

## Planning your Property

When recently interviewed about the process that I go through when renovating a property, I touched on the idea of fixing “proximity issues” and my explanation of what they are and how to overcome them was quite an interesting discussion, which I thought I would share with you.

My two bedroom apartment in Potts Point is a good starting point for talking about obvious proximity issues. When I purchased the property with the kitchen at one end of the house, and the dining at the other, I had a very obvious problem. The solution was simple; just move the kitchen or the dining room (or both) so that they were adjacent to each other. In this case it was fairly straight forward after reconfiguring the floor plan but there were a few issues, which are common and surmountable, those being the ability to relocate the room by removing walls and whether in an apartment plumbing could be easily and effectively relocated in relation to existing exit points.

The solution to the first issue is simple, you need only get the advice of a structural engineer to see if the wall is bearing any load, and if it is what is required to take the load in the event that the wall can be removed. Sometimes you will get lucky if the building’s slabs have been made to be supported by columns and not the internal walls, sometimes not, though in the case you need to bear the load you will generally only require a wooden or steel beam which means in most cases (dependant on the Engineer’s advice) you should be able to remove internal walls. Once you have the Engineer’s report, you should get approval from the building and council as removing walls is something that will require a DA, though be sure to only put the works that a DA is required for on the DA, ie; Don’t put the kitchen or beautification works on the DA as they ask you to estimate the price, and then charge you based on that estimate, so keeping your DA to include only the necessary works will save you fees.

Plumbing is the second common issue you’ll face when wanting to improve a floor plan to solve issues with proximity. These issues are more restrictive in apartments than they are in homes, though sometimes in homes the thickness of the slab can impede the ease of changing plumbing. In an apartment you will almost always face the issue of not being able to move your exit points without entering the apartment below, and gaining their permission to alter through their ceiling. This has the added issue of having to alter the ceilings in the apartment below and then rectify after the plumbing has been done, if you get permission at all, which in my experience is rare. But never fear. There are ways to work with the constraints of your existing plumbing like where, in Potts Point, I had to move the kitchen from one side of a bedroom to the other. In this instance all that was required was to run the hot, cold, gas and waste along the edge of the bedroom wall, building a box over the lot, which would then form the bedhead and bedsides. This saved having to chase the walls (which is messy, noisy and adds to your labour costs) and allowed for the services to be relocated, but exit to the existing locations.

When you are looking to relocate a bathroom or a kitchen the obvious spots to relocate them would be existing laundries, bathrooms (to relocate a kitchen) or kitchens (to relocate a bathroom), or integrating the laundry into the kitchen as these are the most straight-forward solutions. Your major concern with the relocation of a bathroom is the location of the toilet as this can be problematic to move, if you’re moving it more than a few feet away. The simplest solution generally is to leave it where it is, even if that means creating a stand-alone WC rather than including it in the bathroom.

In terms of proximity you will also sometimes have the issue in a floor plan that you have a bedroom as the largest room, or as I saw recently, the bedroom opens out to the yard or balcony and “land locks” the lounge in the middle of the property, limiting it’s exposure to light and ventilation. Obviously the solution is to put a living area where there’s provision for the

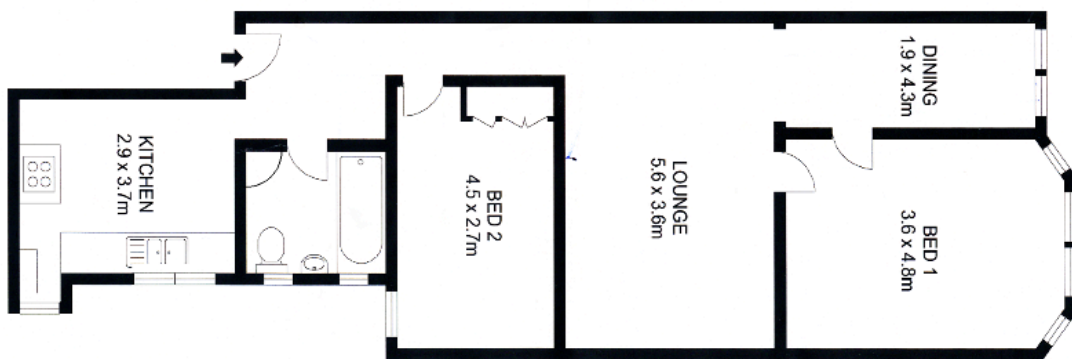
indoor/outdoor lifestyle that we favour in modern living, but sometimes that will require careful thought to “what gets moved and where” as changing your layout will have implications on the size of other rooms, walkways and flow.

The other issue you have is when a living space is too close to a sleeping space, or the sleeping space is exposed to too much light or noise and again most of the solutions put forward above apply. It’s important when looking to improve a floor plan to think about things like light exposure, noise exposure, location of bathrooms in relation to bedrooms, kitchens to dining spaces, and lounge rooms to the outdoors, light & ventilation, though the solutions once found will add usability, visual space and better flow to your property which increases it’s appeal and therefore it’s value.

When renovating or improving a property the very first thing I do is look at the floor plan, in plan (on paper or on my computer) and see if there are any obvious issues of proximity and flow. I think if you are to spend your time and money improving one thing only it should be the floor plan, as it’s what most people notice as a problem but are often not able to rectify of their own accord, giving you the opportunity to turn an undesirable layout into a well thought out plan.

Here’s my example:

### BEFORE



### AFTER

