

Tips for Developing Heritage Houses



Be aware of the level of heritage conservation control over your property

You should be made aware of this at the time of purchase. However, zoning or classifications to individual properties can be revised without notice, so get a planning certificate to confirm. Heritage controls can vary from “streetscape” preservation (not v.comprehensive) to “Class 1” preservation of individual houses (protects most of the house, including some interiors). This usually requires a report from a separate accredited Heritage consultant about the house and the works proposed. Many controls are “area specific” and info should be available from your local council.

Original Character

It's understood that if you want to develop a heritage house you want to preserve it's original character. Councils and heritage conservation organisations can offer broad guidelines about about this and what characterises a particular style. It is not just an external application of details and colours but, a whole philosophy which is also reflected in the planning. New details should be true to the original character or be simple and understated so as not to detract from it. It's encouraged by council and will be reflected in re-sale values.

Scale

It's usually not possible to build a second storey on top of or an addition significantly larger than a heritage house. However, building into roof spaces with an addition to the rear can provide sufficient space for a master suite and /or study/rumpus room, etc. Extending the rear at ground level is common but, it's preferred not doing so at the side to preserve the existing character particularly from the street. The areas at ground level are typically a dark “maze” of small spaces that reflect the practical operation of the house at the time of building. Of course, they don't reflect contemporary domestic life so opening them up and connecting to the rear private open space is standard practice and helps to reinforce the original character.

Site coverage and Floor space ratio

Some precincts have strict controls of the area of landscaping, as it's usually part of the original character and design. This also affects scale, together with floor/space ratio (the percentage of floor area allowed as a ratio of the site area). So, a 50% soft landscaping control means anything hard that won't allow plants to grow e.g. paths, driveways, walls of planter beds,etc. Therefore, in some circumstances you may have to build up into the roof space to achieve additional area.

Cost

Renovating old houses is a labour of love and requires passion and dedication and “going the extra mile” financially. It may seem easy to justify the cost of some items like fireplaces but, be aware of the need to repair latent site conditions like rotten timber floor boards, roofing, etc. Some of these old places seem solid until you start removing walls and finding out how fragile they can be.

We have a lot of knowledge to share so if you want to know more, contact us now!