



## FACT FILE

## THE BRIEF

Increase and enhance the living space of a strata apartment in a heritage-listed building

## THE BUILDER

Mark Farrugia,  
Life Structures

# A new chapter in history

This elegant apartment needed special care to preserve its heritage, writes **Chelsea Clark**

**A**ny renovation of a heritage-listed building in Sydney is sure to raise some eyebrows. Especially when that renovation is an attempt to add some modern features to a well-loved period building.

But with the input of some of Sydney's leading building professionals, an extensive

renovation on a 19th-century building on Sydney's lower north shore has resulted in an award from the Housing Industry Association (HIA) for Best Renovation/Addition Project – Apartment for 2011.

"There wasn't one wall left untouched," says builder Mark Farrugia, whose company, Life Structures, carried out the renovation following plans drawn by architecture firm HBO+EMTB. "It was basically a complete refurbishment."

The property, built in 1831, now incorporates three separate residences but only one of the three-storey apartments was the subject of this renovation.

So it was out of respect for the other residents – and because of the historical significance of the property and sandstone access path – that a requirement to carry all materials and machinery by hand was in effect throughout the works.

"We carried all demolished and excavated items out of the job by hand and all the new items in by hand," Mark says.

"[There were] no machines, no barrows, no pumps, no ready-mixed concrete. In fact, we hand-mixed about 15 cubic metres of concrete on site."

Initial plans for the renovation were solely to provide the structure and shell for an extended area on the ground floor.

The final job, however, resulted in a whole new apartment, including the installation of a passenger lift made from exposed steel and glass.

"The original extension was for three small rooms added to the ground floor and,

as a consequence, a balcony on the first floor," Mark says. "But we ended up doing a complete refurbishment that also encompassed the lift, which meant we had to change the roof line."

Mark says that because the NSW Heritage Council recognised the property as having "state significance", the design required matching a lot of existing details which, in turn, required having some fittings and features specially made. Unique items for the job included some joinery being individually milled using Victorian ash as well as individually moulded skirts and architraves.

Another design feature on the project was the coffered ceiling – an effect dating back to Roman times that uses sunken panels. Mark says the coffer design helped create the appearance of extra space but his team had to move existing structures and services to accommodate the panels.

"Normally, airconditioning units are quite visible but the system we installed in this property is completely hidden in the joinery," Mark says.

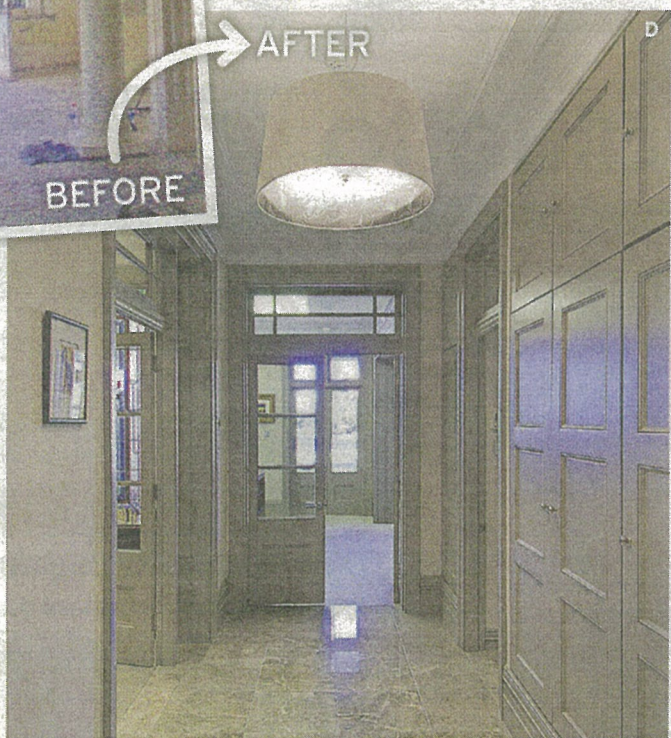
Mark and his team used a variety of materials to blend seamlessly between old and new, including polished marble floor tiles in the hall and wet areas, tessellated tiles with period-matched slate borders on the external balconies and patios and Victorian ash timber with walnut polish as a custom stair trimming.

The stairs, in fact, are a highlight of his team's work, according to Mark. "I guess the staircase is a part of the project that



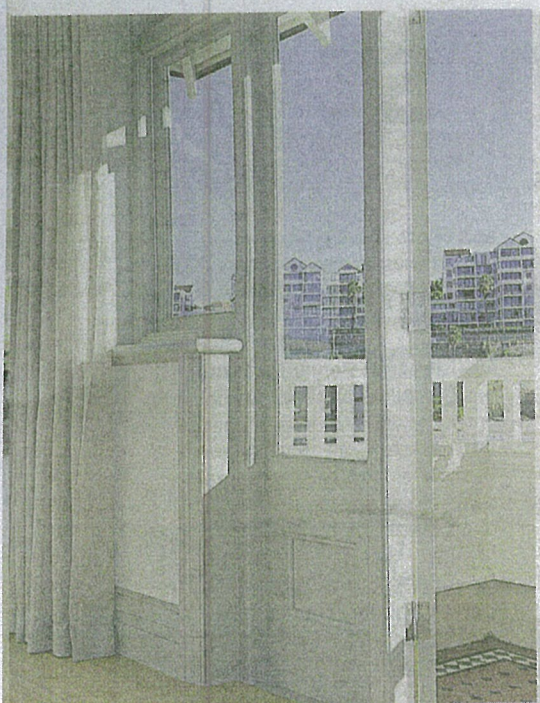
BEFORE

AFTER



**A** The interiors were designed by Sandy Schubert of Schubert Design **B** Due to the heritage significance of the building, material had to be sourced to match the period details **C** The look of the facade had to be kept in style with that of the original **D** The hall is resplendent with polished marble floor tiles





I am most proud of," he says. "We had them wind around the lift but there were, of course, specific boundaries we had to adhere to so it was quite a challenge making everything work."

The stair body and curved railing were supplied by OZ Stair while the bespoke trimming was provided by DJM Joinery.

Other specific materials used in the project included pressed zinc roofing which, Mark says, is rarely used in Sydney but was required to match the building's heritage.

"It's quite common in Europe but it's not used very often here," he says.

Custom cedar windows and doors were also part of the finished product – specifically detailed by the architect.

Polished limestone walls in the wet areas were set off with glass tiles and bespoke anti-fog mirrors in the ensuite. Mirrors also feature in the kitchen splashback and walk-in robe.

"Part of the reason we entered this project in the HIA awards was that it is such a beautiful old building and it was just one of those jobs where everything clicked," Mark says.

"I've got a great crew and the whole team – including the architect and interior designer – were on the same page."

clarkc@dailytelegraph.com.au

#### MORE INFORMATION

**HBO+EMTB** www.hboemtb.com

**Life Structures** 9544 1771