bar.

STAINED OAK TABLE, STAINED OAK CHAIR, BOTTLEOPOLY SINK, PROBE-HANGING UTENSIL SET, PAPERBAGS, DESERT OSMUNDEN BASKET, BOHMIAN & PEPPER HOMEWARES, ILLUSTRATION: VENTURE DESIGN

Tasty trio: the sensual combination of walest veneer, Carrara marble and Indian limestone.



Some people like to live life by the seat of their pants. Others, like Brendan and Amanda Gonzales, prefer things more controlled. You know the type: they never seem to be late, they never lose their keys, and as for clutter, well, they just don't do it.

You can imagine how eager Brendan and Amanda were to get stuck into their new home: the worst house in the best street, it was a brilliant buy but a bit of an eyesore. Untouched since the swinging 60s, the 1915 Edwardian house in Melbourne's inner-east had an ugly pergola out front and a dated lean-to at the back, home to the kitchen and laundry. There was no bench space in the kitchen, and barely any storage – “Just a little knocked-together chipboard unit in the bathroom,” says Amanda.

Brendan – a builder who'd fixed up heaps of other people's houses – and Amanda lived in the house for about a year while they plotted and planned the renovation. “You know when you see couples sitting in restaurants, scribbling on napkins?” Brendan asks. “That was us. We were constantly working on designs.”

A stickler for detail, Brendan worked with architect David Chandler on the new space, finessing every detail of the design, from taps to trim, before any walls came down. Six months later it was done, and the house now easily meets the couple's impeccably high standards. There's a tasteful, more traditional facade up front

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lucky, later: watch the world go by from the new window seat. Below: the movie star walk-in wardrobe.

ITALIAN BLEND: VELVET COVERS IN PLUM, POMPADOUR AND SAFRIT SQUARE DESIGN, CHOCOLATE

Design it yourself: Brendan's furniture lends the bedroom boutique hotel luxury.



There's a definite 'wow' factor. Our neighbour – the look on her face!



Can you handle this: add the cute solution to the eternal 'where to put the towel rail?' dilemma.



Soap addict: the understated elegance of walnut veneer. Below: glass doors separate sleeping and living spaces.



before above



before left



## ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT... STONE FLOOR FINISHES

The secret to a glowing, gleaming stone floor that gets better with age? It's an all-natural finish. Here's how:

- Brendan and Amanda chose Indian limestone floor tiles (from Melbourne's City Tiler) for their living room, but the real beauty comes from the natural sealant they used.
- Limestone must be sealed well or it'll stain and crack. Most people use chemical finishes, like acrylic or solvent-based sealers, but a natural finish will help the stone age gracefully, and give it a gentle glow.
- Brendan and Amanda used large limestone slabs, honed to a smooth finish, then applied a mixture of 60 per cent grapeseed oil and 40 per cent eucalyptus oil. The grapeseed oil brings up the colour, and eucalyptus oil cuts down the greasiness.
- The cost? Brendan and Amanda's floor cost \$300/square metre, including laying and finish.
- To keep it looking great, mop once a week with a mild cleaner and use neat eucalyptus oil to spot clean.



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(the pergola was ditched for a rear return veranda), and a new extension at the back.

Oh, and more storage than this neat and orderly pair knew what to do with. Seamless walls of ceiling-high cupboards line the open hallway, and in the new living space there are two huge cupboards with doors that slide back out of sight; one's for all the appliances and the other's a bar, complete with bar fridge and glasses. There's also a sleek, skinny cupboard that runs the length of the living room.

"There isn't a kettle or toaster in sight," laughs Amanda. "And we couldn't fill all the cupboards if we tried."

Which brings us to the walk-in wardrobe. There are dedicated racks for belts and 24 pairs of shoes, glass-fronted drawers, adjustable shelves and hanging spaces, arranged in parallel floor-to-ceiling sections for his and hers.

From the pre-loved hand-me-downs to the custom-built furniture, Brendan and Amanda have lavished their home with luxurious textures. The favourite worn-in leather lounges and armchairs in the living room belonged to Amanda's parents and were bought in the 50s. The elegant walnut veneer furniture in the main bedroom was designed by Brendan. "You go shopping but just don't see what you want," Brendan says. "So I sketched up some designs."

There are exotic touches too, like the green Indian limestone tiles on the floor of the living area. "The tiles were the starting point," says Amanda. "Everything else just fell into place." Enter the American walnut veneer for the kitchen joinery, the Carrara marble benchtops, glass splashbacks and chrome door linings. The palette was carefully integrated, down to black anodised window frames. "There's nothing outlandish about the place," says Brendan, who insisted on natural or neutral finishes throughout.

The ceiling on the new extension seems to float, thanks to a slender rim of windows at the top of the walls. Another smart touch is a pair of glass pivoting doors that buffers noise from the bedrooms and controls the temperature between different parts of the house.

The paint had barely dried when the couple christened their home with a New Year's Eve party. "We could move house now," says Amanda, "but we have the house we want right here." **hb**



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