

Made to measure

Our industrial heritage lives on in a townhouse complex

Words **Susan Bugg** Photography **Chris Groenhout**

Inner Melbourne may no longer hum with the sounds of industry, but the significance of manufacturing in shaping our streetscapes is still evident in the warehouse developments and apartment blocks that have replaced the factories.

In some cases, it takes more than a quick glance to realise that what still looks like a place of work is, in fact, a home or homes.

Along one aged red-brick wall in a narrow Fitzroy street, a panel of door buzzers next to a laser-cut steel door is really the only clue that

the interior of this former textile factory is now an eight-townhouse residential development.

"The original character is retained ... this allows the building to retain much of its privacy and security, remaining at a swift glance inconspicuous in the city landscape," says architect Judith North, from Cowland North Architecture Interiors Design.

Judith and her husband, Neville Cowland, designed the complex for a family syndicate who bought the 80-year-old factory from its original owner in 1999.

They set out to preserve not only the facade and saw-toothed roofline — in sympathy with the City of Yarra's heritage overlay — but as much of the existing building fabric as possible.

Only two holes were made in the structure: ▶

Aesthetic

Limestone was chosen for the party walls because of its reflective and thermal qualities (right)



Artwork: Stay Away by Albert Fagan



Artwork: Sleeping Late in Springwood by Guy Gilmore



▶ one as an external door for a unit and the other when part of the roof was removed to open the central courtyard to the sky.

The original oregon roof trusses still stretch across the internal open space, and the design uses existing double brickwork, iron roofing, steel window frames and timber columns.

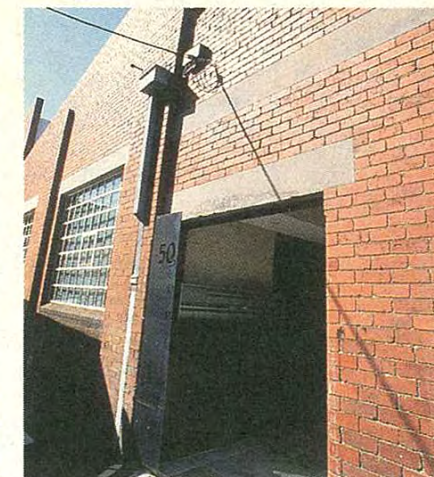
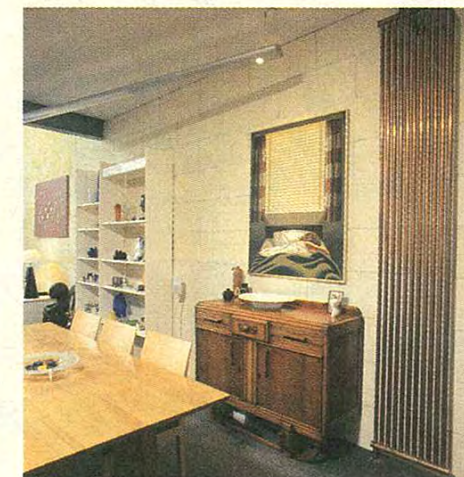
Neville says that where new window frames have been installed, the fenestration copies the original.

Using the building's shell not only preserves the area's industrial heritage. It helped Judith and Neville achieve a major goal — creating an inner-city development using the ecologically sustainable principles that earned them a Royal Australian Institute of Architects award in 2000.

Minimal demolition restricted building waste and landfill, and reduced the impact of construction. An existing transport bay was used to create a 12-space garage.

"There were a few minor cosmetic adjustments there; we put shade cloth over the existing skylights," Neville says.

Many of the materials have a natural feel. Party walls between the townhouses are



limestone, so no fossil fuels were used to make bricks, and staircases are a warm-coloured, recycled bluegum.

North-south cross-ventilation and windows double-glazed in low-e glass help to eliminate the need for airconditioning, and the light-filled townhouses are warmed by an energy-efficient hydronic heating system.

Heat is distributed by eye-catching copper pipe panels, which stretch between two floors.

Materials — including the white sandwich panel of the exterior walls — were also chosen for their low-maintenance qualities.

Floor space in the townhouses ranges from 97.5sqm to 116sqm and, with limited space, there was no room for inefficiencies in the design. Passageways were kept to a minimum and storage units were used as partitions.

"Things other than big can be beautiful," Judith says.

There is also plenty of storage, so residents didn't have to put 20 to 40 years of living into a garage sale before they scaled down to a smaller living space.

With restaurants and galleries close by,

Judith says there's an undoubted attraction to inner-city living, one that should not be restricted to young couples without children.

"The unit development was established so as to appeal to the maximum number and type of buyers," she says.

"I see the complex as an academic and real exercise showing that apartment developers can attract a broader audience."

Heat is on

The copper pipes of the hydronic heating system have a sculptural effect (far left)

Award winners

Judith North and Neville Cowland say things other than big can be beautiful (left)

Comfort

Clever storage means room to move (above left)

Ready-made

The development retains the original red-brick facade of the factory (above)