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Peter Latemore's Designing your Queenslander Reno Tips from an expert

Queenslanders are unique buildings.

I am going to give you a super-fast history and important details. I feel it is important to know some of this before you begin the reno.

We'll look at standard layouts of Queenslanders, followed by examples from my practice of what we did. All are a bit 'different' from what you might have seen.

Here we go:

Queenslanders

What makes them special?

Unique vernacular	Our Queenslanders are unique in the world because of a combination of a few things.
This picture	A house we worked on in Bardon. The owner's grandfather on the left, other family in windows and verandah. 1925. Boards finished in dark stain, roof rarely painted. Scorched earth subdivisions.
Timber frame	They all have a timber frame, made from local plentiful supplies of good quality hardwoods. Brick was not available for decades. Stone could only be afforded for government and church buildings.
Corrugated Roof	All houses had corrugated steel rooves. Until terracotta tiles began being used from federation times, but only around 20%. The early roof sheets were ballast on sailing ships, a practice that was replicated with the roof tiles. Until Australia made our own.
Highset on stumps	Stumps originated in England with 'blocks' on the ground. We adopted the idea but quickly raised the houses 3 feet above floods and termites. We raised them further to 7 feet, to use the great undercroft space and to see across crops.
Single Skin Walls	The most unique feature. Privacy was irrelevant. Like hardwood, there was plentiful hoop pine. This was ideal for VJ boards for walls and ceiling. Early houses had horizontal wall boards. Also for tongue and groove floors. Did you know many houses has lino?
Verandahs	You know this one. Every single Queenslanders had a verandah, often 2, even more. Emerged as a response to the hot climate. Verandahs were corridors and outside living spaces.
Decorative features	All Queenslanders had some form of decoration, even workers cottages. Most had verandah brackets, post collars, breezeways over doors. Many added feature arches, special gables. Skirting boards quickly went from D mould to quite tall feature versions.
Picket fence, Palm trees	Every house had a picket fence, always white. Most planted palm trees.

Single Skin

Why VJ's?

English Half Timbered	The idea emerged from the old half timbered look from the 1600's.
NZ Origins	It first was trialled in New Zealand. Still used, but not as much as here.
Cheaper	A single board was stable, load bearing and remarkably cheap for what it did. Plaster type finishes were not available.
Tropics/Sub-Tropics	Single skin walls let the heat out of a building, it was thought. True but a bit flawed. They forgot about cooler weather!
Local Architects	Many early architects liked the idea of VJ's and popularised their use through institutions like the State Advances Corporation. More on that soon.
Verandahs Needed	The verandah was thought essential. With VJ's it was cheaper to create the wall between verandah and house. The 'interior' aesthetic of VJ's reinforced the feel of the verandah as an important living space.

Structure

What is individual to Queenslanders?

Box House	Queenslanders are boxes in structural theory. Every portion is necessary.
VJ's are Structure	Single skin walls are often load bearing. Half at least for ceiling. Many have roof loads, especially under roof ridge. VJ's brace the building. It all adds up. Do not remove without thought.
Timber joints	The timber frame has traditional joints. Mortice & tenon studs to top and bottom plates. Half checked purlins onto verandah rafters. Birdsmouth rafters. Lots of galvanised nails. Door and window posts.
Belt Rails	VJ walls need a binder. Called a belt rail. Many houses have two. Do not remove.
Wind resistant	Queenslanders have survived cyclones. Will fail if the roof comes off, like any building.

Kit Houses

So Queenslanders were ready made?

Standard designs

Over 75% came as standard designs, from the early 1920's as a response to the Great War. State Advances Corporation was the major design supplier.

Some banks and builder supply companies also.

All were architect designed.

The 1950's style was invented in the 1930's.

The loan was easy. You went to the bank, after selecting your preferred version and builder. There was no need for pricing, it was part of the design.

Delivered to site as a full house

Most hardware firms of the time had cutting lists matching the designs. They simply gathered the lot and delivered to site. This included windows and doors. You could select from a limited range.

Every house has the same 'stuff'

Because of the 'kit' style, all the houses shared similar items.

As such builders were very quick at erecting Queenslanders.

The only specialist trade was a plumber, and later electricians.

Eras

So, when were Queenslanders built and what styles are there?

Rough eras

These eras are a bit rough. It is my attempt at keeping it to four.

1840-1890 Colonial

The classic cottage, or Worker's Cottage. These were small, to quickly house a fast-growing population. The earliest versions were copied by everyone and became a set of standard designs. They were always a two or four room 'box', with front and rear verandahs.

1890-1920 Federation

This is the era of bigger grand houses. The 'cottage' was enlarged and verandahs added down the sides. Separated kitchen buildings were placed on many. Like southern states – to reduce fire risk. The broad pyramidal roof emerged at this time.

1920-1940 Interwar

The golden era – so many Queenslanders were built.

The State Advances Corporation was a main cause.

So many styles were introduced.

Asymmetric Gable.

Multi-Gable.

California Bungalows.

Spanish Mission.

Executive Brick.

Cape Dutch.

Wide façade Terracotta Rooved Bungalows.

The first three were the most common.

1940-1960 Post War	<p>Also known as Post Modern.</p> <p>State Advances Corporation was still producing designs, by architects.</p> <p>Housing Commission was started, with its own designs.</p> <p>The pre-war designs came forward but were pared back considerably to handle reduced material supply and a huge building boom.</p> <p>Lower ceilings, no verandahs, very cheap asbestos sheeting.</p> <p>1960's versions were heavily influenced by many post-modern architects in Brisbane.</p>
Designs span eras	<p>Designs from earlier times kept being used in later years.</p> <p>1910 styles were still in design books till the 1940's.</p>

Layouts

What are the different layouts?

My generalisation	<p>From my 40 years' experience, I see these three layouts the most.</p> <p>They are the most used designs from the design books.</p>
Examples	<p>These are all from State Advances Corporation 1928. They kept being used into the 1930's.</p>
Cottage + Hallway	<p>This style began in the 1890's.</p> <p>The 4 room cottage box with verandahs front and back, I mention above.</p> <p>They all have bedrooms at the front with a hallway between.</p> <p>Usually two spaces behind for kitchen and living.</p> <p>I always suggest – don't cut them open too much.</p> <p>Extending at rear is not easy unless you cut into the main roof.</p> <p>Extending to sides is ok, but it can look unbalanced. Adding verandah on sides is easy, even enclosed sleepouts.</p>
Asymmetric + Hallway	<p>Definitely emerged from 1920. People wanted 3 beds plus dining. They all have a hallway.</p> <p>A bedroom was pushed through the verandah with always a gabled roof.</p> <p>Usually behind this at rear, there is a hipped roof zone for kitchen. The rear verandah was wider and always enclosed for a dining room.</p> <p>It is easy enough to extend at rear because of the hipped barrel.</p> <p>Going sideways, with full height ceiling is possible, but as before, can be unbalanced.</p> <p>As per Cottage, sideways verandah shapes can work, but they make interiors dark.</p> <p>Same as cottage, people sat on the front verandah.</p>

Centre Beds + Vestibule	<p>My first slide had one of these.</p> <p>These were common on 15m and 20m wide blocks. Very many of them.</p> <p>People wanted an entry, therefore a vestibule appeared.</p> <p>There was always a side verandah. Beds were always central and only two.</p> <p>Living and dining spaces were now grander.</p> <p>People stopped sitting on front verandah as a result of the vestibule.</p> <p>Almost every side verandah was enclosed to a sleepout, during the Great Depression or World War 2. Certainly by 1970's.</p> <p>These houses have inherent difficulties as the centre bed is always dark and under ventilated.</p> <p>Very difficult to extend on the verandah side.</p> <p>Extremely easy to extend at rear. Lots had average decks added in the 1980's to 2000.</p>
Box Minus Verandah	<p>Not shown.</p> <p>I am referring to 1950's houses. Very common buildings - too often knocked down, with no character protection.</p> <p>Essentially a rectangular house with projections and hipped roof, never a verandah.</p> <p>Easily extended.</p>
All can be lifted	<p>Every Queenslander is easily lifted and built-in under. The timber frame on stumps allows this.</p> <p>But what about stairs – more later.</p>

Examples

How I'm showing you	<p>All examples have existing & new floor plans.</p> <p>The 'new' is coloured in light green.</p> <p>Demolition in light red.</p> <p>There are photos or 3D views, before and after.</p>
What I'm showing you	<p>I have picked 4 projects that illustrate some of our responses.</p> <p>Two adopt Burra Charter heritage principals.</p>

Pavilion Extension

Can you extend without touching the house much?

Where, what?	<p>Cottage in West End.</p> <p>2 street frontages.</p>
Brief	<p>They desperately needed more living and separated master bed.</p>
Constraints	<p>Character code.</p> <p>DA would be triggered if we touched the cottage.</p> <p>Not big back yard.</p>
Concept	<p>Two Storey Pavilion attached to cottage.</p> <p>Box gutter at rear of cottage.</p> <p>Reduced footprint.</p>
Solution	<p>Old lean-to converted to link with family bathroom and pantry.</p> <p>Living zone on lower level, added stairs, with deck.</p> <p>Upper level - master suite.</p> <p>We squeezed a carport under the one storey portion.</p> <p>Modern style, as per Burra Charter.</p>

Traditional Extension

How to extend a Queenslander in matching style?

Where, what?	Camp Hill Centre Beds + Vestibule
Brief	Leave the current house alone. Add a huge living zone, 2 beds, and very large understory for 3 cars, workshop and rumpus plus office.
Constraints	Character code Current house has raw VJ's – must be kept. Large lot – no restrictions.
Concept	We added a traditional looking wide rear element. Projected past the existing house to balance it. No deck, just an enormous living area, with a lot of glazing.
Solution	Added side porch borrows front verandah style. Stairs central, without cutting into original house. Careful detailing. Existing house nearly untouched, only lifted. Ensuite and w/c central – do not need outside wall.

Linked Pavilion

Can you add a separated building?

Where, what?	Ascot Federation Pyramidal
Brief	We need to accommodate two sets of visiting grandparents, for 6 months a year. House is generous enough for large family. Need a pool pavilion.
Constraints	Character Pool is in the way. Need back yard still.
Concept	Pavilion, two storey. Linked via stairwell through study and added deck.
Solution	Angled long plan shape to still see pool. Cantilevered over pool. Curved roof as heritage response. Murphy beds. Double kitchenettes.

Lift + Build-in
What are the tricks?

Where, what?	West End Multi-Gable, Cottage
Brief	Double the house size. 6 beds overall, for renting.
Constraints	Tiny site, 197sqm. We could go 80% site cover. DA and siting relaxation triggered.
Concept	Simple Lift & Build-in. Add a stair tower – the big answer. Do not cut them into the house. Add a generous carport.
Solution	Major negotiations with council. Make lower level slightly bigger. Return front to some verandah. We got 6 beds and 4 bathrooms.

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