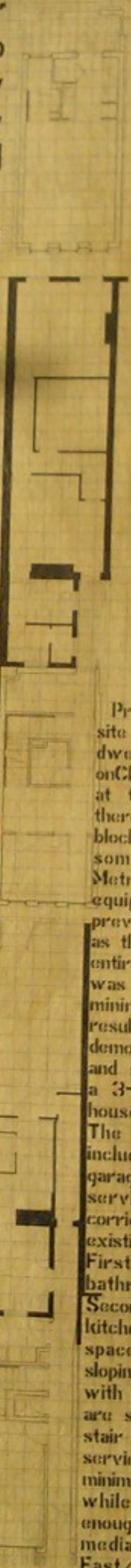The following describes the work of Rowan Opat, Architect. Rowan Opat graduated in 1997 from RMIT and is currently a sole practitioner. This, his first job, was carried out in association with John Davidson of Catalyst Design Group. The subject site, adjacent to South Melbourne Town Hall, is recognised by Heritage Victoria as significant and forms part of what was formerly known as the Orphanage Estate, subsequently the Emerald Hill Estate. After the orphanage was demolished in the 1870 s a subdivision was prepared by the architect/surveyor Sydney Smith. Subsequent development had to conform to his specifications. The significance of the site is mainly attributed to the fact that it was owned and managed by the ministry for Housing for in excess of 100 years and therefore was consistently treated and maintained.

Given the heritage value of the site, a number of constraints were advised by both Heritage Victoria and the City of Port Phillip. They are summarised as;
Lane to operate appear as a rear retaining primarily the lanes role as a service corridor. Visible external walls to be of brick or concrete render finish similar to the surrounds. Visible openings to be proportioned vertically. To be apparently no more than two stories. To have either skillion or hip roof forms similar to main buildings or utilities. To be recessive in the lanescape. To be low in height, no greater than the context. To demonstrate in plan that the building may never have more than 1 bedroom.
Ground floor must be set back from the lane way to allow for vehicular access.

contributor: ROWAN OPAT

Prior to construction the site operated as a shop and dwelling with its front onClarendon Street. While at the rear of the yard there was a small utility block ,circa 1970 s, and some decommissioned Metropolitan Fire Brigade equipment as it had previously been operating as the control point for the entire block. The brief was for maximum area at minimum expense. The resulting proposal was to demolish the amenity block and services and construct a 3- storey one bedroom house in brick veneer. The design response includes: Ground floor - garage, reinstated utilities serving shop, service corridor serving new unit, existing shop and dwelling First floor- bedroom, bathroom and store. Second Floor- living space, kitchen and private open space. Roof - skillion sloping down to the lane with skylight. Services are stacked with a central stair winding around this service core as a means of minimising circulation space while being generous enough, in size, for a median tenant. The East/West orientation demanded consideration to maximize natural light. The design was informed by the works of Alistair Knox, Robin Boyd, Percy Everett, de Klerk and the Smithsons. The scheme is infill, O trick, thick and dumb with a rear. South Melbourne Heritage City of South Melbourne Ministry for Planning and Environment December 1988 pp.52