

35 Hill View Road

The story of the 15-year extension

by David Jay Reed

I decided to put an extension on the house when I entered into a relationship with a woman who had two children. After she moved in with the two boys, it became obvious that space was tight, especially as I was using one of the three bedrooms as an art studio. Work commenced in June of 1983.

I couldn't afford to put on a second storey, as I had originally planned, as it would have been 50% more than the loan that the bank was willing to lend me. I registered as an owner/builder, in order to save some money.

To assist me, I enlisted both a registered builder, who just happened to live in the house behind my property, and my friend, who was a bricklayer. I had previously worked with my friend for several years in the early 1970s, as his 'brickie's labourer'. During that time, he also taught me the trade. We both worked full-time jobs, so the extension was mainly built on the weekends and during my holidays. The extensions took 15 years to complete, and unfortunately, that long period took a toll on my relationship with my partner, although we remain good friends to this day.

As you can imagine, the house was under constant construction, and for a period, we had to use an outside chemical toilet. However for her, the 'straw that broke the camel's back', occurred when I was redoing the kitchen. Prior to my renovation, a new kitchen had been built on the original verandah in the 1950s. The 'building norm' for verandahs then, was sloped, to allow rainwater to run off. I decided to level it and in doing so, needed to remove and replace the original support stumps under the verandah to make the flooring level. As fate would have it, she arrived home with groceries, just after I had removed the posts. So, as she entered the kitchen, the floorboards undulated as she walked across them, which sent her topsy-turvy – groceries and all. With a yelp, she cried, "that's it, I'm out of here". Luckily, we could laugh about it later, but it caused her to rethink the living conditions for her and the boys.

One mishap, that really frightened me, happened before the additions were even started. As I wasn't adding a second storey, I had to dig below ground level to accommodate two house levels (storeys). Prior to any extension work, my neighbour's house and mine were on neighbour's property level and intact. The process I used was to drive metal poles vertically into the ground at 180cm



intervals and then dig out a section of dirt and place horizontal planks behind and in between the poles. As I dug deeper, I added planks on top of each



other, until they built a wall of planks. Unfortunately, I had misjudged the depth of one section, and as I reached the bottom area, one of the poles slipped, due to the pressure of the dirt, and the whole lot caved in on me. I was covered in sand to nearly shoulder height and was unable to move. I screamed for help, but no one came to my aid. The neighbours had gone on holiday, so weren't there to

hear my cries. Luckily, two of my friends came to visit me, saw my situation, and helped dig me out.

Although I was very happy with the design of the extension, the original materials, as far as I was concerned, were not in keeping with the 'feel' of the house. The architect had suggested floor-to-ceiling aluminum windows and metal doors, as well as cement balustrades to help cut costs. However, I decided to change the windows, doors



and balustrades to wood to complement the original structure. I also added a wooden step and balustrade to separate the kitchen from the dining room, to create a continuity between the old section and the new addition.

Luckily, none of these changes affected the original budget. In fact, they saved me money. All in all, I was able to stay under budget for the entire extension. As both my friend and I were able to build – as well as fix any mishaps – it was achievable. These savings meant I could introduce items like slate instead of carpet in some of the floor areas. I also scavenged the second-hand salvage yards and managed to find skirting boards for a reasonable price, so bought the entire lot. They were stored for about ten years in my garage, before I used them.

I found an old cast iron bath on a farm. It was being used as a horse trough. The farmer wanted \$25.00. I couldn't believe he still had the 'eagle-claw' feet in his barn. He threw them in for free. At that time, a restored bath was selling for \$1600.00. I re-enameled it, using self-leveling, white epoxy paint.



I bought some second-hand chest-of-drawers as vanity sets for the bathrooms and removed and recut the drawers to accommodate the basins.



I also built the staircase and balustrade. The original quote was for \$3000.00. I had a budget of \$1200.00. So, for the treads, I went to a salvage yard in Fremantle and found two 5x30x1000cm rough-cut Oregon pine planks that had come from a demolished building. I de-nailed them and had them resurfaced in the yard. I cut them into 200cm lengths and brought them home in the trailer attached to my car. I negotiated a deal for \$200.00. To make the balustrade, I visited a local staircase company, and the owner said he had the newels, balusters and handrails from a job that a former client had reneged on.



He said I could have them for the \$1000.00 I had left over. He was even kind enough to give me some tips on how to make the balustrade and was amazed when I invited him back to the house to see the finished product.



With the actual construction of the addition, the first part of the project was to remove the old laundry and steps to the backyard, break up the concrete and dig out the dirt to the level of the prescribed lower foundation. This took about 22 truckloads of dirt. Then I had to remove the remaining dirt by hand to build the afore mentioned retaining wall (*see photos above*).



At the same time, a support wall was built to hold up the original back of the house. This was accomplished by building brick columns, one at a time, then filling in between to create one large wall.

The bottom floor was then poured and the brickwork was built to the first level.



After that, the patio area and top level was poured (*above left*). Work then began on the second storey (*above right*).



When the final brickwork was done, the tile roof was put on (*above left*). However, and to make life more interesting, to be able to live in the house while it was being constructed, the rear double wall had to be demolished only after the roof, doors, windows were all in place (*above right*).

One major issue that occurred, was that the original toilet had been built on a thin cement base, which had weakened over the years and finally caved in. The pressure of the collapsed rubble caused the inner wall of the bottom storey, in the laundry, to shift (*right*). So, a new support wall had to be introduced which took up an extra 20cm of floor space.



Originally, I had opted for a tile roof, but the architect said I might have issues in heavy weather as he felt the pitch on the roof was not steep enough. So, to see how the roof weathered in the different seasons, I waited one year before putting in the ceilings. We had a heavy winter, and as he had predicted, the water

leaked through, despite overlapping waterproof insulation. I discovered that water can travel upwards! So, unfortunately, I had to redo the roof and put tin on the back section.

Once the main structure was secure, I began the arduous task of detailing. As I wanted to keep a similar feeling to the original part of the house, I used old style linoleum and maintained the original design of the kitchen (*photos below*).



With the second-hand cabinets that I found for the bathrooms, all the drawers had to be reconstructed to fit the plumbing and the tops cut out to fit the basins. The only contemporary item I introduced was slate on the floors of the lower family room and two bathrooms. Otherwise, I used carpet on the other floors. I chose a South African slate, as it picked up the brown hues of the wood, which gave the floor less of a cold feeling. I chose a light brown carpet to echo the browns of the slate and wood of the doors, architraves and skirting boards.

I added some medallions to the ceilings to stay in keeping with the medallion in the upper family room. I also added cornices. I discovered later this was not necessary. The original house was very low-budget and didn't have cornices in any of the rooms, except the upper family room. I had not paid attention to this fact and, in hindsight, wish I had not put the cornices in.



In terms of air-conditioning and heating, I didn't want to introduce modern air-conditioning, as I felt it was, again, not in keeping with the style of the home. Instead, I installed fans and flywire doors in all the rooms. In the summer, if the front door, patio doors and laundry doors are left open, and the ceiling fans are used, there is enough of a breeze to keep the house relatively cool, except for about two weeks, when it gets very hot over an extended period.

For the winter, I installed an old-style gas fireplace in the bottom living room, which works relatively well, unless it gets very cold over an extended period. I do have portable room heaters, in each room, that work well, as the rooms are small and warm up quite quickly. There is only one air conditioner in the house and that is in the top living room. It was installed in the late 1960s and a section of the outer wall was taken out to accommodate it. It was not functional when I bought the house and I could not replace it until about six years ago, when I found a similar style of air conditioner that had the same dimensions.



I'm happy with the result, as I feel I have honoured the original style, even though there are some added modern concepts. I believe that the continuity I have tried to create, between the original home and the extension, provides a favourable unity.