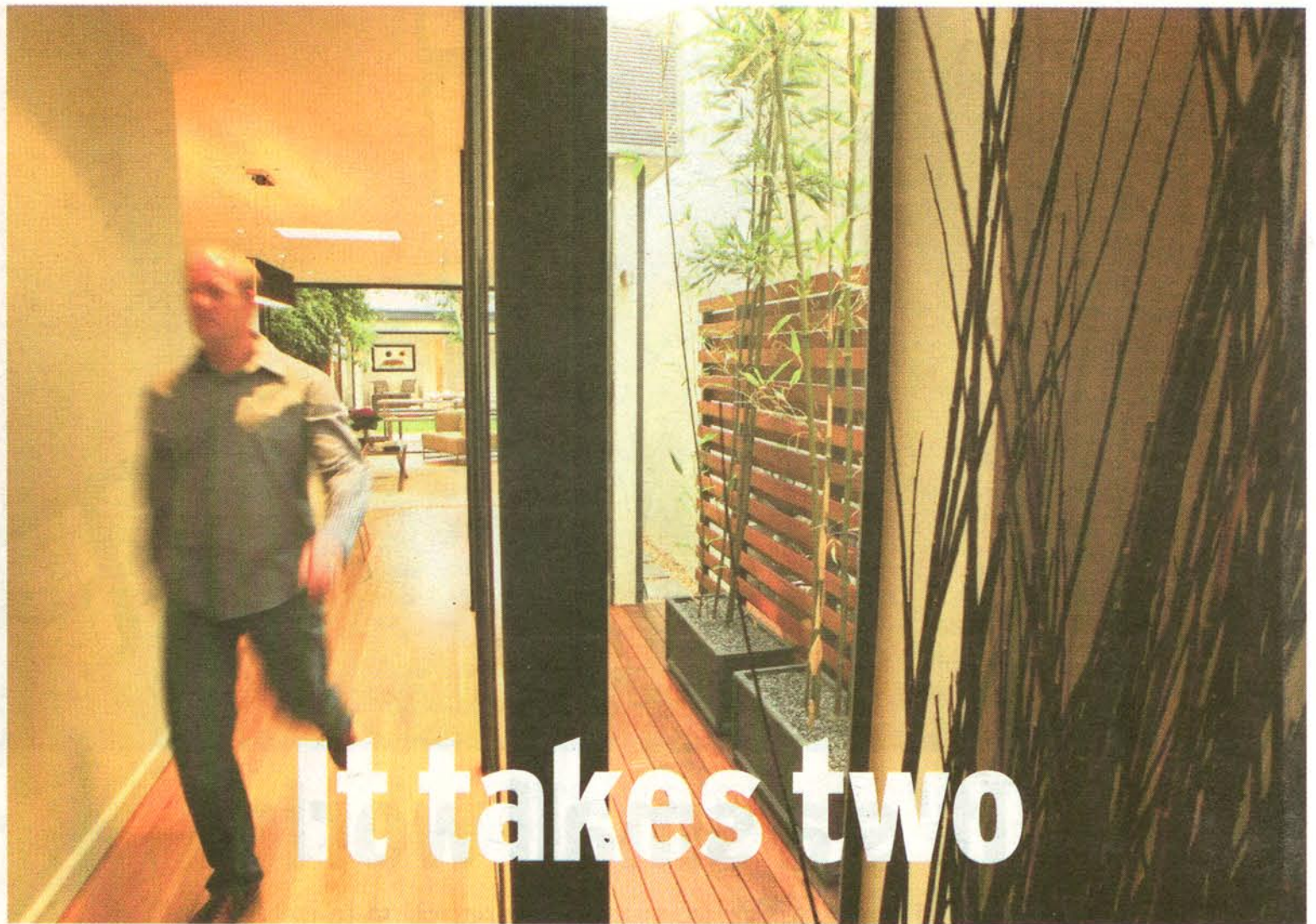




**Modern touches** A new master bedroom balcony and timber fence update the front, blending with the streetscape. The old rear (below) had to go.



**Old and new** Historic features such as the hearth and fireplace remain. Drab, dilapidated rooms were replaced with light-filled interiors.



# It takes two

An architect and her brother team up to reinvent a clapped-out city terrace.

**R**at-infested rubbish once overflowed from the front yard of this Surry Hills terrace, making it almost impossible to enter. But brother and sister renovation team Chris and Nicole Kreis decided it was the house for them.

"Our father worked in real estate and would often take us abroad on work trips," says Swiss-born Nicole. "Chris and I saw lots of houses and land so it became a dream of ours to one day do a project together."

After years of working in top architectural firms in America and Europe, Nicole seized the opportunity to fulfil the ambition when her sibling moved to Australia. Chris says: "We did our research and discovered Surry Hills was an up-and-coming area." He hoped the \$580,000, two-bedroom buy would become the ideal project and home. Initially, it looked like an uphill struggle. Piles of junk, collected by a former owner, had been cleared

away from the 167-square-metre site but the narrow, 4.6-metre-wide property was termite-ridden.

"I'm surprised the building was still standing," Chris says. "Most of the floor joists were unusable. You could put your fingers through the timber."

The dedicated DIYer became project manager, helped builders gut and paint the property and cleaned hundreds of bricks for reuse.

Meanwhile, Nicole drew up plans for a smart, open-plan extension including a loft conversion, separate rear studio-shower and a central deck and lawn. The result is a transformation from a gloomy inner city slum to a glamorous urban oasis. Light permeates the long, north-facing kitchen-living room through a skylight and full-width bifolds.

Halfway down the east wall, a series of fixed glass panes form an atrium, brightening the heart of the home. "We went for handmade, steel-framed glass to keep the frames strong and small. They open the house," Chris says.

To improve ground floor flow, the old transverse staircase was removed and replaced with stylish, grey box steps to the west. Upstairs,

there are three bedrooms, including a converted loft space-study and elegant master with ensuite.

Here, french doors lead onto a contemporary balcony. "The original french doors had been taken out and replaced with windows and the balcony was unsafe," Chris says. He wanted to celebrate the street's heritage appeal. "We kept the new balcony in line with the neighbours' but gave it a modern look."

The facade harks back to Victorian times but the home and yard have been carefully updated to cater for the demands of modern living. Nicole and Chris love relaxing in the Asian-inspired garden, under a 30-metre-high gum tree that shaped and inspired the design.

The pair admits there were tensions during the six months of building but the challenge was worth it despite the fact they are now selling and hope to launch a home design service. "We spent a lot more money than we wanted to and got a bit emotionally attached," Chris says. "But we are very proud of what we did."

BECKY BARKER

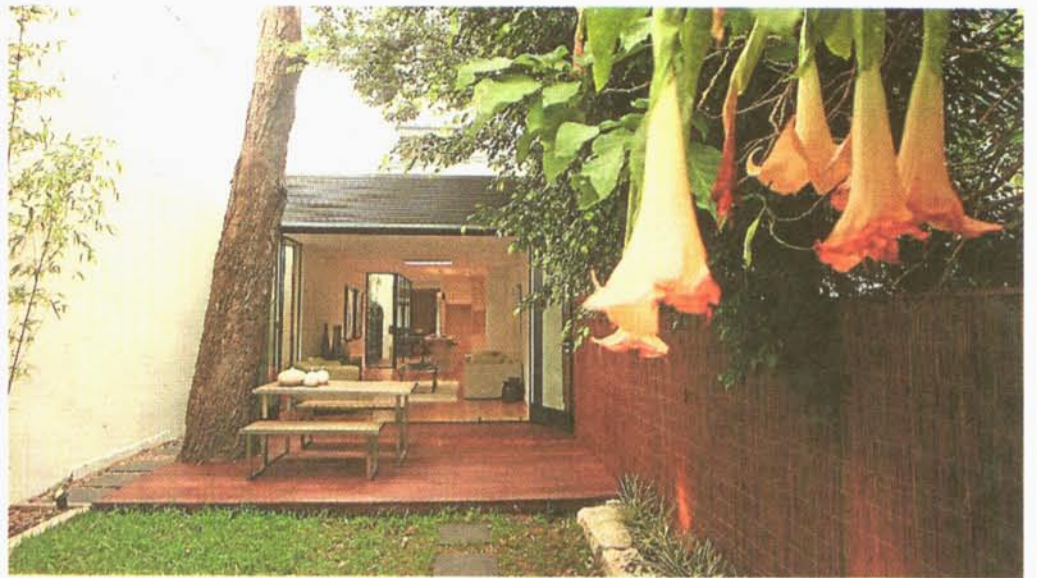
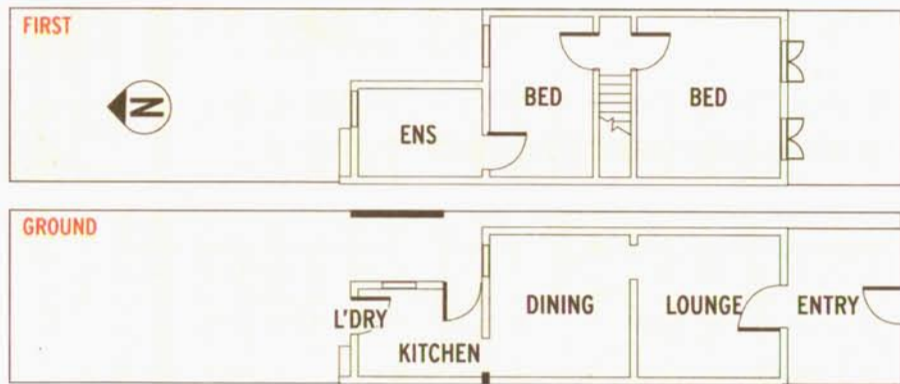


**Middle ground** A central garden separates the main house from the studio (above). Brother and sister team Chris and Nicole (left).



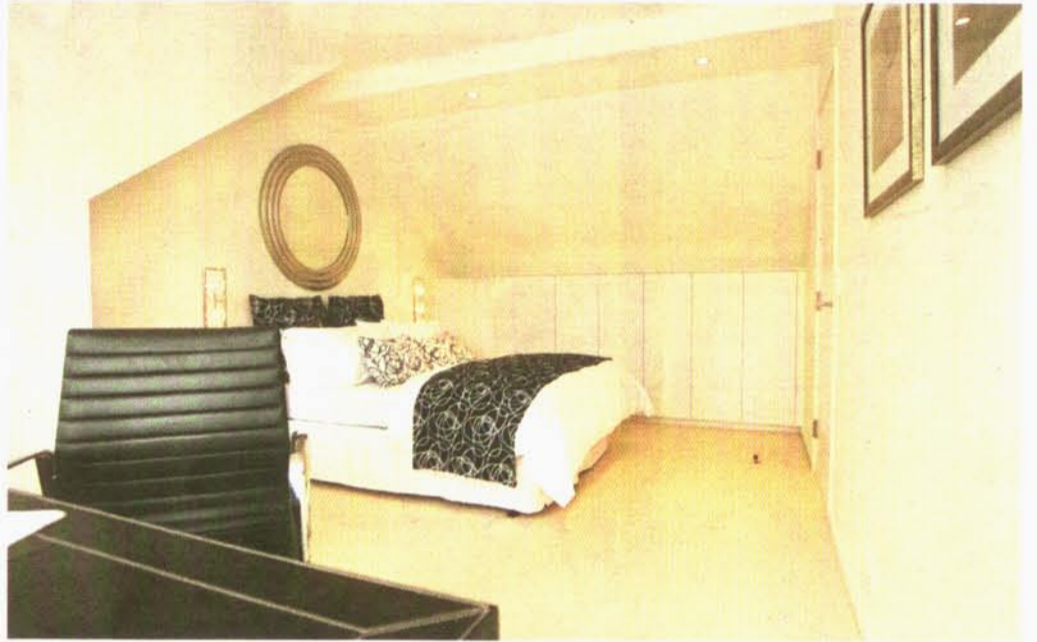
**Brighten up** Chris walks past a light-giving atrium (left) which illuminates the corridor between the open plan lounge-dining and kitchen-living zones as well as the sleek, streamlined kitchen (above).

**BEFORE**



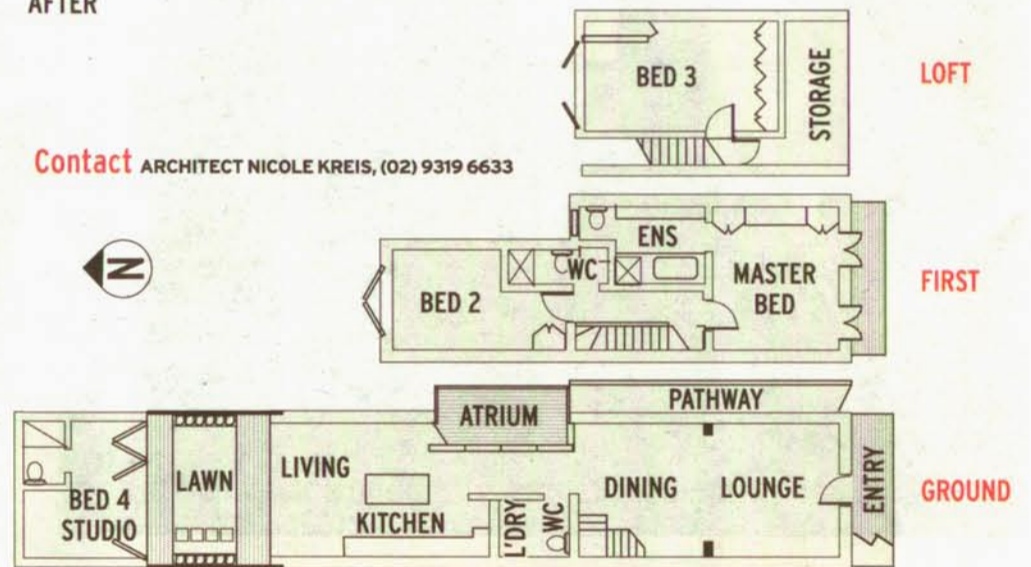
PHOTOGRAPHY: GLEN SHIPLEY/ANTHONY JOHNSON

**All together now** Chris and Nicole love the way the rear studio connects to the main house. "The house feels as one, even though it is broken up by the lawn," Chris says.



**All white** In the attic bedroom, the eaves were used for extra storage space and a study nook looks out over the rear extension and garden. The master bedroom ensuite (left) is luxuriously large.

**AFTER**



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