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# Opposites attract

Blending an ultra-modern pavilion with an 1880s Victorian property seems counter-intuitive but in this Melbourne home it worked like a dream.

Photographs SHANNON McGRATH Words CARLI PHILIPS Styling SWEE LIM



This page: A 1950s armchair from Fenton & Fenton sits in front of the original fireplace. Apparatus 'Cloud' chandelier from Criteria hangs above. Opposite page: Architect Chris Rak says nature provides the meeting point for old and new in this property.

If an 1880s Victorian estate is at one end of the style spectrum then a modernist LA-inspired pavilion is surely at the other, two vastly disparate aesthetics at odds in both era and appearance. Architecturally speaking, knitting the two together may seem questionable, but architects and interior designers Kathryn Robson and Chris Rak of Robson Rak answered their client's prayers by successfully fusing the two to form one cohesive '20-year home' in the bayside suburb of Brighton.

It was a project not to be underestimated, with the owners interviewing no fewer than nine firms before enlisting the Melbourne-based practice. "It was a challenge," says Kathryn of the brief that also included increasing the natural light and a functional plan that would stand the test of time as their toddlers grew to adults. "We didn't want a house that felt as if it had two styles. There had to be a sense of cohesiveness."

Rather than stapling on a contemporary addition, smooth transitions were created by landscape links. "We've gone against the idea of just putting a box at the back," says Chris. While there is a new volume, it's separated by a transparent internal courtyard to "meld the old with the new", making for a gentle flow rather than an abrupt junction to encourage a journey rather than a jump. Connection to the outdoors is common throughout, with each room oriented towards garden views. It's established right from the moment of entry with a line of sight straight down the long, grand hallway to lush greenery and an electric blue sculpture by Caleb Shea framed by a black rimmed window.

On the north elevation, Chris and Kathryn extended the Victorian structure to encompass a bedroom, laundry and study in the spirit of the existing, recreating period details such as relief patterns, keystones and corbels. The process was sensitive, requiring specialised craftsmen to avoid pastiche or mimicry. The Ashlar pattern on the 19th-century dwelling is repeated in the internal, jigsaw-style limestone walls of the extension, fostering a level of authenticity. "We've really focused on bringing the outside in so it doesn't appear too different from the Victorian," says Chris.

Sourcing furniture was a group effort, with the clients, Robson Rak and designer Ali Ross all taking part in the process. The stately grand marble fireplaces, ornate cornices and high ceilings were complemented and enhanced by elegant finishes such as rose gold tapware, while furniture is a mix of mid-century and Italian classics in soft colours.

Initially slated for subdivision by a previous owner, the sprawling site was ripe for new landscaping. The circular driveway and hedging have been retained, but landscapers Mud Office have created a more relaxed scheme complete with a children's play area dotted with squat timber logs, and whimsical concrete balls from Anston Architectural.

Floor-to-ceiling windows optimise vistas and the addition of skylights, louvres and internal gardens creates natural cross ventilation, the property now boasting a six-star energy rating. The open-plan kitchen, dining and living zones take cues from buildings like Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House and Le Corbusier's Barcelona Pavilion. "This project must have been really confusing for the neighbours," says Kathryn. "There was so much work going on for 18 months but it still looked pretty much the same from the street." The rear though, is a whole other story. **151**

For more go to [robsonrak.com.au](http://robsonrak.com.au); [alirossdesign.com](http://alirossdesign.com).



"We've really focused on bringing the outside in so it doesn't appear too different from the Victorian."

These pages: In the new living area, an 'Outline' sofa by Simon James Design from District is matched with Poliform 'Santa Monica' armchairs and a Country Road ottoman. Poltrona Frau 'Ilary' coffee table from Cult. Mark Galea sculpture on bench (left). On shelf above, an artwork by Rebecca Hastings from Flinders Lane Gallery, and vessels by Emma Davies.



SPEED READ

» Kathryn Robson and Chris Rak were selected from a vast field of contenders to marry a contemporary extension with an existing 1880s Victorian home in Melbourne's Brighton. » While they wanted a cohesive feel the designers avoided creating a pastiche, so the ultra-modern glass pavilion is in complete contrast to the heritage house, yet it complements it perfectly. » The landscaping was an important element with all rooms affording garden views. » Furnishings are mid-century classics with a cool Italian aesthetic and breezy colours prevailing.

This page, from top The modern extension contrasts with but complements the Victorian features of the house. The new pool cabana has a Ligne Roset 'Grillage' settee and armchair from Domo. Artwork, *Breathe* by Mark Tipple from Otomy's. Opposite page, clockwise from top left The traditional facade. Moooi 'Random' pendant light from Space strikes a modern note in the original part of the home. Mud Office was responsible for the landscaping, which has created a "children's wonderland" says Kathryn Robson. In a bathroom, 'Lunar' vase by Sarah Ellison, and *Ciney Snow*, Belgium artwork by Kirrily Hammond.

