

# more than a name

One of Sydney's most innovative renovation builders has never turned down an opportunity to transform a home. Amanda Williamson reports.

**C**ape Cod, despite its name, hasn't done a traditional Cape Cod style extension for many years. Instead the company focuses on what Paul Petrusma, Cape Cod's director of business development, says are 'modern, spacious designs; designed with the clients' needs and budget in mind'.

Paul says the company, which was established in the Sydney suburbs in 1965, outgrew steep pitched roofs and dormer windows very quickly, and has since become a leader of construction techniques and developments.

'I understand that we were the first company to include a range of procedures and products in our system of building that has kept us not only in business, but at the forefront of the

industry,' he says. 'We pioneered the platform floor system, the use of polyfabric over floors to protect the existing residence, and made standard the screwing down of floors and sealing around all windows. We routed boards to create the Weatherex brick pattern and introduced a waterproofing system that works under low-pitch tile roofs. The company was first to use full scaffold on all job sites and a catch scaffold on the roof to fulfil occupational health and safety priorities. And we continue to look for new and better ways of working.'

The company won the national HIA Professional Renovator Builder of the Year Award last year in part because of its commitment to its customers; providing prompt, reliable service with as much information as possible. And through using more internet-based marketing tools to gain a competitive edge, Cape Cod has now set up its own Facebook page.

'You build up a relationship with clients long term so you really need a

Facebook page that's interesting, updated regularly, and with lots of good information,' Paul explains. With much of the business's work coming from referrals, he thinks this recent development has growing potential.

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Specialising in mainly second storey additions and some ground floor extensions, Paul says that there has never been a renovation that Cape Cod hasn't been able to do. However, he believes that renovations are more complicated than building from scratch as 'you're not just starting with a clean sheet of paper, you've really got to work with what's there'.

He explains that many of their clients live in older – Victorian or Federation style – houses and while they want to remain consistent with the era, they also want modern luxuries and a contemporary feel.





## Extension vs addition

According to Paul Petrusma, Cape Cod's director of business development, Cape Cod is Sydney's largest specialist home renovations company. It differentiates between *additions*, which it defines as adding another storey to a home or 'building up', and *extensions*, which apply to a project that adds rooms at ground level or to an existing floor, or 'building out'.

Cape Cod says a well-designed addition can:

- add significant value to a home
- enable home improvement by creating space downstairs for larger living and kitchen areas
- make the most of available views
- retain outdoor living areas.

It says some reasons for choosing an extension include:

- not wanting to alter the street appearance of the house
- not wanting stairs
- for smaller renovations it may be cheaper to extend out than to build up
- however, the cost of excavation and new footings can be significant, and outdoor living space will be lost.

'In situations where we're allowed, we can turn an old style place into something unbelievable. In terms of before and after – you wouldn't recognise them, they are such transformations. However, sometimes with older homes you may be in a heritage conservation area where there might be some restrictions. Councils or the client want to keep the character of the original home, so it is about finding a balance between style, needs and budget,' Paul explains.

'Retaining the character but adding so much more space inside with an addition is just wonderful to achieve. Renovations are a challenge, but the joy for us is turning something rundown into something you wouldn't pick as a home extension. All of our designs are trying to achieve that balance.'

Cape Cod completes around 90 major home extension projects annually throughout the Sydney metropolitan and Gosford regions, which makes them the largest in Sydney, Paul believes.

The business works on between 25 and 30 projects at a time, ranging in value from \$80,000 to \$1 million. 'Our clients want the extra space, the finishes and the look, views and so on, all of which are important. But we don't knock anyone back,' he adds. 'If you want a first floor home addition and you're on a limited budget, we'll work within that budget.' Regardless of budget he says Cape Cod will work to the highest standards of quality construction.

The company completes the whole process for their clients. 'We offer a full design service, work on approvals all the way through to the council, and any other approvals or compliance requirements, and then we construct,' Paul explains. 'For our clients, it means that there is only one point of contact to worry about.'

Working as both designer and builder allows Cape Cod to work closely with local governments and get to know local regulations. 'We know what's acceptable and what's not ... Different councils interpret things differently and there are different rules to work with.'

Paul believes the company's main selling point is its attention to detail, particularly customer service. 'We address every sort of maintenance requirement throughout. And we follow up with our clients because we want them to be happy for the long term. We bend over backwards to make sure they are happy at the end of the project – not just at the start, but all the way through. We try and understand how the customer would feel throughout the process and that helps.'

Paul thinks this also helps explain the longevity of the company. And with many of the 25 office staff and 100-odd contractors having worked with Cape Cod for more than 10 years, Paul is onto something: 'We've been here for 45 years and you don't stay that long if you're not serious about meeting the changing needs and desires of your clients.' **H**