

homes {australian beauty}



coming of age

It took years of daydreaming before Stuart and Catherine began renovating the elegant cottage they share with two 20-somethings

STORY ANNA McCOOE STYLING SARA SILM PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL WEE

neowners Stuart and Catherine, both designers, created this relaxed dining space, awash with natural light and warm wood tones near their home's front porch and library. The Alejandro Sticotti glass and timber table is framed by Eames 'Eiffel' dining chairs (try Matt Blatt) and a sleek black Tom Dixon pendant light from Dedece. On the wall, Indian teak door panels, a serendipitous find that Stuart stumbled upon at a warehouse's closing down sale, work as both striking artwork and as a subtle way of delineating the flow-through dining area. "I'm always buying timber pieces for future projects and storing them away," says Stuart. "Timber is timelessly neutral and adds so much warmth." >



FLOORBOARDS
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"I like to keep the fixtures simple and create **interest** with quality **furniture** pieces instead" - Stuart



ON A TYPICAL weekend in this lovingly renovated cottage in Sydney's east, hordes of sandy soles tread the home's much-travelled outside path to hose off, kick a ball around the backyard and generally hang out in the built-for-fun lower ground floor. A good time – but not always a quiet time – is had by all. Meanwhile upstairs, property designer and developer Stuart and his wife Catherine, also a designer, blissfully enjoy the cosy comfort of the home in which they have invested years of time and love.

When developing and designing buildings is both a passion and a profession, the eye quickly attunes to potential. When the family first moved in 21 years ago, the humble two-bedroom brick house was the result of a 1950s subdivide in one of Sydney's oldest suburbs, and just 30 seconds from a gorgeous and casually charming beach. "I like to swim every day, so there was no beating the location," says Stuart. "Whereas the house we could work on!"

The original home had untapped potential and the opportunity to renovate was too thrilling to ignore for Stuart and Catherine, but still, they let the project simmer, sketching plans and hatching theories over many years until they struck the perfect combination of layout and materials. "We waited until we had a solution that would actually work," explains Stuart. "We wanted to keep as much of the original building as we could, but we didn't want the renovation to read like a tacked-on addition." >



LIVING ROOM To highlight the couple's evolving collection of art, furniture and collectables, the living room's surfaces were purposely kept simple and neutral. "We didn't want to make too much of the fixtures and we steered away from anything too fashionable," says Stuart of the relaxed space. The furniture the couple has collected over the years, like the replica Eames moulded plywood chairs [opposite], works effortlessly with their heritage pieces, such as the antique mirror and timber chest of drawers. Catherine's creativity is on full display here: she handmade the tribal-style mudcloth cushions and painted the stunning triptych, which was inspired by the rock formations near the beachside home.



EAT-IN KITCHEN (this page & opposite) Storage is king in this kitchen. Tall pantries and double overhead cabinets in Dulux White On White, created by Muscat Custom Kitchens and Joinery, extend all the way to the ceiling. The replica Saarinen 'Tulip' table from Obodo is paired with antique Victorian chairs the couple have happily hung onto since the 1980s. The delicate twin pendants [opposite] suspended above Stuart and his son Sebastian, came from Special Lights in Sydney. Even though the Carrara marble benchtops (from Best Way Marble) blend seamlessly with the crisp cabinetry, stainless-steel appliances and elegant tapware from Harvey Norman Commercial, they will soon undergo a mini-makeover - "We found the gloss finish on the benches gets etched by water. We're planning to change them to a honed finish, which will be more tactile and easier to maintain," Stuart says. >

we love
The splashback window
 The frosted window behind the cooktop offers all the easy-to-clean benefits of a standard glass splashback, as well as effectively welcoming natural elements into the kitchen. "The added light and cross ventilation from the window makes such a positive difference in here," says Stuart.



< For designer Stuart, who spends much of his working life buffing back bad renovations to period buildings, a sense of place was paramount. He found his solution by cladding white weatherboard over the original brick exterior to maintain the home's in-built heating and cooling properties, and to better place the house within an area that was once a fishermen's village. Everything but the original fireplace was stripped back, the existing shell was lifted up on stilts and the land below was excavated to create a self-contained guest area which included a rumpus room, bathroom, kitchenette and a studio for talented painter Catherine.

The 2007 renovation came just in time for the couple's sons, Oliver and Sebastian – who at that time were both studying and living at home – to benefit from the makeover. "The boys really liked having their own space to have friends over," says Stuart. "Sebastian loves travelling, and we often have his friends from all over the globe staying with us downstairs."

The couple went to great efforts to ensure the interior of their forever home would stand the test of time. The walls are all dressed down in Dulux White on White, with only the simplicity and warmth of brushbox hardwood floors and Carrara marble in the kitchen and bathroom embellishing the neutral scheme.

Still, their home is anything but boring: an innovative blend of antiques, designer classics and global treasures, with a few modern pieces mixed in, too, fill the house with life and love in a style that suits this family to a tee. "The space isn't too precious and we're not locked into a look," says Stuart. "It's a home for living and evolving."





MASTER BEDROOM (above left) Stuart chose to keep the finishes as simple as possible in the bedroom. The built-in wardrobe was finished in Dulux's White on White to match the walls. A Vietnamese quilt, found at the Kempsey markets in country NSW, and a Hindu wood carving bought on a trip to Indonesia, both add dimension to the pared-down space. The bed was a lucky find from a sale at furniture-for-hire company Valiant. A stack of magazines topped with an architectural lamp from Obodo cleverly takes the place of a side table. The bulkheads above are a practical design feature that hide unsightly airconditioning ducting and wires.

STAIRS (above right) Cleverly positioned skylights above the stairwell, along with the frosted glass strip-window midway down, encourage natural light to cascade through the home.

ENSUITE (right) The pairing of Carrara marble tiles with Italian Ottone Meloda tapware from SPS brings hotel-style luxury to the ensuite. Windows and cedar shutters take the place of mirrors above the twin basins, to take advantage of the treetop view and draw in light. The mirror at the foot of the bath conceals a large recessed cabinet, ideal for hiding away bathroom necessities.

TERRACE (opposite) By far the best bargain in the home is the colourful outdoor rug. Made from three plastic mats sewn together, it was found in a second-hand store for about \$49. The 1930s-style cane sofa was spotted on Ebay and standing in for a coffee table is a vintage trunk. "On weekends the yard is filled with wet bodies and sandy feet coming in off the beach," says Stuart, pictured with his son Sebastian. "It's great for the kids to be able to enter the house through the side and hose off under the outdoor shower." >





"Our clumping **bamboo** can be high maintenance, but it's a fantastic privacy **screen** for the terrace and balcony above" - Stuart



LIBRARY Beside the Cadrys rug are much-loved 60s-era Parker armchairs from Mitchell Road Antique and Design Centre, which were re-covered in yellow 'Icon' felt from Woven Image. The kilim cushion was made from an Afghan Interiors rug offcut.

PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]

INSIDE STORY

Who lives here?

Stuart, a designer and property developer; Catherine, a designer; their sons Oliver, 23, Sebastian, 21, and Max, the red heeler.

As a designer, what was it like renovating your own home for a change?

Stuart: "When you're on site all the time watching the building develop you have the opportunity to lengthen a window or extend a room a bit, but there's a lot of pressure, too. You have to keep the whole family happy or live with the consequences!"

What are you most proud of?

"Keeping the existing building intact. It would have been cheaper and easier to knock the house down, as integrating the original home constantly brought up obstacles. But challenges force you to become more innovative. Without them, we'd all be living in the same rectangular box."

What do you look for in furniture?

"I go through phases with furniture. There was the design student obsession with postmodern Memphis furniture, the early career hankering for designer classics, and now the passion for mixing contemporary pieces with more detailed antiques."



The weatherboards easily blend with the beachy surrounds.



Treasured keepsakes and curios are spread throughout the home.

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PLANS

