

Infill Fitzroy
Rowan Opat Architects, est 1998
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The site for this engagement is located in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, bordering Melbourne's inner city. It comprised a dilapidated and degraded pair of shops and dwellings and a loose assembly of outbuildings in the rear yard. The site falls within a heritage overlay.

The architect's brief required the provision of four residential units and a double-fronted shop with rear access. Subsequently the shop tenant occupied the entire ground floor. The new ground floor unit was integrated with the shop. Works were divided into three stages: refurbishment, infill work and shopfront verandah.

Stage one saw the ground and first floor completely gutted, rewired and replumbed. Existing first floors had no wet areas. In turn, compact kitchen, bathroom and laundry clusters were installed within the former bedroom spaces.

The second stage created two one-bedroom dwellings in the rear yard by linking the existing garage, loft and rear of existing buildings. Lightweight materials distinguish the new construction from the existing buildings. A common entry across the courtyard provides rear access to the Gertrude Street shopfronts, one existing and one new dwelling.

An external stair, enclosed bin store, metering cabinet, new eastern wall and fence line all combine to flank and define an external courtyard. Fibre cement weatherboards, mitred at one end, and shapely window openings on the east wall of the courtyard imply a corner in the single plane of the wall. The trompe l'oeil is defined by the tilting of the southern end of the strip window. The effect, however, is somewhat negated by the insistence of the municipal heritage officer to angle the northern end of the strip window frame to "differentiate the new from the old".

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