

# House McBEATH by Tribe Studio

• SYDNEY, NSW •

This small terrace alteration and addition is a delightful labyrinth of paths, stairs, voids and views, creating a series of memorable spaces.

Words by Genevieve Lilley

Photography by Katherine Lu

**W**orking on small historic residential properties can be a thankless task: the local council wants the street frontage improved; the client wants a small house made large, without overcapitalizing. The architect wonders what will sustain them through the two years of work from start to finish, what will make the project rise above a mundane task of cleaning up an old house.

In this tiny but clever project, Hannah Tribe and her team have not only designed to fulfil the brief and match the tight budget, they have also added a whole layer of whimsy. They have delivered a little house that is big on ideas and full of delight.

The dwelling presents to the street as a typical small, narrow terrace, with an additional, newer tower sitting next to it. Between the two components is a new entry door that conceals a sliver of enclosed space, six metres high. The added half of the house is turned gently and deferentially to the original building, and has an almost-invisible garage door at ground level and a simple boxed window above.

One enters a dramatic void in which the sky is overwhelming through the clear glass ceiling. Sunlight plays along the rough texture of the side wall to the original terrace house, and a sunken garden is visible ahead. A Peter Zumthor brass light is suspended high in the space and a strange, enclosed metal stair crosses from one side to the other, high in the void. This is possibly the best entry to a terrace house I have seen in Sydney.

The house is only two rooms deep at any point – turn left behind the garage to a kitchen/dining space, turn right to the living room in the old heritage-listed house. A concealed stair to upper levels had to be kept in its original location, and leads above the living room





01 The new low-slung kitchen/dining pavilion is orientated north to face a lush garden of granite slabs and herbs.







to a bathroom and guest room. From this point, one can continue up again to a small attic study, or go back across the extraordinary void to the main bedroom/bathroom in the new part of the house. The large bathroom is full of light; the bedroom looks towards a rear boundary line of tall bamboo.

The ground-floor kitchen, set down a few steps from the hallway so that it is read by neighbouring properties as being at fence height, is a cool oasis, with three large doors that slide back to make a fully open space that feels much wider than it is. The room is orientated north to face a lush garden of granite slabs and herbs. The garden, by Pepo Botanic Design, is now wild, almost maintenance-free, an intense burst of growth surprising even Hannah, who had not seen it for some months.

This kitchen works well, with good spaces for two to cook and entertain others, and with a generous laundry concealed behind hidden doors. The room's modest height makes it cosy, but is a true contrast to the grim, low rear kitchen addition the house originally had behind it.


While each room has a delightful outlook, with glimpses west from McMahons Point to the harbour, it is the spaces between the rooms that really make this house a gem. Hannah admits she had not really considered Adolf Loos' Raumplan obsessions until she had completed this project. As Loos described his work:

"My architecture is not conceived by drawings, but by spaces ... For me, the ground floor, first floor do not exist ... There are only

interconnected continual spaces, rooms, halls, terraces ... Each space needs a different height ... These spaces are connected so that ascent and descent are not only unnoticeable, but at the same time functional." (Shorthand record of a conversation in Pilsen, 1930.)

Every major space in this house is on a different level from any other. The entry is several steps below the living area and above the kitchen. In any given journey, say between the main bedroom and the kitchen, one crosses the house a number of times, over five different levels, with glimpses of views and sky five different ways. The surrounding neighbourhood is dense, with numerous mature trees and glorious harbour vistas, and this sense of surrounding pours into the house at every turn.

Hannah explains that the project had a torturous path to gaining local council approval, with conflicting strategies recommended by the council, and then numerous changes required in order to achieve approval. The client held tightly to a defined budget, so some delights have been designed out of the completed building (such as a green roof over the kitchen, which would have improved the outlook from the main bedroom above). But all projects have tales of lost opportunities and, ultimately, the house must be judged on what is finally built.

The labyrinth of paths and stairs and voids and spaces and views is the true delight of this house. Working on small projects can be a thankless task, and this contribution adds greatly to the morale of those who have high architectural hopes for small projects. 



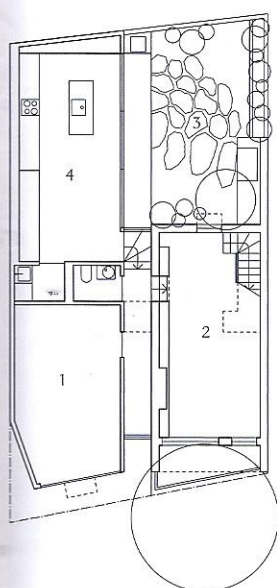
- 02 Deep joinery units provide ample storage at the connection between the living room and the hallway.
- 03 The modest height of the ground-floor kitchen makes it cosy.
- 04 The simple and finely detailed addition is connected to an existing narrow terrace by a new entry door that conceals a sliver of enclosed space, six metres high.



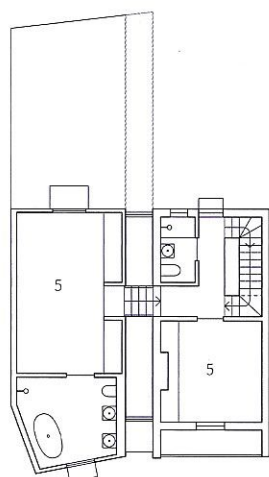


05 The new large ensuite on the first floor is full of natural light.

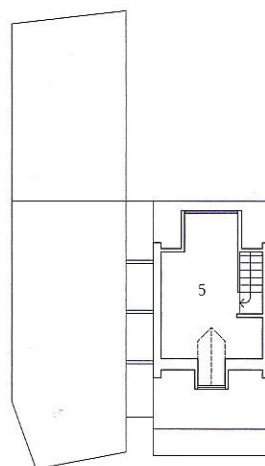
06 The metal stair that forms a bridge across the void over the entry features a circular peephole.



**Ground floor 1:250**



**First floor 1:250**



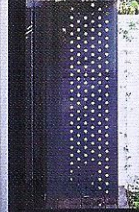
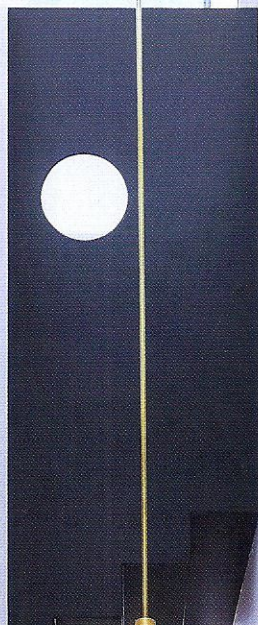
**Second floor 1:250**

- 1 Garage
- 2 Living
- 3 Garden
- 4 Kitchen/dining
- 5 Bedroom





07 A Peter Zumthor brass light is suspended high in the entry passage, with the sky seen through the clear glass ceiling above.



## Architect

### Tribe Studio

Level 6, 110 Kippax Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010  
+61 2 9211 3211  
mail@tribestudio.com.au  
tribestudio.com.au

## Practice profile

Founded in 2003, the practice works at all scales, from urban design through individual buildings to bespoke furniture design.

## Project team

Hannah Tribe, Miriam Green,  
Ricci Bloch, Ben Wollen

## Builder

JLS Construction

## Consultants

**Engineer:** Cantilever  
Consulting Engineers

**Landscape design:**  
Pepo Botanic Design

## Products

**Roofing:** Colorbond  
corrugated roofing in  
'Shale Grey'

**External walls:** Rendered  
masonry, painted

**Internal walls:** CSR  
plasterboard in Dulux  
'Natural White'; Easycraft  
V-Joint lining

## Windows and doors:

Svendour aluminium frames;  
Wilkins Windows timber  
frames, painted; Halliday and  
Baillie sliding door hardware;  
Madinoz door lever from  
Architectural Door Hardware

**Flooring:** Precision Flooring  
American oak in Espresso  
stain; Bisanna Tiles honed  
tiles in 'Montauk Black'

**Lighting:** Artek pendant  
lamp; Viabizzuno Candela di  
vals pendant lights designed  
by Zumthor

**Kitchen:** Miele appliances;  
Astra Walker Icon tapware;  
Industrial Expression  
joinery pull; Bisanna Tiles  
Carrara stone in 'Bianco' to  
splashback; Laminex laminate  
in 'Polar White'

**Bathroom:** Astra Walker  
Icon tapware; Victoria and  
Albert volcanic limestone  
freestanding bath; Duravit  
under-counter basin with  
custom-designed marble  
surround

## Heating and cooling:

Markilux external blinds

## External elements:

Tallowood timber decking

**Other:** Jordan Kiyo table,  
Sidney low table and side  
table, and Seb chairs;  
Armadillo and Co rug

## Floor area

132.2 m<sup>2</sup> site

147 m<sup>2</sup> floor

## Time schedule

### Design, documentation:

12 months

### Construction:

12 months