

Demolish and Profit?

by Tom Smith

For many developers the assumption is that demolishing a house, subdividing the land, and building two new properties leads to a higher profit. But is that always necessarily true? When we look at older houses in a place like Norwood, there is a demand for them to be retained and upgraded/extended. Of course, a private buyer is not concerned with profit but simply to create their ideal home. A developer however may not be so concerned with the heritage value but rather the bottom line on their investment. Here, I want to make a case for such retention where it can still mean a good return for the developer. I will also give a recent example in Norwood where this has been the case.

Firstly, apart from the perceived heritage value of a property, it makes sense to utilise what is already there. Existing foundations can be kept, solid bluestone walls can be repaired at a fraction of their replacement cost, timber floors rejuvenated etc etc. Internal layouts are modifiable to create more open space and kitchens and bathrooms can be updated/replaced. And of course, rear/side extensions are usually possible due to the typically generous land sizes. Doing a high spec renovation plus addition can lead to a property that would be in high demand and fetch a considerable price. Not everybody wants to share walls with their neighbours so there will always be a premium for freestanding properties in inner areas. There is also probably a premium for build quality – some of these properties have been around for 100+ years and, with quality restoration, can be around for a hundred more. The modern trend for prefabricated ‘tilt-up’ construction saves time and money on the build but their long term durability is yet to be tested.

All this is fine in theory but what about in reality? Well, here is an example of what actually HAS been done in Norwood. Anthony & Tracey Securo of Securo Projects are custom renovators and occasional developers. Their passion, however, is for renovating and improving inner city villas. Their most recent project was 26 William St, Norwood. They purchased the property for essentially land value but saw the potential for restoration to bring it to its former glory and to modernise and extend it to satisfy present expectations. There was no heritage listing although it is a moot point as to whether demolition would have been approved (we all know developers somehow get their way eventually...). The villa had sound bluestone walls and solid foundations. Initially they restored the existing building – winning the HIA ‘Bathroom of the Year’ award along the way. Then they added an open plan extension to provide a light and airy environment and completed the project with a swimming pool and landscaped gardens. With their smart design and by using the highest quality materials they ended up with something that commanded an extremely high price and duly sold the property to an owner occupier. Now this property will sit proudly in the streetscape for a long time to come. Presently Securo Projects are doing the same thing with a villa in Unley.

See the photos below for before and after views. We should encourage more of this work – perhaps even some financial incentives? There is a place for higher density within our inner suburbs but let us do it intelligently and in the right areas. Not every old building needs to be nor should be preserved but many have qualities in their building and history and deserve the chance to be retained for future generations to enjoy. The above demonstrates that this can even be done at a profit...

26 William St, Norwood - Before



After...

