

Modernity melds with colonial chic in Port Fairy's Drift House

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A grand dame gets a makeover with a point of difference, writes **Stephen Crafti**.



One of Drift House's four apartments. *Photo: Martina Gemmola*

Built in 1852, this pre-Victorian house is one of the oldest homes in Port Fairy. Built for sea captain John Mason, the home's colonial features were concealed behind Victorian additions. Used as a private dwelling for many years, Drift House is now bespoke boutique accommodation, a stone's throw from the beach.

"When we first inspected the property, it wasn't clear what was original and what had been added," says architect Tim O'Sullivan, a co-director of Multiplicity who engaged Lovell Chen heritage architects.

Says interior designer Sioux Clark, also a director of Multiplicity: "What made it confusing was that many of the additions and alterations were from recycled Victorian materials, such as the iron lacework added to the front verandah in the 1930s."



The present owners, a couple with two children, were looking for a sea change. Their brief to Multiplicity was to create four spacious self-contained apartments using the original building and by providing a contemporary wing.

While the bluestone building, now containing two apartments (each about 55 square metres), features thick walls and limed timber floors, the new wing is lightweight and clad in perforated steel.

The ornate verandah at Drift House, Port Fairy. *Photo: Martina Gemmola*

"We wanted to create a shadow-like effect," O'Sullivan says of the scale and dimensions of the new wing, which is nestled between the bluestone house and an outdoor fireplace, thought to be built about the same time. Dividing the two is a glazed link that provides light and private entrances to each apartment.

Unlike many boutique developments, where every room is identical, each apartment has its own signature. The owners, John Watkinson and Colleen Guiney, wanted a bed-an-breakfast that offered a point of difference.

"They want people's stay to be memorable," says Clark.

The two apartments within the original walls express the past while beautifully creating the present. A variety of green hues predominate - a hallmark of Multiplicity and a nod to Port Fairy's early Irish settlers. Green also references the Norfolk pines that circle the property.

Like the previous owner, who recycled materials, many elements from the building's past have been reworked. A Victorian over-mantle, for example, once gracing a drawing room, has been given a contemporary twist and is now a feature of both a wall and ceiling in one of the front apartments (think Dali's surrealist paintings).

Another apartment includes a Victorian fireplace but comes with all the mod cons, such as a streamlined kitchen, a free-standing bath and a private shower.

Guiney, a visual merchandiser and artist, shows her hand in the design. One of the feature walls in an apartment comprises a series of collages showing images of the building's past. Yet another apartment offers a beach feel, complete with timber battened walls and screens.

The fourth apartment has a translucent feel with generous glazing that surrounds an elevated tiled kitchen pod.