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AN INDOOR FOREST

On a busy street in Melbourne's Carlton, architect Nic Owen has carved himself a quiet home and studio amongst the suburban hubbub. Inspired by Japanese modernist architecture, the building is designed as a tranquil space, where Owen and his artist wife can both live and work.

"The two driving forces behind the project were privacy and noise because of where we're situated," Owen says. "We're right beside a café, we've got a tramline in front of us and then over the road we've got a pub."

The small 1866 cottage has seen a contemporary rear addition provide more space while maintaining the proportions of the original building. "Rather than trying to duplicate and regurgitate an older period in today's conditions we felt it paid much more respect by letting both periods shine," he says.

"There's quite a clear delineation: the office inhabits the older front part of the house and my wife has a studio in the roof space. We've really eked out as much space as possible," Owen explains.

Designing a home that they would live in themselves was no easy task for the architect.

"Basically it just makes it a whole lot harder because you don't have another professional you can turn to and ask for their opinion of the design elements," he says. "We wanted this house to follow our design ethos and be something we could show to potential clients as well, so it was quite important."

In creating privacy and minimising noise it would have been easy for the space to appear cold and inward looking, but Owen's use of colour and natural timbers has created what he describes as an 'indoor forest', where vibrant green carpet leads you through the 'trees' of the spotted gum timber.

"The species we selected we chose purposefully, because just up the road on Elgen Street are spotted gums," he says. "If you look up the road you'll see spotted gums and then look inside our house and you'll see the same thing."

Owen has used Big River Spotted Gum Armourpanel throughout the project for flooring, wall panels, stair treads and even custom-made furniture pieces – a bed, a table and a coffee table made from the same material.

"The amount of people that comment on it is unbelievable... the spotted gum sheets are beautiful they're like a whole tree being unwrapped. They really are something quite beautiful – that would really have to be one of my favourite elements."



PROJECT PROFILE

PROJECT: NIC OWEN STUDIO
 PRODUCT: ARMOURPANEL SPOTTED GUM 2400MM X 1200MM X 15MM
 ARCHITECT: NIC OWEN ARCHITECTS
 PHOTOGRAPHER: PETER CASAMENTO

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