

**RECYCLED SPACES** IN FOCUS





A rugged multiresidential development in Sydney by Cracknell Lonergan Architects shows that increasing inner-city density need not be detrimental to amenity or aesthetics.

# URBAN STRONGBOX







**PEMME LANE IS HIDDEN** behind the bulky pomp of the Enmore Theatre in Sydney's inner west. It's one of the many secondary service streets that stalk the main arterial roads of the city, following their course in parallel, one block back from the public gaze. Formerly the province of lock-up garages, small-scale industry and the occasional worker's cottage, they make up the finer weft in the weave of the city and are increasingly being inhabited by contemporary residential schemes.

These lanes don't always offer promising sites, and 3 Pommel Lane, a residential scheme by Cracknell Lonergan Architects, suffered more constraints than most. A narrow, deep site – 37 metres long with a 9.5-metre frontage – it has an easement for stormwater drainage running down one side, and earlier residential developments on both flanks. Even more problematic, there's the rear of the theatre across the narrow street, rising up several stories opposite the scheme's frontage. Throw in a flight path to Sydney airport above and you have a pretty hostile environment in which to build something livable.

An existing semi-derelict, single-storey industrial building on the site had already been converted into a five-bedroom share house. More importantly, development approval had recently been given to convert the structure into a triad of three-bedroom houses, with a 1:1 floor space ration. Conversion, here, was a loose term for a scheme that simply retained the brick facade.

Cracknell Lonergan came on board when a new owner, a developer and builder, decided that the existing development approval could be bettered with a new application to Marrickville Council. It turned out to be a long process. Unsurprisingly, given the tight squeeze, residential neighbours lodged many objections, but the local authority offered significant concessions that produced a more sensible built scheme.

The new project comprises three terraced one-bedroom townhouses, bookended at front and rear by a two-bedroom version of the same. The Local Environmental Plan allows more floor space in industrial conversions than in new buildings, and in this case the policy was stretched to cover the two-storey rebuild. Project designer Tom Ferguson wisely chose to face the industrially flavoured townhouses perpendicular to the street, ignoring the looming theatre by addressing a heavily planted secret garden that creates its own mini-enclave. Inside, the units have open-plan kitchen and living areas on the ground floor, and bedrooms, bathrooms and study areas above.

Marrickville Council also agreed to less than 1:1 parking for each townhouse, on the basis that the new development contained fewer bedrooms than had been previously approved. If they are serious about promoting public transport, more councils should be allowing reduced parking for residential developments that have ample access to transport networks, such as this one.





**PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT:** The townhouses turn their attention away from their gritty setting and look out to verdant gardens along the eastern site boundary. **RIGHT:** The building's external skin harks back to its industrial origins. Concrete, steel and flush-mounted windows reflect an "industro-residential" architectural vocabulary. **THESE PAGES, LEFT:** Polished concrete floors make for bright living spaces. **ABOVE:** The extruded balcony of the front townhouse forms a canopy over the garage.

Tom decided to push back against the hostile context with what he calls an "industro-residential" architectural vocabulary for the new dwellings. The lower levels are built of structural designer masonry blocks, supporting an upper floor created using an insulated timber-frame structure clad in unpainted corrugated iron. "It's something you don't see a lot of in Sydney," Tom says, "but there are no heritage issues here, and Marrickville [Council] is a bit more adventurous."

Moreover, an industrial shed typology with a thin-skin aesthetic is entirely appropriate to these laneway sites. It's a style that has been articulated by the materials chosen, as well as by details such as the windows flush-mounted in the corrugated skin. "Normally, I go for deep reveals, but it suits the lightweight approach," Tom says. The window frames are insulated, in a bid to cut noise on those days when the flight paths are crossing the sky above – always a major concern in the inner west. "Internally," adds Tom, "concrete floors, steel balustrades and commercial aluminium-framed windows enhance the industro-residential feel."

A pierced metal gate hides the access path to the units. There's a parking bay for three cars on the street boundary, in front of the heavy masonry and concrete plinth forming the base of the building, and under the cantilevered upper floor that holds the front unit's second bedroom. Fixed planter boxes in front of the windows at the upper

level give this room a green fringe. Tom says that the articulation of the common entry facade on the west side, along with stands of bamboo, helps "break up the gun-barrel effect that might otherwise have been created" down the length of the entry way.

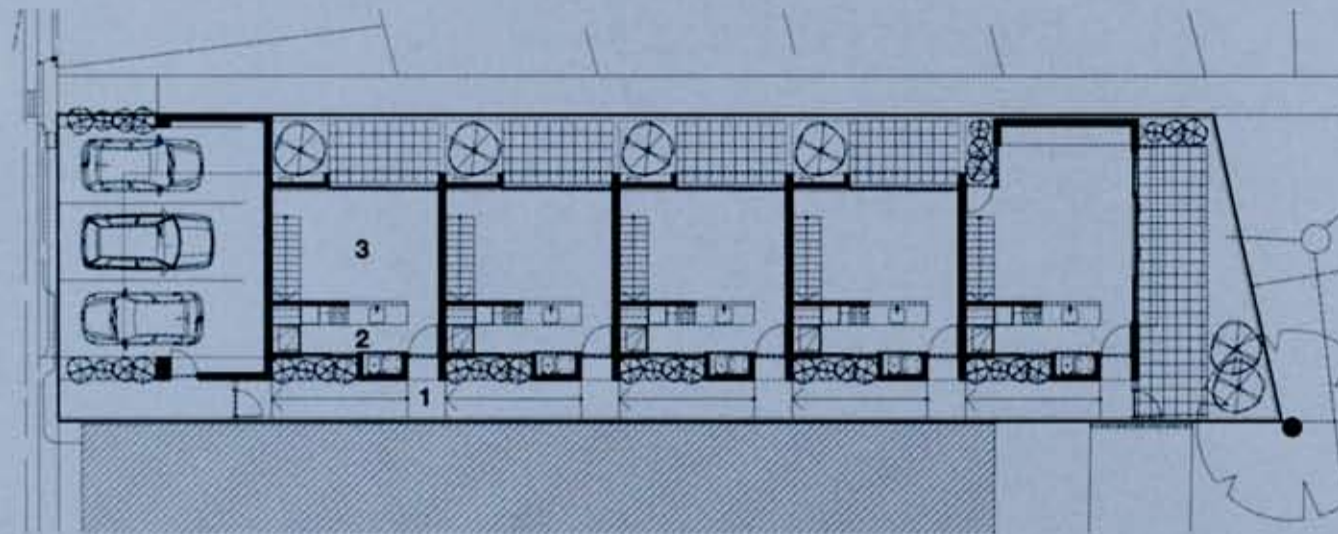
While the industrial lines of the building are a definite feature here, they are softened by plantings on the eastern side. Here, each unit has its own small yard, running back to the flanking easement line. The rear property has a full-width garden. Tom argues that this, too, is an improvement on the previously approved scheme, which had its open spaces arranged around shadowy internal courtyards. Directing the main inhabited facades down the long side of a site is not something normally welcomed by planners concerned about the creation of active frontages opposite properties across the boundary. In this case, however, the strategy simply mirrors the existing situation in the adjacent residential blocks.

If our cities' footprints are to be limited in the name of sustainability, then increased densities will demand that windfall sites like Pommel Lane are used to their full potential. High-quality accommodation can be supplied without detriment to existing amenity, and this scheme is an example of how to do it. It is also an instance where a local council has responded positively, if slowly, to sound arguments about density, parking and architectural quality. **ROBERT BEVAN**



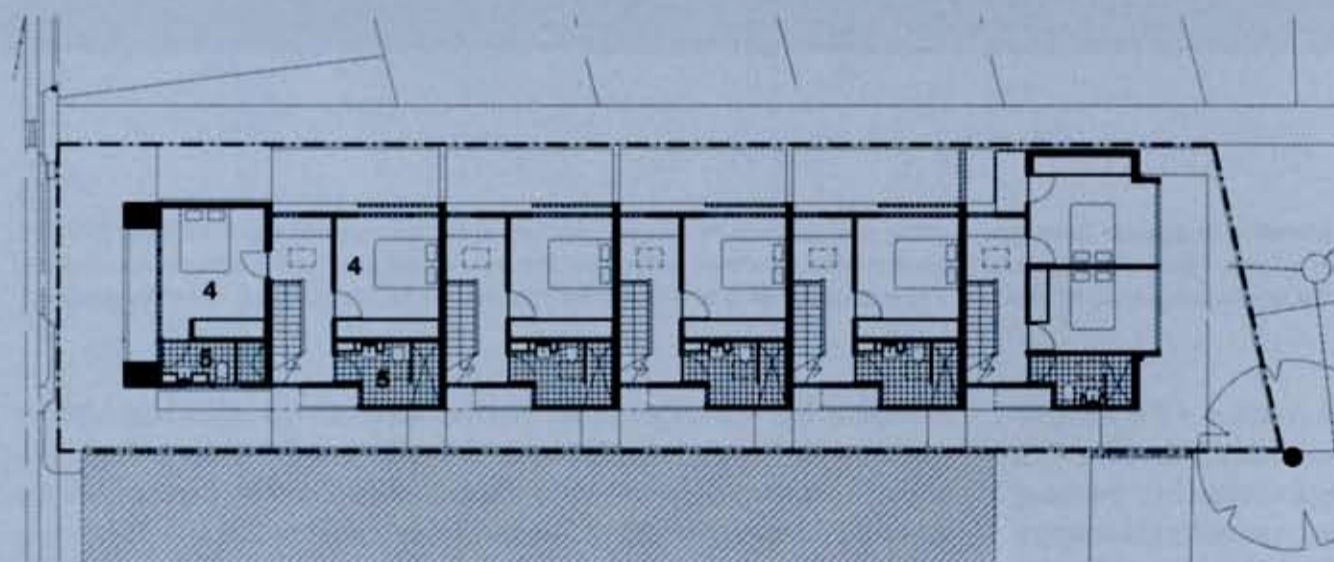
## RECYCLED SPACES IN FOCUS

- 1 Entry
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Dining/living
- 4 Bedroom
- 5 Bathroom



Ground level

0 5 10 m



Upper level

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**PRACTICE PROFILE**  
 Fifteen-person practice specializing in medium-density inner-city housing, particularly adaptive reuse/renewal projects.

**PROJECT TEAM**  
 Tom Ferguson, Peter Lonergan

**BUILDER**  
 Civic Project Management

**PRODUCTS**  
**Roofing** Lysaght Trimdek Hi-Ten steel with Zinalume finish; Insulco vapour-check insulation  
**External walls** Lysaght Zinalume cladding with corrugated profile; PGH full-brick masonry; Boral Besser split-face blocks  
**Internal walls** CSR Gyprock plasterboard  
**Windows** Mid City Windows aluminium windows  
**Doors** Corinthian Doors Retro entry door  
**Flooring** Boral polished concrete on ground floor; wool blend carpet on first floor  
**Lighting** Stainless steel fittings; custom cover to facade floodlight  
**Kitchen** Smeg appliances; CaesarStone benchtop; matt 2-pac joinery from Nuline Kitchens; Dorf tapware  
**Bathroom** Marquis vanities; Novelli Tapware; ceramic floor and wall tiles  
**Climate control** Finna gas hot water; LG multi-split inverter aircon  
**External elements** Boral coloured concrete to access way, tiled courtyard

**TIME SCHEDULE**  
**Design, documentation** 3 months  
**Construction** 9 months

**SITE SIZE**  
 360 m<sup>2</sup>

**PROJECT COST**  
 \$950,000

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
 Tom Ferguson