

**DOF!**  
ARCHITECTURE

# ACUTE HOUSE



## PROJECT INFORMATION

[www.oof.net.au/acute-house/](http://www.oof.net.au/acute-house/)

Project cost: \$750,000

Site size 48 sqm

Dwelling size 145 sqm

Completed June 2016

## CLIENT INFORMATION (NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Michael Briese

26 Withers Street, Albert Park, 3206

## DESIGN TEAM

Architect: Fooi-Ling Khoo

Planning + Heritage: David Brand

Interior Design: OOF in collaboration with JPILD

Engineer: Mark Hodgkinson Consulting Structural Engineers

Building Surveyor: Anthony Middling & Associates

## CONSTRUCTION TEAM

Builder: Mitty & Price | Michael Briese (Builder/Director) Christian Klueter (Foreman)

[mittyanprice@bigpond.com](mailto:mittyanprice@bigpond.com)

External Cladding | Advanced Metal Cladding

Windows and Doors | Pickering Joinery

Joiner | TT Cabinets + Design

Steelwork | Redon Forge

Plumber | Innerline Plumbing

Electrician | Warner Electrical

Heating + AC | Marshall's Heating & Air conditioning Pty Ltd

Concrete Polishing | Lumic

## PHOTOGRAPHER

Nic Granleese

[www.nicgranleese.com](http://www.nicgranleese.com)

## IMAGES





## ACUTE HOUSE DESIGN STATEMENT

Acute House is the transformation of a 'renovator's nightmare' into a compact 21st century family home. The severe limitations of a tiny, very triangular site and the demanding heritage context have resulted in a pointy new wedge of house that is designed to exploit its problems. Promoted at auction as the "cheapest house in Albert Park", this property was clearly signposted as a problem site – a renovator's nightmare, 'too small' or 'too weird' to be viable.

### **Re-calibration of Heritage Aims:**

The unusual nature of this sort of site can render council's standard heritage design techniques inapplicable and require a more site specific-response. The willingness of the City of Port Phillip to discuss what their heritage policy hoped to achieve, and to negotiate a re-think - from first principles – on how this could be pursued on this site, was crucial to achieving the project. The resulting building is as familiar as it is new with a beloved neighbourhood landmark retained in its most visible form plus a contemporary family home and life where it was previously impossible.

### **Small Scale Densification:**

As we search for ways to densify the city appropriately, it becomes increasingly important to realise the potential of even small underutilised sites in infrastructure and service-rich inner suburban areas. These "leftover" sites - often also in important heritage precincts - present challenges due to their awkward geometry or other peculiarities. This project demonstrates the role of good design in tackling a site conventionally dismissed as undevelopable.

Intensive design work was required to mine the space required for a family home from an undersized site (total area 48sqm) in an awkward triangular shape. The resulting house covers 100% of the site and provides a high quality and compact 3-storey, 3 bedroom family home distributed over 145sqm (inclusive of the balcony, services areas as well as the walls of the house itself).

### **Tight**

To take advantage of the opportunities of such an unusual site, the geometry demanded an adjustment to the layout and lifestyle expectations of a conventional family house. Multiple levels were required to accommodate the basic space needs of a family home and these were accommodated where site geometry best suited them. These spaces are distributed over split levels with the vertical space of the stairwell providing visual privacy and a sense of definition without wasting precious space on internal walls, corridors or doors. Continuous circulation is provided through each floor with no dead-ends, allowing spaces to be kept lean yet feeling spacious and unclogged – visually or physically.

### **Virtual Gardening**

While site area limitations and geometry allowed the council to permit building over 100% of the site, this advantage came with the counterbalancing disadvantage of 0% outdoor space. As a result, the house interiors had to accommodate the needs of a family as well as providing them with the enjoyments of the great outdoors. This total lack of garden is offset by the artificial internal landscape of the stairwell with lawn green carpets, hanging plants, a central aquarium of aquatic plants and fish and a sunny outlook to every room. Full height sliding doors and screens allow the main level to be opened up as a verandah-like outdoor living area and the pointy, but surprisingly generous, balcony provides the ambience of a yacht in the street.

### **Heritage-our-ness + Context**

The original, and extremely decrepit, Victorian weatherboard cottage had become impossible to inhabit but was well loved by the neighbourhood as well as its new owners. The design endeavours to preserve the old house as much as possible from warped weatherboards and fence palings to random accumulations such as door knobs, vents and street numbers. Like fragile museum artefacts, these were carefully removed, labelled, stored and re-installed in their original location on a new "mount", the black metal façade of the new house. The façade not only highlights their charms by contrast but also makes the old house liveable again in a new way.

The resulting new wedge of house is designed as an unusual but highly responsive approach to the character of the surrounding neighbourhood, and to the challenges and opportunities for responsive architecture presented by the site and its immediate context. It takes on the challenge of preserving an important but almost unsalvageable local landmark and dramatically re-emphasises the historic oddity of the clashing street grids. It is a celebration of the weirdness of the original timber cottage with its pointy-ended outhouse, and works within the general typology of the neighbourhood by "rhyming" with the surrounding housing stock while remaining resolutely contemporary in its expression.