



# Welcome to the house of fun

*Nothing stays the same for long in a busy family home in Melbourne*

Words **Robyn Willis** Photography **Tatjana Plitt**

Some homes are designed to be places of respite, even sanctuary, where a sense of calm and quiet prevail. This is not that kind of house.

“This place always looks fun and happy, there is always someone home and there is always something going on,” says architect Fooi-Ling Khoo of OOF! Architecture.

“There’s a liveliness about it.” Indeed, this home in the outer Melbourne suburb of Newport can not only handle a bit of activity, it actually embraces it. Owned by a builder and his wife, the house needed to accommodate them and their five children ranging in ages from mid primary through to their late 20s. Khoo describes them as active and ‘outdoorsy’.

Having already worked with the builder on previous projects, Khoo says they had a good rapport.

“We know each other well, we are comfortable working together and we know each other’s strengths and weaknesses,” she says. “It’s not like a normal client where you might have to explain everything and help them through it.”

“It’s still a stressful process because it’s a lot of money and there are delays and council processes but because he is a builder, he is aware of all those things so you’re able to cut to the fun stuff.”

The ‘fun stuff’ included designing spaces that were both functional and aesthetically pleasing. But even before plans were drawn up, the owners made some big purchases.

“They were so excited about the project, they had bought two things — the fireplace and a big stove for the kitchen — the two hearts of the home.”

In addition to designing for

these significant focal points, Khoo says the initial stages were spent discussing how the house, which presented as a classic weatherboard cottage from the street, would look at the rear.

“One of the things they mentioned was a love of converted warehouses, like loft apartments, and we’re thinking ‘but this is a little wooden cottage,’” Khoo says.

The family also wanted to make the house as sustainable as possible, not just in terms of construction methods, but also for heating and cooling. Khoo’s plan was to create a warehouse-like extension, complete with exposed steel trusses with a soaring void at the rear. To create the slightly industrial vibe they loved, Khoo specified a reverse brick veneer construction, with exposed recycled bricks on the inside and traditional weatherboard cladding for the exterior. Unlike standard brick veneer, >>

The original weatherboard cottage (above) does not give many clues to the loft-style living spaces that lay beyond.



Robust materials like chain mesh fencing and steel maintain a sense of lightness in this busy house.

« reverse brick veneer makes the most of the thermal mass of brick, keeping indoor temperatures comfortable for longer.

While the block is not overly wide, it has significant depth, which Khoo took advantage of to create an elongated two-storey extension, which is barely visible from the street. This allowed her to place three of the bedrooms, including the master suite, on the new upper floor, which are accessed via a metal gantry. Two more rooms, which can serve as bedrooms or home office space when necessary, are below, leaving the rear of the house for the semi open kitchen, as well as the living and dining space.

Elements such as chain wire fencing, steel mesh for the staircase and open timber shelving maintain the open, warehouse feel the family desired while large sliding doors to the rear allow activity to naturally spill into the garden space.

Khoo says the layout and style are well suited to a family where nothing stays the same for long.

“This is a fun, energetic family that are all doing stuff,” she says.

“In this house, they can have stuff out and it doesn’t look abnormal, there’s always something going on.

“I dropped by the house when they were moving in and even with all the boxes around, I thought they had unpacked because the space seems to absorb stuff.”

The house has also proven to

be resilient and flexible, with the ability to cope with the changing circumstances of the household.

“One of their sons moved out with his girlfriend and they had a baby and moved back in for a while. It worked quite well for them living downstairs,” she says. “People also come to stay from interstate and they can have the front of the house to themselves.”

While the high efficiency wood heater they bought in the early stages of the project warms the whole house in winter, a ‘spine’ of louvred windows manage breezes and draw hot air up and out of the house in summer.

Given the owner works in the construction industry, Khoo says he was able to call on a talented team of tradespeople to build this exceptional home.

Not that it was a quick job.

“We started a long time back — we spent a couple of years just talking about the design,” she says.

“Construction took another couple of years, which was the result of COVID and also because it’s a builder’s house (and he was fitting it in around other jobs).

“That was quite good in some ways because you had more time during construction to see how things were going. That level of craft in the house is because of the care (the owner) and his mates took to do something special.”

More: [oof.net.au](http://oof.net.au); [completebuildersinsight.com.au](http://completebuildersinsight.com.au)



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The owners bought the Belling cooker in the kitchen well before the project began and the space was designed around it.