Established Manors

Missing Middle Open Ideas Competition
testing New South Wales' *Draft Medium Density Design Guide*
in the form of a Manor House at 9-11 Frederick Street, Canterbury

Damian Madigan

Our suburbs accept all manner of change. The traditional four-roomed cottage, described by Robin Boyd as the 'bungalow' and represented throughout the country in subtle variations, supports a variety of what might be described as suburban anomalies.Living spaces are moved to new rear extensions, cars find homes in garage additions and bathrooms are added in side pods. Sheds and outbuildings dot backyards, filling the suburbs with activity. Fencing is raised as living spaces are oriented to backyards and front gardens become decorative thresholds. These observations are not value judgements, but merely a description of what is.

What if we leverage off these conditions to provide the additional housing we need? Perhaps much of our suburbs can continue to adapt over time in both an *ad hoc* manner, and significantly, in an exercise of strategic suburban infill: perhaps our homes can continue to evolve organically while new housing models find a place within that established grain.

Across New South Wales, nearly $8.8bn will be spent on housing renovations across 2016-17, rising to almost $9.5bn by 2020.* If Sydney could marshal a fraction of that investment, it could make a dramatic contribution to housing targets.

More compelling, however, is the fact that the mannerisms of suburban alterations and additions that drive this economy, once acknowledged, can be deployed as a set of suburban infill tactics to create housing that is similar, but subtley different.

If we can accept a garage between houses, for example, what about a kitchen and dining space that triggers an additional dwelling? Such a proposition can hold in the absence of any statutory obligation to retain an existing house. Whilst many houses in established suburbs are protected by local or state heritage listings (and this extends to entire precincts that receive protection as Conservation Zones) there is an overriding logic to why we might keep such houses in the absence of these protections. What happens if we retain these houses not because we must, but because it makes sense?

Bungalows are robust. Formed of masonry, they resist wholesale deterioration and demolition. Space can be transformed, connected and extended through deploying simple lintels, as has been done for generations. Conventionally framed roofs provide occupiable space not afforded by contemporary trusses. The four-roomed structure continues to adapt to contemporary life internally whilst accepting new additions.

And bungalows provide cultural memory. They establish a necessary continuum that speaks of a suburb's life over time.

'Established Manors' is a design speculation that creates a complying Manor development utilising what already exists both physically, in terms of the base buildings of a suburb, and conceptually, where the manners of our suburban adaptations have already been set. It asks what might be achieved if much of what we need is already here.

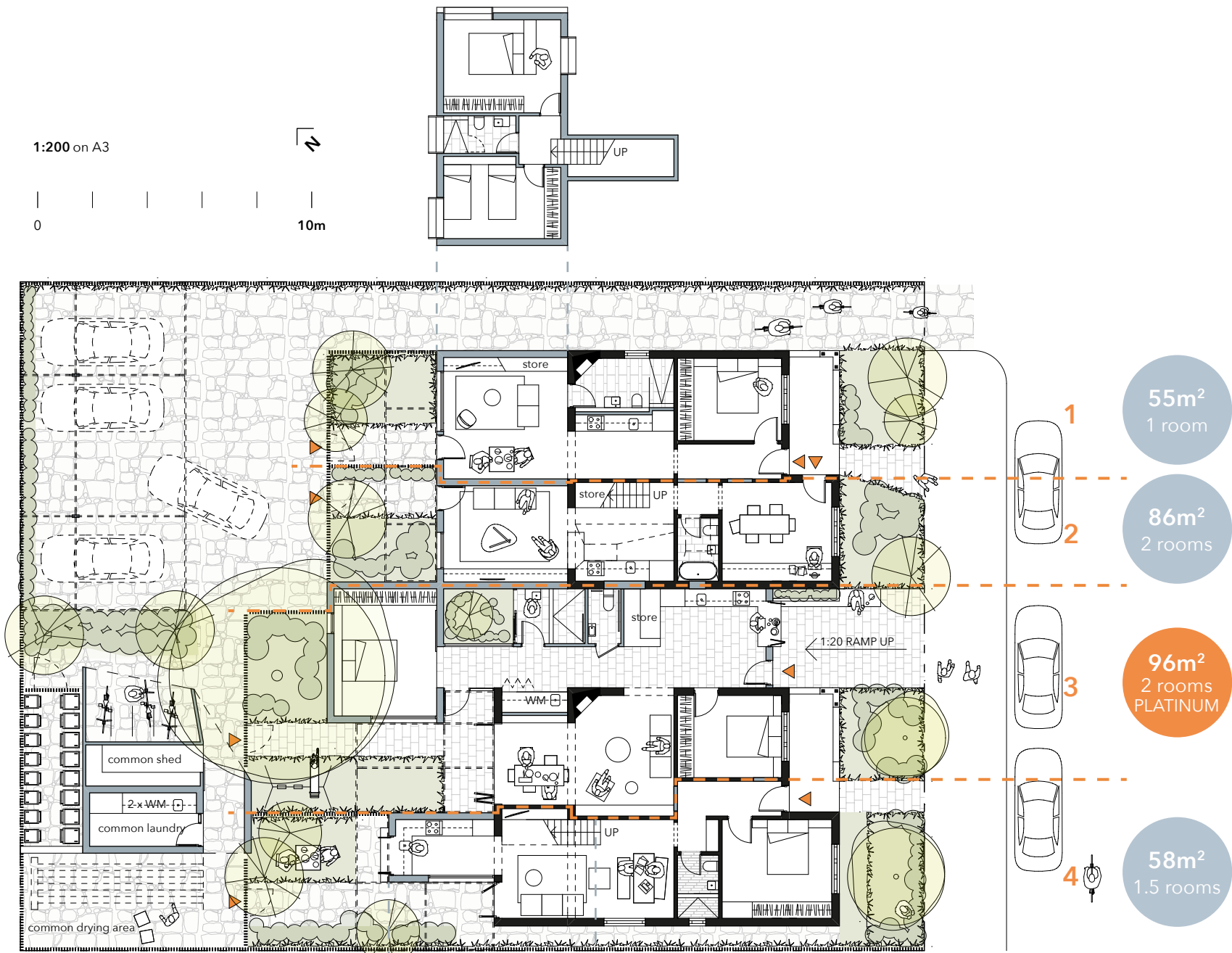* HIA *New Housing Outlook*, Housing Renovations Forecast, August 2016

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1:200 on A3

0   10m

N

store

store   UP

1:20 RAMP UP

store

WM

common shed

2 x WM

common laundry

common drying area

UP

store   UP

1   **55m²** 1 room

2   **86m²** 2 rooms

3   **96m²** 2 rooms PLATINUM

4   **58m²** 1.5 rooms

3x **P**

~7.6m cap

permitted building envelope

North (driveway) elevation

Section through bungalows and driveway/walkway intervention

The design speculation sees two adjacent bungalows retained and joined with a new infill element in the combined driveway and walkway spaces between the two properties. The second driveway is kept, providing access to four car parks, one of which is accessible. Also at the rear of the property is shared bicycle storage, along with a laundry, drying area, shed and rubbish bin enclosure. The existing mature tree in the rear yard is retained, as are the trees in the combined front yard.
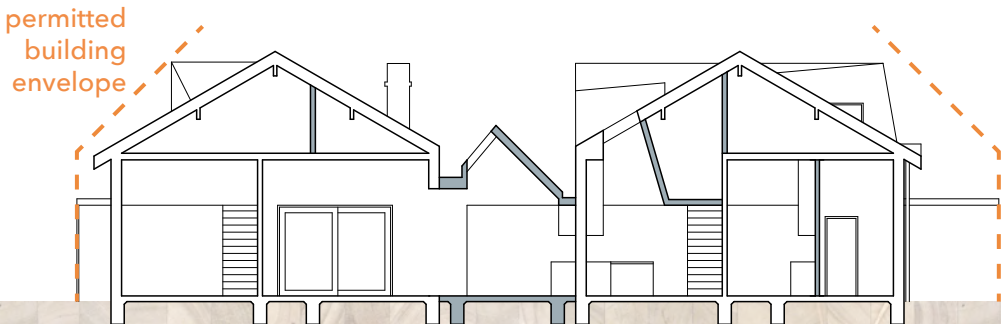
Four dwellings are arranged across the original two houses. Each bungalow is divided down its central hallway with the resultant split enabling a variety of layouts and sizes.

Dwelling 1 is a one bedroom house occupying one half of the northernmost bungalow. The remaining half is given over to Dwelling 2, where the ground floor provides the living spaces while two upstairs bedrooms are arranged across the full width of the bungalow.

Dwelling 3, designed to the Platinum level of the *Livable Housing Design Guide* and providing more generous spaces, occupies one half of the second bungalow plus the new interstitial infill element. The remaining half-bungalow is given over to Dwelling 4, and provides one bedroom and an upstairs work space.

Together, the dwellings operate as a single Manor house, displaying the flexibility of this new model of housing and in the spirit of normative suburban adaptive reuse.
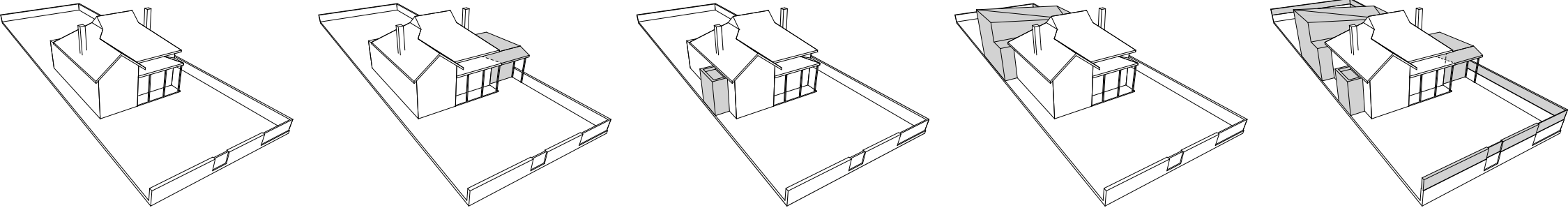
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suburban anomalies

aerial image source: Google Earth (modified)

Frederick Street, Canterbury

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By nature, the rules that define any form of complying development face a dilemma: how do we provide measures that allow designers to proceed with clarity and confidence without limiting opportunities for innovation?

At the same time, we understand more than ever that as our household structures change and we work to accommodate more diverse occupants, innovation in our housing is needed more than ever before.

The *Established Manors* design speculation offers a mix of small housing choices that provide individualised space and privacy where practicable. Windows are either oriented away from others' private space or shrouded to limit over- and inter-looking between dwellings. But what if individual privacy is not a trump card that beats other aspects of such new housing? How might we accommodate scenarios where individualised space is important, but not more so than the capacity for residents to share aspects of their homes and lives if they wish?

The four dwellings of this speculative scheme are particularly suited to those seeking a form of shared living and whilst extended families are an obvious audience, so too are house owners who might team with their friends or neighbours when the house next door comes on the market and provides a group of people the opportunity to downsize, upsize or simply live differently.

Four challenges to the proposed controls of the *Medium Density Design Guide* would significantly increase amenity and neighbourliness within this speculative Manor. Each points to a more communal way of living and a more diverse way of supporting contemporary household structures.

1. Permitted Overlooking

Balconies and upper storey windows that are screened to prevent overlooking assume that overlooking itself is a bad thing. Balconies with planter beds distribute landscape across space more broadly and their need for maintenance gives people another reason to go outside, thereby encouraging incidental interaction.
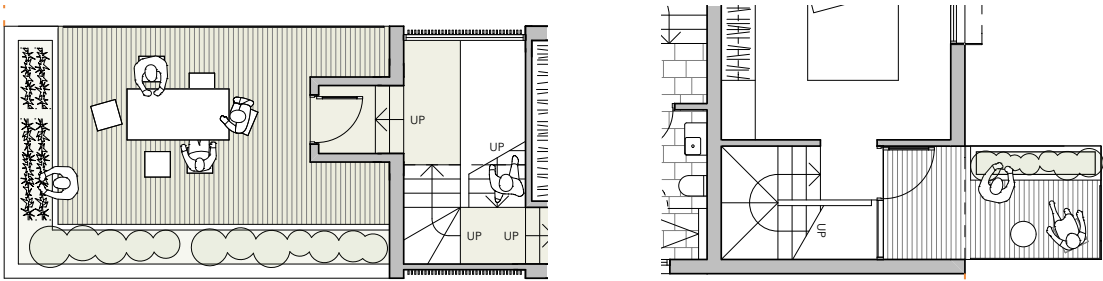
2. Shared Yards

Sometimes high quality shared space is better than low quality private space. Whilst not for everyone, many occupants would prefer to share a larger space with their neighbours. True housing diversity requires us to not just reconfigure the size and form of dwellings and yards, but the manner in which they are organised and enjoyed.
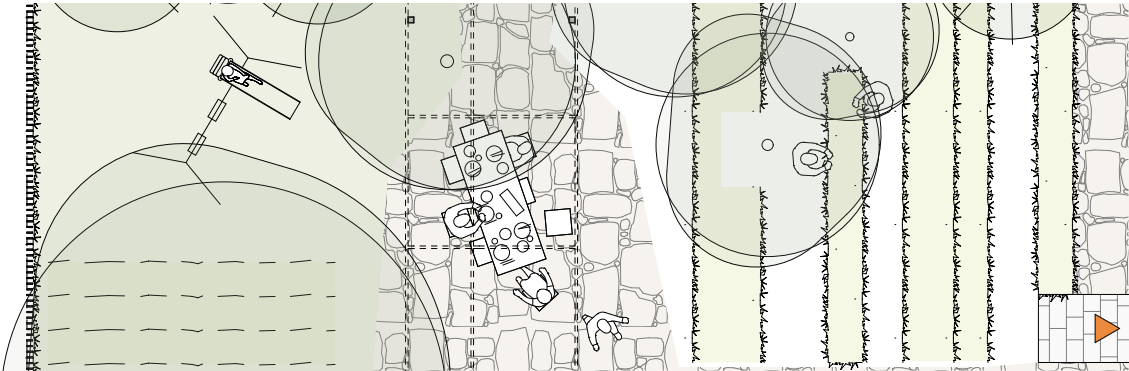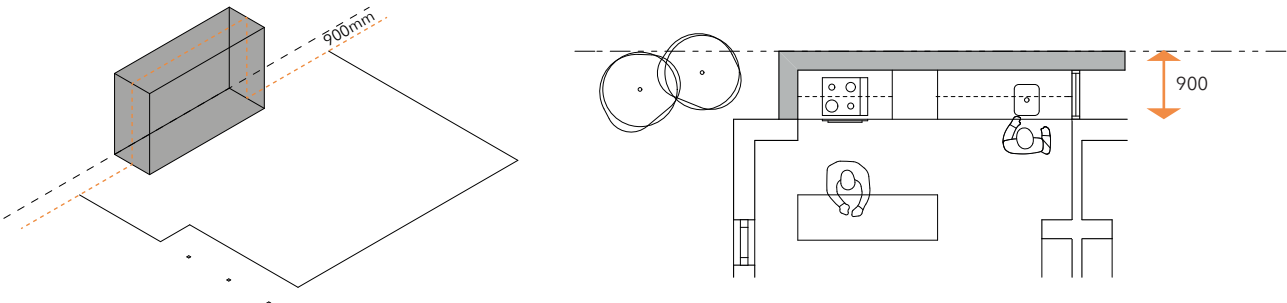
3. 'Informal' Party Walls

Whilst existing doorways in bungalow hallways can be blocked to permanently separate tenancies, retaining them as operable doors gives the choice of segregation or connectedness over to the users as they deem appropriate.
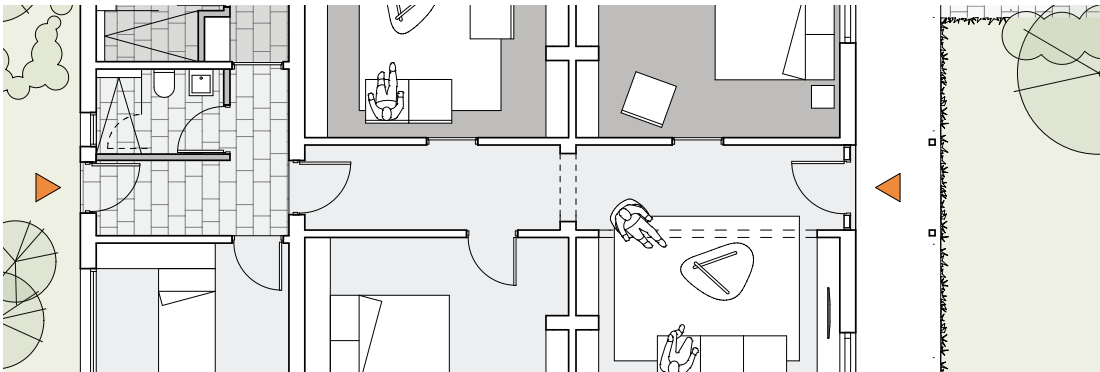
4. Boundary Construction

Even a walkway width of 900mm can accommodate a kitchen when opened to an existing room via a lintel in an external wall. Resulting in minimal impact on neighbours, this small gesture triggers an additional dwelling by converting a front bedroom to a living space. It requires that consideration be given to allowing living areas at the front of the dwelling and for the front yard to become an active space.

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