

# WOOLLAHRA TERRACES RENATO D'ETTORRE ARCHITECTS

Words by Bronwyn Marshall • Photography by Justin Alexander • Architecture and Interior Design by Renato D'Ettorre Architects • Build by Belvedere Projects • Styling by Joshua Morris  
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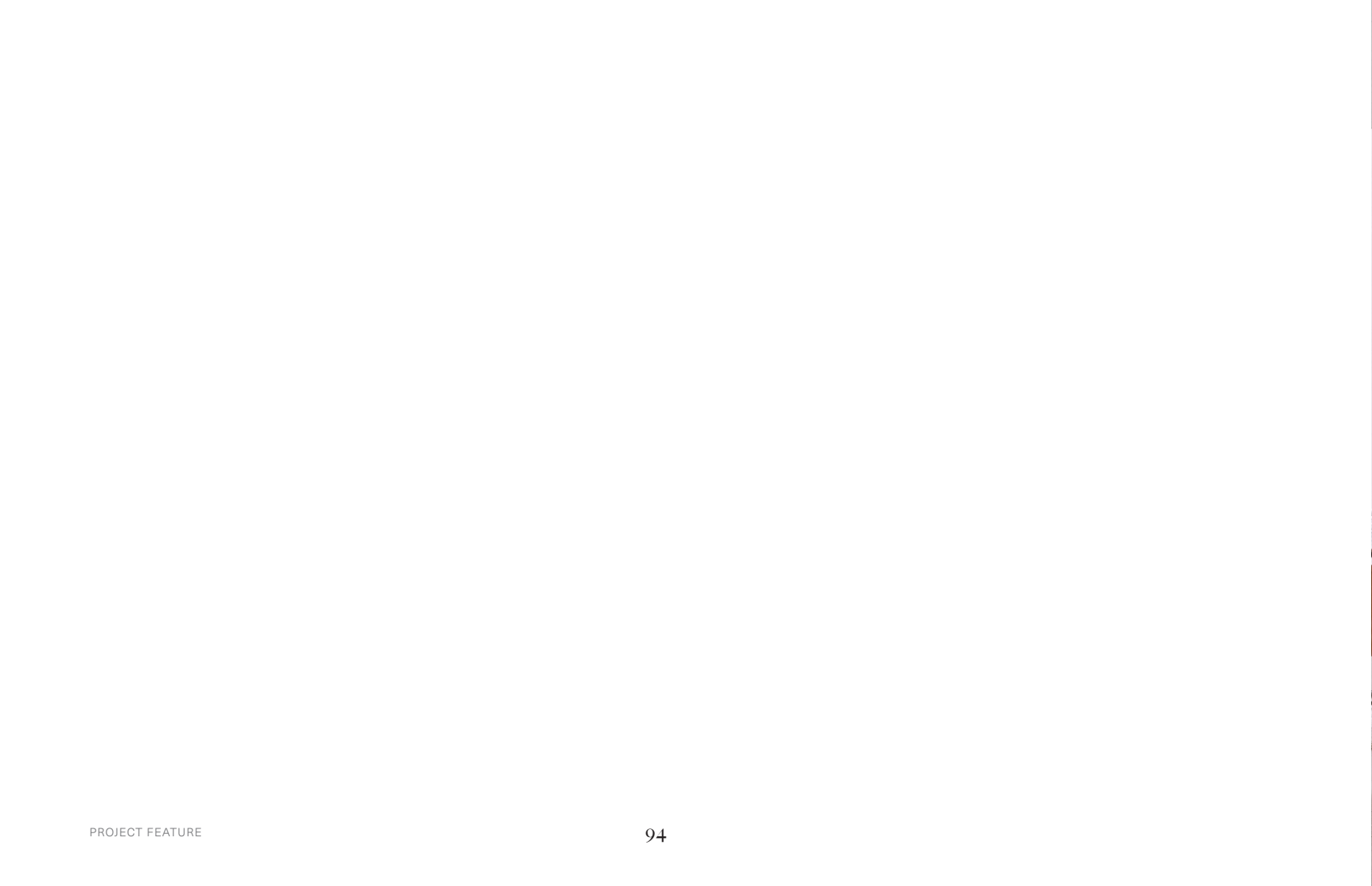
Imagined as an urban oasis to reflect its owners and their appreciation of refinement, Woollahra Terraces sees the combining of three separate houses into one generous dwelling. Renato D’Ettorre Architects elaborates on a Milanese-inspired approach in conceiving this enduring home of enviable proportions.

While it is undeniably rare to own more than one dwelling on the same street, it is even more uncommon to acquire not two but three heritage terraces next to one another. The clients of Woollahra Terraces have, over a decade, used their acquisitions to expand on the storied pasts of the trio, retaining their essence from afar and yet carving a uniquely connected residence behind. Aligning the three heritage homes into one, Woollahra Terraces nestles in amongst other row homes of similar vintage within inner Sydney, reinforcing its historical context. The area is known for its dedicated preservation of heritage, and this latest gesture by Renato D’Ettorre Architects combines a passion for preservation with a contemporary understanding of scale and occupation. Behind the aligned ornateness sits “a haven of peace and tranquillity,” says Founder and Director Renato D’Ettorre.

The outer shells of the homes remain, painted in unison, and the internal brick and plaster walls persist in place as a reminder of their chapters past. “The new and the older heritage elements contrast faintly,” describes Renato, “where new and old walls in the original section of the three terraces are painted white – the subtle contrasts are then expressed in textural differences – old walls rough, new walls smooth.” There is a

sense of balance at play in the coming together of the past and present and the preservation of elements versus the insertion of new ones. Although deceptive from approach, there is such considered cohesion occurring beyond the exterior that all is swiftly forgiven.

While the façade sits delicately laced with typical Victorian-era metal-work balconies, it is the quietening of the details and a honed focus on craft that connects the old and new. “It is a home that is built for longevity,” Renato describes, “and the result produces the ideal pared-back aesthetic, achieving more with less.” Looking to Europe for inspiration, as a place known for its fusing of eras, the project evidences a similar passion for maintaining history in a contemporary context. “The house reflects the client’s design brief of a space that could evoke a Milanese design sensitivity in detail,” he explains, “followed through to the material selections and the purity of the resulting spaces.” It was this shared understanding of both enduring design and lasting elements of heightened quality that ensured the clients, a young family, and Renato were aligned. “The clients had a deep appreciation of all aspects of contemporary design,” he adds, “from architecture and products through to furniture,” allowing the vision and potential of the home to be realised in full.





Though the focus of the building is drawn inwards, connection to outdoor elements was key. Natural illumination subtly characterises and enlivens spaces.



Light is drawn deeper into the combined home with the opening-up of contained terraces, increasing the perceived volume of the space.

As the expanded volumes are connected behind the newly united façades, an additional level is carved further into the site, creating a basement space. The new level allows an additional living space to sit sunken into the terrain while creating the opportunity for an in-ground pool and underground water tanks to align at ground level. A consistent base then binds the various new and old zones and links across its various levels, ensuring a sense of consistency throughout. “Inspired by natural materials, with a focus on emphasising inherent colours,” Renato says, “there is tactile durability to the spaces, allowing for a softness to be present along with an unexpected warmth.”

With the opening-up of the terraces, light is brought deep into the combined home. As light and space are an issue for many terrace homes, the ability to open and increase the overall scale of the volumes and then penetrate the horizontal and vertical surfaces with openings is an advantage of no small means. Light also helps to subtly characterise different spaces. “While the two upper levels are mainly white and flooded with

light, the introspective basement sits in contrast and is markedly darker,” Renato says. “Natural light comes from three apertures – a circular skylight, a window into the swimming pool and a perforated plate metal walkway above casting patterned light on to the soft grey concrete wall, creating a mysterious and intriguingly internalised space.”

Optimising the opportunity at hand, Woollahra Terraces sees focus drawn inward, with key connections to the natural elements while an emphasis on sustainability and a desire to reduce the impact on the site for its future chapters sees integrated systems reduce energy reliance. In its complexity, the project sees the combination of both delicate and robust elements, derived from a shared focus on longevity. The unexpected approach called for an unexpected response and, while a challenge of no small proportion, the results are equally impressive. Renato D’Ettorre Architects has combined a sustainability and future-focused approach with a keen restorative core, leaving the clients well positioned for their future in Woollahra.



The project sees the combination of delicate and robust elements link to the natural through light and materiality.

