



# real RENOVATORS

A former Salvation Army hall has been miraculously transformed into a stylish and comfortable home, studio and office.

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**B**uilt of weatherboard, this 15m x 7.5m old Salvation Army hall was opened in 1904 to cater for 250 people in Yarraville, Victoria. Today, the renovated building accommodates only three people – Hans and Catherine van Wilgenburg and their son, Mantu – but does triple duty as home, office space and studio.

Architecturally, the hall was a simple, rectangular design, complete with cathedral ceiling and a front door opening onto the street. The building had been leased since 1988 and was in very poor condition. “The roof was like a sieve, with vents in the exterior walls and ceiling. Gaps had appeared in the interior panelling, and the floorboards bowed in both directions. However, we fell in love with the space,” Hans explains. “The hall had been a local icon in the past, so we were keen to create a strong identity for it for the future.

“Our original intention was to have an art studio with office space in the hall and our home in the officers’ quarters – a separate building at the rear, with a large garden. However, the layout in the officers’ quarters was poor, with the living room in the centre and no external windows. We were not encouraged. Catherine is a visual artist, and I am an architect, and we wanted to incorporate both of our business offices with the living space – making an extensive renovation in just one building.

“To fund the renovation of the main hall, we sold off the officers’ quarters and garden eight years later. We realised more than the property originally cost, and the extra funds meant we were able to refurbish it in the way we wanted.”



**RIGHT:** Catherine and Hans van Wilgenburg in their living area in front of Catherine’s painting in two panels, titled ‘Noon and the Hour of the Wolf’.

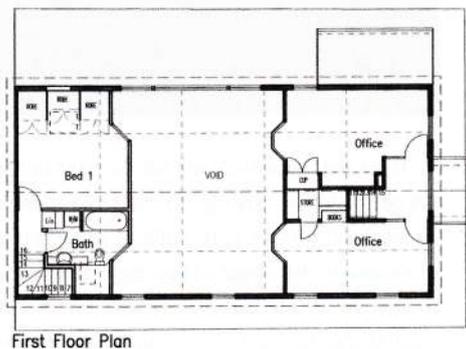
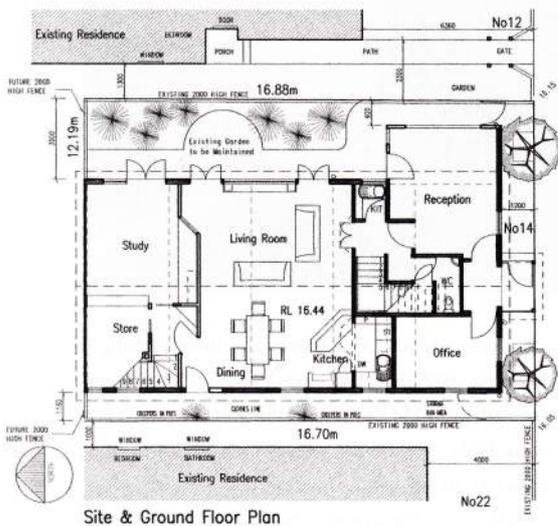
**LEFT:** A corner of the brilliantly coloured living area showing the movable island bench that divides off the kitchen area. The bench is faced with Formex in ‘Charcoal Fusion’ colour.

Hans and Catherine’s aim was to make minimal alterations to the existing structure by leaving the external walls intact, only adding a small entrance extension to the front. They then attacked the renovation in stages. The first work included creating the Living Colour Studio for the visual

arts and architectural practice; also incorporating a building colour consultancy. Four offices were created on two levels on the street front, leaving the main body of the hall, with its 5.5m-high ceiling, intact as living space. Internal bay windows were installed into the upstairs’ rooms, overlooking the



LIBER  
OVER



ABOVE LEFT: The square eight-seat dining table was custom-made from recycled timber by furniture-maker Andrew Scott.

LEFT: Architect's plans show how the old hall was turned from an open community space into a comfortable and contemporary home and office.

OPPOSITE: The kitchen was housed in one corner of the open-planned downstairs' area. To continue the vivid colour used in paint and furnishings elsewhere on the lower floor, splashback ceramic tiles are in bright cherry red.



## what they did

- First stage of the renovations focused on creating street front office space on two levels for the Living Colour Studio, and building an entrance extension.
- The main body of the hall, with its 5.5m-high ceiling, became the family's living space.
- Brought in lots of light through internal bay windows in the upstairs rooms, which overlook the main hall.
- Installed Comfort Plus glass in exterior windows to reduce the summer heat.
- By selling the officers' quarters and garden eight years after they originally bought the old Salvation Army hall, Hans and Catherine financed the renovation of the main hall.
- The second stage of the renovation saw the large, open space of the old hall being divided into three more workable, and liveable, spaces: kitchen, sitting and dining areas.
- A high kitchen workbench was fitted with castors so it could be moved easily to accommodate the square eight-seat dining table.
- Lighting is an important element, as exhibitions and functions are staged here. Studio lights hung on a square grid can be adjusted to highlight an object, while two sets of ceiling spots and lamps are positioned for mood.
- Wooden floor was stripped, waxed and sealed with a non-toxic oil.

main hall, to admit more light. Existing exterior windows were replaced with Comfort Plus glass, to reduce heat in the summer.

"The second part of the renovation was to transform the hall area into our home," Hans says. "The large open space was divided into three. The kitchen was housed in one corner, with a high bench on castors, to allow flexibility in the use of space. A square eight-seat dining table, made by furniture-maker Andrew Scott, sits alongside. A sitting area was furnished with two large sofas, arranged to face a glass side wall, giving extensive views of the courtyard garden."

A broken wall at the rear of the room now leads to a stairway and second storey. A small bedroom

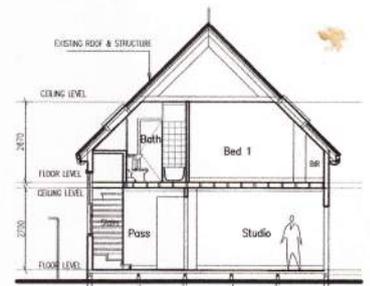
has been created on ground level, with an artist's studio for Catherine alongside. Above this is the main bedroom and ensuite.

Colour has been used extensively throughout the house. Catherine selected 'Domain' and 'Esprit' by Dulux for the ceiling and walls, and Haymes 'Ginger Spice' on a feature wall in the main hall. The ceramic tiles chosen for the kitchen are a cheerful cherry red.

To maintain a natural ambience, the Formex laminate benchtops are covered in 'Granite Fusion', and whitegoods have been concealed. The wooden floor has been stripped, waxed and sealed with Anro Floorcare's Livos oil, which is based on cold-pressed linseed oil with lead-free hardener.



West Elevation



Section



East Elevation



South Elevation



ABOVE: With a roof like a sieve and gaps in the exterior weatherboard walls, the old hall was a daunting proposition. Today, with a small entrance extension, the Living Colour Studio is open for business.

RIGHT: In her light-filled studio, Catherine works on a large painting she calls 'Reconciliation for White and Colour'.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Hans and Catherine's bedroom in the upper level at the rear of the building. Extra natural light has been achieved through the installation of skylights and internal windows.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: The ensuite bathroom fitted under the original roof of the old hall.



## words of wisdom

- "Frequently, colour is regarded as merely decorative, serving no formal function. But for architects with an awareness of the effects of colour on the human being, it can complement form in animating the bones and body of the building."
- "The prevalence of boring beige in contemporary homes demonstrates the dominance of the neutralised personality, led by the mistaken belief that home resale values improve with a neutral coloured environment."
- "Currently favoured white walls with counterpoint feature walls orient the viewer around the space, giving the option of diverse moods with even a small space."
- "Colour embellishes the bones of a building by emphasising forms and features such as cornices or fascias."

"One of the key factors of the design was flexibility, so that we could also use the space for exhibitions and functions," Hans explains. "Lighting was an important element, and we created a variety of different applications in the living area, so that it could function like a theatre set."

Studio lights were hung on a square grid and can be adjusted to highlight any feature. Two sets of ceiling spots were installed for softer lighting, and lamps are positioned for mood. "We wanted to maximise the wall space for Catherine's paintings," Hans says. Her large, expressive and vibrant canvases hang on the walls. "I work with the life force of colour itself, communicating energy to bring a room alive," Catherine explains. "Colour is an important feature of interior design because it directly impacts on our wellbeing."

The whole project has matured and is the living/working environment the van Wilgenburgs hoped

for. With son Mantu, who has his own room in the front of the house, the configuration works successfully for them.

"We are interested in creating enlightening environments with environmentally sensitive architecture and offer a personalised colour service and building colour consultancy," Hans explains.

If the renovation of this once simple space is an example of their expertise, it is to be recommended. The old Salvation Army hall has found a new lease of life and another set of devotees, while the van Wilgenburgs, who sought to combine home and work under one lofty roof, have found the answer to their prayers.

For more information, email Hans or Catherine at [info@livingcolourstudio.com.au](mailto:info@livingcolourstudio.com.au) or you can visit [www.livingcolourstudio.com.au](http://www.livingcolourstudio.com.au) for Catherine's series of informative articles about colour and the way it affects our lives whether at home or work.