Bending the rules

Words Ben Kelly
Photographs Thurston Empson

Bridging a gap between the old world and the new, this bold architectural home takes command of curvature, light and colour to create a space that is both calming and dramatic.



Created by Archaea Architects, Yeo Yo house is defined by its soaring 5.6m barrel vault ceiling, where granular dry-pressed bricks introduce warmth and spatial drama.

Others might have baulked at the radical circular shape that Archaea Architects presented to their clients for an extension to a century-old bungalow in Highgate. But on this occasion, architects Sam Lucia and Sally Wilson were greeted with enthusiasm by the couple who were inspired by their bold vision.

"For their extension, they didn't want a box, so I said, 'What about a circle?'," Sam says.

The award-winning Yeo Yo house – named as a play on its street name – is the type of project that might come along once in an architect's career: "A unicorn client," Sam explains.

The architects were involved in curating every single aspect of the home, from furniture to lighting and even the air conditioning. "You only get that with clients who trust us completely," Sam says.

"They saw the value of a consistent design theme throughout the home, and trusted us to design and curate everything, including the interior design."

Sam had an extra layer of trust, being a close friend of the homeowners. The couple had lived in the bungalow for more than a decade and wanted to transform the dark and dated home into a bright, light-filled modern space. They also wanted it to be daring.

As the design progressed, the sphere was pushed and pulled – re-configured to include straight walls and edges for practicality.

"Once we started designing function into each space, we lost the curved forms of the circle. We decided to re-establish the curves with a barrel ceiling. You don't see it very often in Adelaide, but it is common in Spain, Italy and Portugal. It's a very old construction technique," Sam says.





Above The architects curated the project from the foundations through to interior design, including the kitchen island, which features recycled stone pieces that add character and colour. **Opposite page** The heart of the bungalow was previously a dark space, now full of light thanks to a wide corridor that carries the circular motif.

The brief was to be able to see the sky from inside the home



"Everyone fell in love with the concept, and then it was working out who was going to be able to build it. We used a Welsh bricklayer who has experience building compression arches and he did an incredible job."

The Catalan-style barrel ceiling reaches 5.6 metres, with one side supported by a continuous steel beam painted mint-green and fitted with bespoke sliding glass doors.

The barrel ceiling has a semi-circle picture window that faces north. In winter, this window allows sun to reach in and illuminate the brickwork, thermally warming the space.

"The bricks are composed of dry-pressed sand, which gives it a granular tactility," Sally explains. "We instantly loved them, as did the clients."

Key to the renovation is a new central corridor that breaks up the existing home, which was starved of natural light.

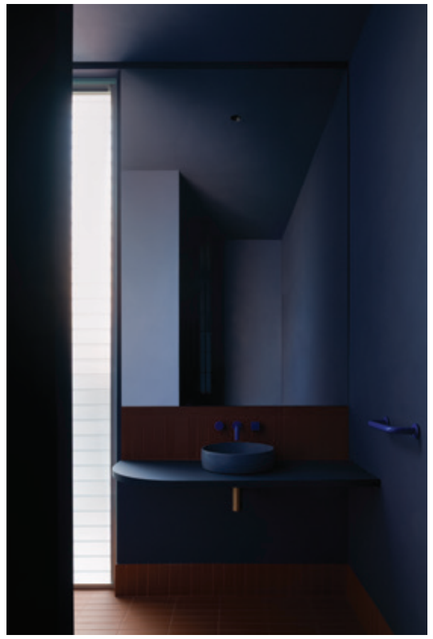
The corridor provides a vista from the front door all the way to the atrium at the rear, where a swathe of broad curved glass brings sunlight into the home and connects to the lush central courtyard.



Instead of a traditional backyard, the home wraps around the garden with curved south-facing glazing that bends and reflects daylight into the adjacent rooms. **Opposite page** The house challenges design convention while being highly liveable.



Left The soft office space is bathed in natural light. **Below** The calming blue bathroom. **Bottom** The deep forest-green guest bathroom is dramatic. **Opposite page** Natural sunlight filters into the en suite.







"It is quite an impactful visual statement as you walk in, which is exactly what the client wanted," Sam says. "The brief was to be able to see the sky from inside the home, something not provided by the old bungalow."

Although the home has a minimalist theme, it's brought to life with playful colour and texture, with hints of mid-century architecture. "The clients didn't want to see classic white gyprock walls, they wanted colour," Sam says.

Some rooms feature colour-blocking tones for calming and cohesive ambiance, and others are fun and vibrant with different colours, textures and unique shapes. Some rooms are masculine and dark, others bright and uplifting, each reflecting the personality of the owners.

The custom kitchen benchtop was inspired by paladiana: a 16th century Venetian masonry technique where random pieces of natural marble or stone are set into a terrazzo matrix. "The client and I picked through recycled pieces of stone and added leftover pieces of the Verdi Alpi kitchen benchtop stone, which were all then cast into pink concrete formwork," Sally says.



Heritage restoration was needed to sure up the bungalow's facade, and creeping viola was planted with the driveway pavers for a unique splash of greenery.

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Each bathroom has its own theme. The muted pink master en suite is bathed in natural light via a skylight and refracted by a ceiling-high mirror. "As the sun moves, the colour in that room dramatically changes from rich earthy reds to toned-back pink hues," Sam says.

"We knew that the diffused eastern light would spill down into the room, but when we witnessed beautiful beams of light being directed into the space – that was a special 'wow' moment that you don't always plan for."

A circular motif is carried throughout the home. The architects say there is a fine line to repeating a motif without overdoing it. But in the Yeo Yo house, it is carefully considered – from the custom steel door frames to the curved barrel ceiling and atrium glazing.

"It's a landmark project that serves as an example of how good a design outcome you can achieve if you give us the breadth and the lead to do that," Sally says. "The non-traditional response can give you a better design outcome, but it's an experiment."

At the Australian Institute of Architects 2026 SA awards, the project won the Interior Architecture category and also took out the coveted gong of Residential Architecture, Alterations and Additions.

But for Sam, the key moment saw him handing over the finished product. "I visited them and we were just sitting in the courtyard on a nice sunny afternoon," Sam says.

"They said to me, 'We really love this home' and it was this incredibly satisfying feeling after quite a few years of hard work."

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