

A little retro ripper in Port Fairy



This 1960's Tag Walter classic in Port Fairy is an elegant composition of varying roof heights and window geometries.

Bluestone columnist and architect **CLINTON KRAUSE** previously worked in Daylesford before [relocating his business](#) to Warrnambool. Clinton explores the mid-century architecture that gives our region so much character, but about which most of us know very little.

Port Fairy is renowned for its charming nineteenth century architecture, but just a street away from the town's historic centre is a 'rediscovered' retro home that is drawing the limelight away from its older siblings.

For its time, 43 James Street, the house designed by **Tag Walter** in 1960 for **Colin and Maureen Leishmann**, brought a host of revolutionary new design ideas to the sleepy seaside hamlet.

Removal of many large and overgrown trees has revealed, once again, the wonderfully proportioned facades of the house on the corner of Cox and James streets, with many a passerby

declaring that they had never noticed the house before.

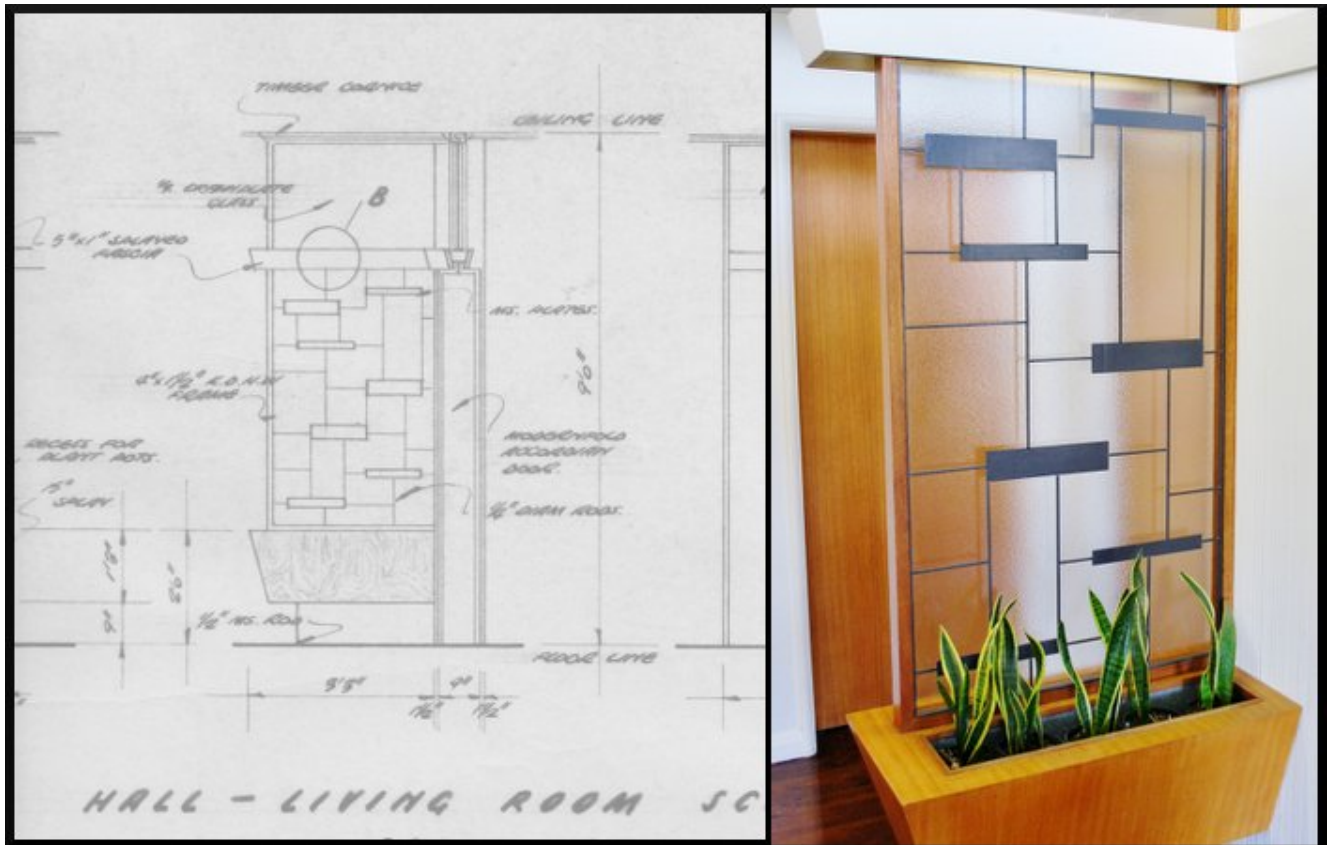


One of a series of original light fittings in the home.

Current residents **Liam** and **Jo Murphy**, along with their young family, are only the third owners of a property which remains largely intact and true to Tag's original plan and design.

Purchased in 2012, the house had suffered more from neglect than the 'vandalism' of successive 'improvements' and the Murphys were faced with extensive water damage to interior walls and floors caused by blocked gutters and deterioration of the almost dead flat metal roof and its poorly fitted skylights.

Carpets were sodden petri dishes of mould and the glass diffusers on ceiling lights were filled to the brim with rainwater.



The original plans drawn up by Tag Walter (left) show the eye-catching and quirky planter box that makes for a striking entry.

As enthusiasts of all things retro, Liam and Jo threw themselves into the herculean task of the restoration with gusto, approaching the work with almost reverential attention to detail. Liam, in particular, is meticulous in preserving the period details and interior finishes of the home.

Setbacks encountered along the way were faced with stoic fortitude: when baby Charlie decided to pick off a large section of the original wallpaper in the nursery, Liam set about carefully reinstating the multitude of tiny scraps and slivers with forensic diligence and considerable success.

The Murphys are also lucky to be in possession of a set of the original plans prepared by Tag which contain detailed drawings for signature installations within the house.

These include a quirky entry planter box – complete with pelmet lighting, an abstract metal privacy screen and ‘stick

legs – and a suspended glass display cabinet in the kitchen: a lost feature that will be reinstated sometime in the future.



A clever arrangement of blockwork to create maximum impact.

Indeed you could say this house has just about every mid century design trick in the book! Here are just a few:

- *Flat rooves with wide overhanging eaves and thin fascias evoke a floating weightless effect;*
- *A cantilevered porch roof along with crazy paved steps and a 'breezblock' screen wall make a dramatic entry statement;*
- *Individual bricks in walls are stepped out to create a shadow pattern effect;*
- *Windows of fixed and opening lime green coloured glass*

are laid out in visually pleasing geometrical arrangements;

- *Varying roof heights correspond with interior ceiling heights to differentiate living/entertaining areas and private sleeping zones.*

With its expanses of north facing glass – in some rooms wall to wall and floor to ceiling – the house is light, warm and airy and provides a comfortable family friendly home for the Murphys and their three children.

The work undertaken by Liam and Jo demonstrates a sympathetic understanding and love of this fantastic house and it is reassuring to know that another outstanding example of mid-century design in our region is in good hands.



The floating rooflines, expanses of glazing, breezeblock entry screen and bold colours all distinguish the house.

Note: You can read more about the legacy of Tag Walter in my [November column here](#).

When we return in January: Googie 101

