

HOME STYLE



JOHANNA LEGGATT



Conversation starter

This former Richmond shop has been transformed into a warm and inviting family home



YOU wouldn't guess it from the great big "hello" spelt out on the side of her Richmond home, but artist Rose Nolan isn't a loud person.

She doesn't have over-the-top furnishings or expensive statement pieces and the living space she shares with husband Ian Hicks is intimate and compact, with soft curtains to cordon off space and simple wood cabinetry that is immaculately finished.

But her art is a different matter. Ms Nolan (no relation to the Nolan art family) has developed a reputation for her bold red-and-white text art.

And her cheery greeting to the neighbourhood is similarly bold, and has been fashioned in a white brickwork pattern along the western side of her home.

"The idea came from the planning guidelines from local councils, which talk about renovations needing to be in conversation with the street," Ms Nolan said.

"And I am a literal person, so I thought, 'Well, what about a big hello?' People love it. It's had such a strong response."

Architect Fook-Ling Khoo, from OOF! Architecture, said the salutation solved a multitude of problems.

"We needed a blank wall facing the street because it sits directly opposite the local cafe, the mini civic hub of the neighbourhood," Ms Khoo said.

"If we had made it all glass, there would have been no privacy at all and it would have been like living in a fishbowl. And we felt it should be brick because we wanted to continue the brick story that was part of the heritage of the house and the neighbourhood. But a blank barge-arse wall was not what the owners wanted as their 'face' to the locals."

Ms Nolan and her husband had been living in the 184sq m Victorian-era former shop for a number of years before renovating, so knew exactly how to make the most of the home's small dimensions and aspect.

The window in the 'O' of hello, for example, looks out on to a narrow street and the lights of the MCG at night. It also affords a stellar view of the New Year's Eve fireworks.

The couple bought the two-bedroom home in 2005 after it was passed in at auction — "we could never afford Richmond now" — and began renovating in

2013. "We were looking for a space that could accommodate Ian's stepson, Ned, on occasions, as well as a workspace for me," Ms Nolan said.

"The good thing about moving in before renovating was that we actually got to live in the space for a while and get a sense of what was important and what the views were and where the light was.

"We heard lots of renovation horror stories about how the budget is always way more and there are always delays, but we had none of that."

They turned the front of the shop into Ms Nolan's art studio and moved the main entrance to the side of the home next to the hello wall.

They extended the tiny living area and left the roof trusses exposed to create more space. The simple wooden cabinetry in the kitchen includes beautiful hand-turned doorknobs from In-Teria in Tasmania.

"It was lovely to have something local and Australian-made," Ms Nolan said.

"It's an open-space kitchen so it has to be very efficient. We said, 'This is what we need: appliance covers where you can put it all away'."

The floors are polished concrete and the home is cooled by giant fans and warmed via double-glazing and high-efficiency in-slab hydronic heating.

There is a small back courtyard, off the living area, that is used for barbecues and the occasional bout of backyard cricket.

The furnishings are simple — an Eames chair, a small couch and a Roger Capron coffee table make up the seating area — but the hallway connecting the studio to the rest of the house is slightly bolder with its red carpet and wall art.

"After we moved in here, my cat, a tonkinese, died and one day I decided to write the word 'hopeful' on the wall as a way of dealing with the grief," Ms Nolan said. "The artwork was a way of moving forward."

The couple adore the home and can't imagine selling or ever moving anywhere else.

"We love the community here, we like being connected to the cafe over the road and we love the feel of the space," Ms Nolan said.

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Rose Nolan and her Richmond home. Photos: Chris Groenhout



Postscript

WITH ROSE NOLAN

What first attracted you to the home?

The location and the feel of the original shop. I'm not interested in Victorian architecture but, for me, seeing that studio space (the shop) and thinking, 'I can work here' was important.

Your favourite room?

The living room, where we spend most of our time. I love the warmth of the materials. They're very basic, mostly plywood, but I like the idea of having big curtains where we can section off the seating area from the kitchen.

Best party you've celebrated here?

Ian's 50th birthday. We opened up the house and there were kids running up and down. The home can be intimate, private and warm or you can open up the glass doors like a pavilion and it's just very airy and light.

Any styling advice?

Go for less, but go for quality. Go for the original and not the rip-off, if you can. And enjoy the process of looking and collecting. I think sometimes people move into a new space and think they have to fill it up straight away.

Favourite piece of furniture?

My Eames chair, which I bought after I sold a big piece of art. Or my Roger Capron tiled coffee table. We sit around it on the floor sometimes and have dinner.

What does home mean to you?

A sanctuary and privacy. It's the first place that Ian and I have had together and often I will come home and Ian will say to me, "I can't believe this is ours".

