



Three mates risk it all with a home renovation that had more than its fair share of ups and downs

FLIPPING OUT

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COURTYARD (opposite) A true entertainer's zone, the kitchen flows out to a courtyard by Outdoor Establishments in this new Sydney home. A trailing plant, Dichondra 'Silver Falls', softens the exposed brick. **KITCHEN (this page)** One of the owners Daniel Hedge at the curved concrete bench he built.



Island bench After approaching builders with his curved bench idea and being told it couldn't be done, Daniel worked with an engineer to create it himself. He created the formwork and cut a curved Perspex mould.

cheat sheet

Who bought this: A trio of friends - James Mafumo and Michael Edwards, both oil riggers and both 26; and licensed builder Daniel Hedge, 29. The men have now started their own "boutique property rebirthing firm" called A Gentleman's Agreement.

\$\$\$\$ The trio took on a complete revamp of a tired heritage-listed terrace in Sydney's Woolloomooloo, giving it a modern yet respectful update.

Fireplace Trystan Graham of Outdoor Establishments designed this feature. The cladding is from Kellyville Landscape Supplies. The lintel above the hearth is a sandstone footing from the old house.

LIVING AREA Vintage pieces - such as the Cool Edies sofa and a coffee table from Vampt Vintage Design, recall the history of this terrace.



Staircase lighting Taking inspiration from nightclubs, the owners used subtle strips of LED lights to showcase the stairway. LED lights are cheap to buy and run, making it a cost-effective lighting option.

It's hard to go past a 'Renovator's Delight' without pausing to think, 'could I?' What would happen if you bought an unloved property, renovated it and then 'flipped' or sold it – would you make a profit? Or would you be undone by the vagaries of a volatile real-estate market, and the unknown costs of the whole process?

Almost two years ago, three optimistic friends developed a plan. Working on off-shore oil rigs, Michael Edwards and James Mafumo (pictured above, left and right) made a pact to move on when it didn't make sense for them any more. "Everyone on oil rigs over 30 is either divorced or about to get divorced and we didn't want to be the same," says James. The friend to complete the trio, builder Daniel Hedge (pictured, centre), recalls they were travelling when the idea of working together first got tossed around. "It was just a topic of conversation," he says, "but it did plant a seed of thought."

The trio's first project was the deck and pergola entertaining area at James's mum's house in Berowra. This further fuelled their ambition to work together. James and Michael went on the hunt for a rundown property where they could demonstrate their renovating skills, hopefully make some money and do some networking so they could set themselves up for their new company, A Gentleman's Agreement. After seven months of searching, a dilapidated three-storey terrace in Sydney's Woolloomooloo was, as James describes, "the ideal launch pad for our firm".

The house had been on the property market for 11 months and was formerly owned by the NSW Department of Housing. Most of the floor was rotten, there was significant water damage everywhere, the staircase had been removed (as had most internal walls), and there wasn't a kitchen or bathroom to speak of. "We couldn't have lived there even if we wanted



"THE PROPERTY WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MIX OUR MODERN FLAÏR WITH A HISTORIC SYDNEY STRUCTURE" JAMES MAFUMO, OWNER



Feature wall While researching the building's heritage, James, Daniel and Michael found an old photo of the street the house is located in. This image was made into wallpaper now covering a wall in the second bedroom.

LESSONS LEARNT

"WE'VE MADE SOME AMAZING RELATIONSHIPS THAT WE'LL TAKE TO OUR NEXT PROJECT" JAMES MAFUMO, OWNER

As inexperienced renovators, James, Michael and Daniel said that the most important thing they learned during the renovation was the value of collaboration. "We've made some amazing relationships that we'll take to our next project," says James. The trio wish they had known more about heritage restrictions, though. "It added expense and effort we hadn't anticipated," says James. "It slowed our progress at the start and impacted the bottom line. That said, we now have that experience under our belts."

to," says Daniel. "Everything was demolished and either scrapped or recycled. We worked for a few weeks off an eight-metre ladder stretching from the sub-floor to the attic while demolition and setout took place."

One of the most memorable first tasks was cleaning out a thick layer of cockroach droppings in the roof cavity, but there was hidden treasure to be found in the rubble. "During the demolition, we found historical elements we could recycle," says James. "The original roof rafters were turned into decorative louvres, and convict bricks were repurposed as feature walls and outdoor planter boxes."

With no previous renovating experience, James, Michael and Daniel spent the next 18 months dealing with government departments, tradesmen and colourful locals. "They provided endless entertainment in the park across the road with regular visits from the police," says James.

James and Michael moved in with James' mother to save money, as they completely financed the construction out of their own pockets. The pair worked three weeks at the oil rig, followed by three weeks on the house. "The nature of our work really lent itself to a project like this," says James. "We were fully engaged on the reno for three-week stints."

Daniel spent seven months travelling back and forth from his job in Queensland. "I worked a 10-days-on, four-days-off roster; I got good at sleeping on planes," he says. Then he was made redundant and moved back to work full-time on the house.

Being new to the whole renovation game, the guys were keen to try new ideas, often sourced from social media and their favourite bars. "James spent hours searching through magazines, Pinterest and Instagram to find the right elements," says Daniel. The curved concrete kitchen island bench



Ensuite elements The benchtop, handcrafted by Leigh Bridgeman, is made from recycled railway sleepers. One-way mirror glass separates the toilet and the shower.



MASTER BEDROOM The pallet bed is centre stage in this airy space. An artful Mexsii bedhead is teamed with dotted sheets from Collected By LeeAnn Yare and luxe Bedouin Societe linen from LivedIn Coogee.



TIMELINE

2012

December After a seven-month search, property is purchased with extended settlement to allow time for finance approval.

2013

January Settlement of property.
May DA approved by Sydney City Council.
October Daniel is made redundant from his job

2014

and moves to work on the project full time.
December After months of planning, the first mould for the kitchen island bench shatters.

January Second (and successful) mould made for kitchen island bench.
March Engaged style team Cool Edies to furnish and style the house for sale.

House is on the market and open to the public for inspection.
April Despite positive feedback, property is sold at auction for a loss.

THE TALLY

Purchase price	\$650,000
Pre-purchase and settlement costs (including stamp duty and DA)	\$69,623
Construction costs (including landscaping)	\$457,076
Selling costs (including agents commission, sale campaign and styling)	\$35,300
SALE PRICE	\$1,180,000
PROFIT/LOSS	-\$32,000

was an experiment. “It had to be done on site and in place, a logistical nightmare with the bench itself weighing over four tonnes,” recalls James. “We added digital electric heating to both the benchtops, which act to warm the entire ground floor during winter.”

The men also built new relationships and developed collaborations. Outdoor Establishments created an elegant rear courtyard with director Trystan Graham building the stone-clad fireplace, too. Rory Allan and Phil Slade of AllanSlade Constructions contributed to many of the designs such as the timber stair patterns and the large skylight in the kitchen.

The trio contracted stylists Jane Frosh and Lucy Tweed of Cool Edies to furnish the house for real estate photography, however, the creative duo had different plans. They created an open house, setting the building up as an exhibition of homewares and accessories from bespoke craftspeople and vintage vendors. All the pieces were up for sale.

While their inexperience had its benefits (“We never would’ve taken this on, if we’d known how hard it would be,” says James), it also made things difficult. “Not many people took us seriously until they saw the product – a prospective buyer told us it’s the best renovation he’d ever seen,” says Michael. “We were always certain of our abilities and the quality of our work but to receive positive feedback is a great affirmation that this is something we should do,” says James.

And, in the end, did they make money? Sadly, no, but all three agree it was an invaluable learning experience. The friends are now on the lookout for the perfect hospitality project as their next venture. Watch this space. ❖
For more about *A Gentleman’s Agreement*, visit agentlemansagreement.com.au.
Turn to page 151 for details about the products pictured.



Feature wall The convict brick wall is a relic of the building. Hours of chipping away render revealed the rough-hewn brickwork - a clear sealer was applied to protect it. A strip of LED lighting is glued behind the architrave for a special touch.



STUDY/BEDROOM Attention to detail and the quality of finishes gives this room flexibility as either a home office or guest bedroom.

FLOORPLAN

