



# DESIGN AND BUILD WITH CONFIDENCE

## Camperdown apartment goes back to the future

### Background

The concrete 'bones' of an old car assembly works in inner Sydney have been given new life in a fresh take on adaptive reuse and sustainability

#### AT A GLANCE

**Architect:** Archer Office

**Design Team:** Tomek Archer, Carmen Blanco

**Images:** Kasia Werstak

**Builder:** Arc Projects

### The Challenge

Rhodes House in Camperdown was built in 1926 as a car assembly plant before becoming better known as the site of Bradford Cotton Mills. In 1993, the building was converted into 140+ apartments, and while its concrete structure was largely preserved the inside was completely reconfigured.

Fast forward 25 years and architect Tomek Archer was charged with redesigning the interior of one of the building's first-floor apartments.

The 1993 conversion had created a generous, double-height (4.9 metre) living area and a two-bedroom mezzanine. However, both architect and client felt they could achieve far more with the available space and natural light.

### Solution/Outcome

The decision was made to gut the apartment and start again, utilising a purpose-build steel framework to create a new, larger mezzanine (three bedrooms), lots of glass to increase the ingress of light (including a glass-floored hallway on the mezzanine level), and natural timbers to balance the palette.

As part of the gutting, the wall, floor and ceiling linings were also stripped away, revealing the original board-formed concrete columns and slabwork of the factory.

Archer and his client were delighted at the find, deciding to embrace these features as both visible and structural connections to the building's past. He describes the





exposed concrete ceiling, in particular, as “....rough as guts,, but that’s what we love about it.”

“It looks like they used some sort of concrete blockwork (in the slab) and then poured around them. I’m guessing it must have been, at the time, a cheap way to construct a big concrete floor in a large industrial building.

“But it’s left us with a really interesting pattern in the ceiling, that we’ve chosen to feature as a contrast to the plywood lining under the mezzanine.”

With the columns positioned on a shared internal boundary wall, only one half is exposed inside the apartment. But it’s enough to lend an additional air of authenticity to the renovation, with the raw concrete surface creating another textural counterpoint to the sleek steel, glass and timber elements.

On the apartment’s ground floor, an in situ concrete topping slab with a polished finish has been added.

Archer is currently working on a number of adaptive re-use projects, aimed at breathing new life into old industrial buildings.

“It’s something we feel strongly about. If you make a building that is solid and provides good spaces, then there’s no reason why it can’t perform various difference used throughout its life span,” he says.

“It (Rhodes House) was built so solidly in the first place, and now that it’s an apartment building you can see it being in its current configuration for perhaps another 100 years.”



*If you make a building that is solid and provides good spaces, then there’s no reason why it can’t perform various difference used throughout its life span,”*

Tomek Archer - Archer Office

## BENEFITS OF USING CONCRETE:

- **Sustainability:**  
Reuse of original structural elements
- **Aesthetics:**  
A textural balance to other materials used in the refurbishment