

Charming gate keeper

Award-winning building designer Melanie Symington from Seaside Homes was struggling to find an office space truly reflective of her style as a building designer. Yet the perfect solution was literally on her doorstep.

Photography: Jérôme Treize, Atelier Photography



After months of investigating potential new office space, Melanie was (almost) ready to give up: "Creative commercial spaces that align with the particular style of a building designer are not easy to find," she says.

Around that time, Melanie and her husband Carl were having a discussion about the effort involved in maintaining the large pool they had installed at their Hamptons style home on the shores of Lake Macquarie when their children were young. It was featured in *Hunter & Coastal Lifestyle Magazine* several years ago and was a favourite with readers at the time.

"I realized that with some careful scaling I could create the perfect office in my own garden. The ideal I had been chasing was a north facing space with water views, which is exactly what I achieved," she says with a smile.

As with most waterfront properties, the home is positioned close to the water creating garden space between the roadside entrance and the residence and allowing for perfect separation between the professional and private spaces. The 36m² cottage with two rooms and



Clockwise from the top: antique French oak flooring connects the different spaces; Melanie's work space has plenty of natural light; the Hamptons style main home.

a powder room was designed with its current as well as potential future uses in mind. Melanie has her own separate office with the second room used as a meeting area or work space for her staff.

Plumbing has been installed to allow for a kitchenette so the cottage can be transformed into a one bedroom apartment in the future. Doorways and floor levels have been carefully

considered for accessibility. Melanie had incorporated quite a few small structures like this one into previous projects.

"As a community we seem to be realising the value of home based, independent work spaces, particularly those that have the potential to operate as small residences at a later time," she says.

It was critical that the new structure match the unique architectural style of

From the top: there was still enough space left at the back of the cottage for a plunge pool; the undercover entertaining area was added by extending the first floor of the main home.

the residence as its location at the entry to the property made it very prominent.

"I wanted the new building to feel almost like a gatekeeper's cottage, giving a taste of the style of the main residence."

The finishes for the office were very important as Melanie would be meeting with her clients in this space.

"There were some items that I was very particular about, primarily the antique French oak flooring, wide cornice and Vantage Magnum style windows and doors with Federation bars. I often say to my clients that not everything in a space needs to be a feature item. Just pick some special pieces and let them shine".

As is often the case when building work starts on a site, a little bit of "scope creep" came into play too. Whilst Melanie and Carl's son Nick, a carpenter, was available they decided to add another element to the build.

Two of the four bedrooms in the home have balconies overlooking the lake. By extending one of the remaining first floor rooms out over the deck space to the side of the home, they were able to create a large suite for Nick and a generous, covered entertaining space on the deck that can easily accommodate the Symington Family Christmas lunch for 25 people.

Extending onto a home with such a unique architectural style needs to be handled carefully. Fortunately, when the owner is a National Design Award winning building designer, the project is in safe hands.

"I love this home and am confident it will continue to be one of the enduring residences recognisable from the water for many decades to come," Melanie says with a big smile. ◇



THE EXPERTS

Melanie Symington from **Seaside Homes** is a multi-award winning building designer.

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Langford Windows expertly manufactured and installed all windows and doors in the cottage.

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