

# PRESERVING HISTORY: THE RESPECTFUL NEGOTIATION BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

**PROJECT :** Ballamac House  
**LOCATION :** Coogee, NSW  
**CONTRACTOR :** Abbesside Carpentry

Abbesside Carpentry's work on Ballamac House at the iconic Coogee Beach in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs, is a beautiful fusion of historic preservation and contemporary construction. Originally built in the 1860s as a grand sandstone coastal residence, the building has since functioned as a private home, hotel and an infirmary, before its latest transformation into two luxurious residences.

For Abbesside Director, Richard Field, the project represented far more than your standard heritage renovation. "As a carpenter, it was a unique opportunity to work on a project like this," Richard said. "We wanted to pay attention to what was already there. The new work needed to be tied in properly with the old materials. Detailed project planning was critical, but that's what made it so satisfying."

Known for its commitment to traditional craftsmanship, Abbesside Carpentry approached the project with a balance of old-world technique and modern install methodology. "We used traditional techniques when preserving heritage building material which we later reinstalled, and modern methods to improve the structural durability of the existing building," Richard explains. "Blending the two is what made this project work in a challenging way."



One of the greatest technical challenges was working with the original sandstone structure. "Nothing was perfectly straight, level or consistent," Richard says. "The building has settled over 150 years. Every junction between the old and new had to be treated individually." Our teams relied on non-invasive fixing methods and close consultation with heritage advisors to protect the integrity of the existing structure."

A defining moment came during demolition works. "We exposed sections of the original framing and stonework and could see the hand-cut marks from the carpenters who worked there in the 1800s," Richard recalls. "That's when it really hit me. We were tying our work directly into something that had already survived generations."

"The fit-out that followed was approached with the same level of respect. We believe the finished result complements and enhances the integrity of the original design, while bringing it seamlessly into the present."

Looking ahead, Richard hopes Abbesside's contribution to the structural works will form a quiet but essential foundation, not drawing attention to itself, yet underpinning everything that follows and allowing the fit-out to be fully appreciated.

"Traditional carpentry in a heritage building of this calibre is where we excel," he says. "There's a discipline and respect required when working with structures of this age. The end result feels solid, balanced, cohesive and built to last."

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