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UNLEY PARK RESIDENCE

WILLIAMS BURTON
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Build by Ikon Projects • Engineering by Gama Consulting • Joinery by Admor Dimensions



Drawing on legacy and tradition, Unley Park Residence sees the re-sculpting of an established heritage treasure to create a revitalised and contemporary home. Williams Burton Leopardi embarked on a rare extended journey with a patient and humble client, slowly unveiling a quiet confidence through close collaboration and embedding the home with a renewed sense of purpose.

Having previously worked with the extended family of the owners of Unley Park Residence, Williams Burton Leopardi had established the vital bonds of trust and understanding that come from a lengthy design, renovation and construction undertaking. This existing relationship was further deepened during an evolving design process, creating a unique understanding of the personal bond between the clients and their home – a heritage residence originally built in 1937 and imbued with combined art deco and art nouveau styling.

The initial brief was only to assist with the purchase of a new dining table. “There are several layers to how the project came about,” Director Sophia Leopardi recalls. Williams Burton Architecture, the precursor to the current practice, had worked on the additions to the house several years prior, followed then by work at the neighbouring home of the client’s parents by Williams Burton Leopardi. These cumulative experiences awakened in the clients an awareness of the potential of their home, growing from a simple desire to add new furniture into an intent to modernise their spaces and, ultimately, to a holistic reimagining of the interiors as a reflection of their young family’s lifestyle.

“Every project has its own special element,” Sophia describes, “and in this case, I think the house and the clients’ extended context – with family living next door – created a collective sense of achievement in how the transformation occurred [while retaining] the home’s sense of self.” With a light touch and the existing floor plate remaining in place, the interventions were deliberately internal, as it was important that the design not only reflected the clients but the origins of the house as well. Containing the new works within the building outline was a core part of the strategy to retain the character of the home and preserve both the original’s history and that of the subsequent extension, which Sophia describes as “a great space [with] a conservatory and glasshouse feel.”

Heritage and legacy were important drivers in the design of Unley Park Residence. Williams Burton Leopardi’s objective was not to utterly overhaul the home, but rather to elevate it through tailoring and precision. There was a sense that through this restrained approach the new interventions became even more special, Sophia reflects, “because by doing less, you are continuing to enhance that connection to history instead of removing it or dwarfing it by some new addition.”



Connections to the gardens were created through the careful insertion of steel-framed glass doors.



In the original house, sightlines were opened up to create a more contemporary sense of connection internally, inserting steel doors and placing mirrors above structural elements to expand the overall sense of proportion. Dedicated spaces for the children to retreat to, in addition to their own new bedrooms, were included and the principal bedroom was also updated. The new work encompassed the expansion of the underground cellar, as well as the integration of a custom wine storage unit in the dining space to highlight the owners' prized wine collection. The previous extension was then reimaged, tapping into the home's art deco origins, where curved and playful forms offer an element of the unexpected. "By working within the existing spaces already created," Sophia explains, "it taps into the idea of timelessness – how, when beautiful volumes and considered connections to the garden are created, newer additions can add a freshness without needing to change who the home is."

With the original home representing a place of historical and personal significance, retaining a reminder of the past as the building prepared for its next chapter was key. This imperative extended to the furniture and art as well. As the client had grown up in a heritage

home, "his appreciation for antiques was embedded in him without him even realising it," Sophia muses. As new furniture and art were brought in, these were all curated to enhance the existing pieces that the client had a strong personal attachment to. "The elements that have remained offer a really lovely connection to the clients and their traditions," says Sophia. "The artworks and antiques that were kept were all important and special pieces from family, layered into the home along with a spiritual element and the associated symbolic pieces that are scattered throughout the house."

For a home of such personal meaning, the extended time that was granted in the design process allowed the project to evolve at its own rate, seeing elements and ideas settle in place before moving onto the next. It was important that the pace was set by the client, which allowed everything to come together in the end as it did. Observing the client change through the process, opening to new ideas, fittingly matched the way that the home itself was opened up. "From start to finish, the clients became a lot more expressive, openly articulating how much they loved their house and wanting to share it with others," Sophia says. "In the end, this is what good design is about – improving lives and encouraging self-expression."

