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## The green house

# RETRO ACTIVE

Eco-efficient retrofits are worth considering at any time but especially when you renovate, writes **Sarah Pickette**.

Many owners of houses constructed before building codes enforced mandatory energy-efficiency standards have probably wondered how to retrofit their homes to make them more eco-friendly. “We’ve noticed a huge increase in enquiries and people committing to future-proofing their homes as they renovate,” says Lyn Beinat, CEO of Melbourne-based EcoMaster, which specialises in environment-friendly retrofits. “The spike in electricity and gas prices has forced Australians to think hard about making their homes more efficient.”

Retrofits that improve a home’s thermal efficiency might be “the lesser-known cousin of renewables”, she says jokingly, but they are just as important. “Solar panels alone won’t keep your home cool.” Given that 40 per cent of the average household’s electricity spend goes to heating and cooling, Beinat advises homeowners to draught-proof all doors, seal cracks and gaps, and boost insulation.

Well-executed sustainable retrofits to existing houses can have a dramatic impact on the thermal efficiency and running costs of a home, says Megan Norgate, the founding director and principal

**‘SOLAR HOT WATER PROVIDES ONE OF THE FASTEST RETURNS ON INVESTMENTS OF ALL HOME TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES.’** MEGAN NORRATE, BRAVE NEW ECO

designer of sustainable design practice Brave New Eco in Melbourne.

“On average, existing older homes rate less than one Green Star,” says Norgate, referring to the Green Building Council of Australia’s sustainability rating scheme. “But retrofits that combine thermal improvements to the building’s envelope with new technology upgrades can achieve an increase to 3.5 stars. We can get a home up to six-star equivalent when passive solar extensions and window upgrades are included in the retrofit.”

She agrees with Beinat about draught-proofing and also sees huge value in thermally efficient window coverings. And, she adds, if the local climate and your home’s orientation lend themselves to it, a solar hot-water system is well worth considering.

Norgate argues that it would be a bad investment to renovate without adding some sustainable retrofits in the process. “Consumer awareness and expectations around a home’s thermal efficiency have increased exponentially,” she says. “When you combine these with increasing energy costs and the value you add to your home, I would be asking if you can afford *not* to make them.” **H&G**

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