

MJ RESIDENCE — SEEAR-BUDD ROSS



Words by Rebecca Gross • Photography by Thomas Seear-Budd • Architecture by Seear-Budd Ross
Build by Agility Builders • Joinery by Woodhaus Joinery



Drawing on a palette of travertine and walnut, Seear-Budd Ross imbues this 1910s villa in Wellington with a warm, inviting atmosphere to create a sense of calm and cohesion in the design.

The single-storey weatherboard villa is a classic style of architecture that gives New Zealand's inner suburbs a distinctive character. As the most popular design for new houses between the 1880s and World War I, the villas are typically small and with period detailing that contributes to their traditional, timeless character. Homeowners Monique and Jonathan, who are young creative professionals, engaged Seear-Budd Ross to renovate their villa in Kilbirnie, Wellington. They wanted to retain its charm yet improve the layout, bring in more natural light and enjoy a warm and inviting atmosphere. In response, Thomas Seear-Budd and James Ross used a refined palette of travertine and walnut to create a sense of peace throughout the home and to enhance the seamlessness of the new configuration.

Reflecting the original era of the villa, the lounge was located at the front of the house, away from the kitchen and dining at the back. Seear-Budd Ross moved the living area to the rear of the house and relocated the main bedroom, with a new ensuite, to the front. Large sliding glass doors with period detailing connect the living room to the dining and kitchen,

allowing Monique and Jonathan to open or close the space. "They wanted the kitchen, living and dining to feel open but not in the conventional open-plan sense," says James. These spaces are now filled with north-west light and have a view and relationship to the garden. A large picture window in the dining area frames the tree outside, a bi-fold window opens the kitchen to the garden, and French doors in the living area provide easy access to the garden.

Thomas and James settled on the material palette at the beginning of the design process. "As a practice, we like to consider materials at the very start of a project when working through initial ideas and principles," says James. "From the beginning, we were thinking about travertine and walnut as we felt they have an unassuming, timeless quality that would complement the existing villa. We wanted the design to feel cohesive, without a clear delineation between what was added and what was existing." The travertine and walnut joinery add richness, warmth and texture to the otherwise clean and simple spaces. They also help mitigate the light and glare in the kitchen, which is exposed to the afternoon sun.



Fisher & Paykel appliances complement the restrained design of the kitchen.





Snaking around the kitchen and into the dining room, the walnut joinery connects the two spaces and anchors the back of the house. Fisher & Paykel appliances are integrated behind the joinery, and the crafted radius on the open shelving exemplifies the Seear-Budd Ross approach to detailing, which is continuously developed throughout the design. “We view the process as being iterative. We keep revisiting details as we work out how the client will use their home and how each element will function over time,” says Thomas.

Walnut also features in the bathroom vanity, which has a tiled top and striking solid onyx basin from India. Wanting to be resourceful with the budget, Thomas and James sourced the basin secondhand. “We searched extensively for one that would add interest and a surprise factor. It’s a nice counterpoint to the other surfaces,” says Thomas. The basin is

bathed in natural light from the skylight above, while the shower, in contrast, feels as if it is carved out of the space. The initial scope of the project also included updating the main bathroom, however, due to budget constraints this was postponed for a future renovation, he explains. “The clients had high expectations around quality, so we focused on certain areas as we didn’t want to spread the butter on the toast too thin.”

With a simple palette of walnut and travertine, the renovation of this villa is cohesive and timeless. The warmth, texture and crafted detailing complements the era of the house and Monique and Jonathan’s home life. “For a project with a modest budget, we created architecture that adds value and spaces that capture the clients’ imagination and quality of life,” says James.