

# Hold Your Horses

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This compact and rebellious heritage-listed project in Subiaco proves good things really can come in small—and even tiny—packages.

For a complex multitude of reasons—affordability, sustainability, minimalist lifestyles, the downsizing trend, or just the innate human desire to innovate in response to spatial or design limitations—there is momentum gathering behind the concept that small designs can indeed achieve great things. Pioneering design solutions now mean that reducing floorspace doesn't diminish the quality of experience for an inhabitant or user.

“The global movement has made it acceptable for people to live in small spaces, which is something modern Australians are not quite yet completely used to,” says architect Sam Teoh of Sam Teoh Architects.

However, Sam believes tiny designs are on the rise in Perth, and his recently completed renovation and revival of a trio of heritage outbuildings in Subiaco is a fine example of what thoughtful design is able to produce. Sam reimagined a laundry, toilet, and wood store into a self-contained project at the rear of a Queen Anne heritage-listed home owned by Thomas Murrell. The award-winning broadcaster, international business speaker, and media consultant has named the small accommodation “The Stallion Box”, and now rents it out on Airbnb.

“The origin of that name is that—legend has it—the owner of nearby Chester Estate had bought a stallion without his wife's approval and kept it in Tom's wood store temporarily until he found the right time to break the news to her,” explains Sam.





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The main house on the block was built in 1917 and is listed with the National Trust. It underwent a modest addition in 1975, although under Tom's tutelage the rear of the was home was to be opened and extended to better cater to contemporary family living.

When Sam joined the project, the plan for the yard was to remove the outbuildings to make way for an entertaining space, pergola, and pool. However, the owners realised a different course of action would be more practical. "With the passage of time, their requirements changed," says Sam. "The kids had become teenagers, and the pool was no longer a priority."

The outhouse buildings, located adjacent to the ROW, had become rundown. While common features in the early 1900s, the trio had lost their currency in the modern world. And so, Sam's proposal was to transform the dilapidated forms into something with tangible and practical benefits, such as an office for Tom, a teenager's retreat, or self-contained accommodation.

"We felt the collection of buildings could be renovated and repurposed for a variety of uses, all of which involved adding a simple structure and forming a multipurpose space," he says. "After much consideration it was resolved to create a self-contained accommodation unit."

This saw both a compact living space with a kitchenette and a bathroom with an outdoor shower added on during the build by Ken Hepworth and his team. "The new addition has a light and minimal feel, with steel and glass juxtaposed against the more robust qualities and raw finishes of the original brick and timber structures," Sam explains. "It connects directly to the garden via Vitrocsa sliding glass doors which, with their minimal frames, allow the space to be transformed into an outdoor room with ease."

Meanwhile, the original wood store and laundry were converted to bedrooms. Here, the materiality is rich and rustic enough to charm, making it a befitting homage to the original outhouse ensemble. Indeed, the face brick walls alongside the new (but sympathetic) concrete floors and

zincalume-finish corrugated iron roofing offer a nostalgic nod to the broader Aussie housing vernacular of the early 20th century.

"We really worked to maintain the original feel of the three outhouse buildings, and features like the exposed bricks really reflect that history and tell their story," says Sam. "The materials look old because they are old, not because we've purposefully aged them to jump on a renovation trend, it's authentic."

An enclosed but technically open-air passage creates an airy and connective spine, tying the bedrooms to the new living zone. "The polycarbonate link provides protection from the elements and privacy for the rooms, while allowing northern light in when the doors are open," says Sam. "The satin-finished concrete floor is also a continuous element that really ties the areas together and offers a throwback to the original floor."

As a project, this is fundamentally about re-purposing and restoring the value of old and used elements. "Where possible, building materials were sourced from demolished structures on site and from Tom's collection of recycled building products, which we carefully curated into the addition in what some may consider an 'eclectic' way," says Sam. "In reality it was a controlled process that ultimately bonded Tom to this building, which is now comprised of materials and objects that are of personal value to him."

Sam says it was a challenge but an honour to bring the group of outbuildings together under a new era that is fit-for-purpose today. He also credits the City of Subiaco heritage department for supporting the re-purposing of this trio, because outbuildings are becoming increasingly rare in the suburb.

"I loved the concept of re-purposing original structures and giving them a new lease on life," Sam says. "I enjoyed the challenge of incorporating recycled products and reusing these quality materials that have built well over time – almost in defiance of today's disposable society."