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# STRONG POINT

This newly designed home's strength of character comes not just from its robust materials but also the confident embrace of its bayside position with gun-barrel views of Sydney Heads.



These pages, from left Architects Potter & Wilson made the most of the spectacular views in their redesign of this house in Sydney's Balmoral. A materials palette of concrete, steel and glass is softened with planting by Spirit Level. The existing pool was downsized and reshaped to better fit with the house. The dining area enjoys the views and is bathed in natural light. SP01 'Smith' dining table from Space and B&B Italia 'Vol Au Vent' chairs designed by Mario Bellini. A trio of Astep 'Model 2065' pendant lights by Gino Sarfatti from Mobilia illuminates the setting.



With sunlight splicing through the street-level garage and tantalising glimpses of Sydney Harbour and the Heads creating an impressive sense of arrival this is a house that promises – and delivers – much. The spectacular position wedged into the slopes above Balmoral in Sydney’s north demanded a stunning design to match and architects Potter & Wilson certainly delivered on the brief.

The clients had bought the battleaxe block in 1992, acquiring an 80s “modern box, architectural and of its time”, although with surprisingly minimal windows and low ceilings. “Even then it was unconventional for the area, which primarily consisted of Federation-era houses,” says the owner. The most outstanding feature was the uninterrupted panoramic view across Sydney Harbour to the Heads. “Whatever the weather it has an enormous impact – a storm rolling in, a sunset, the sparkling blue water – each has distinctive appeal,” the owner says.

While the house underwent several renovations over the years the time came when “it no longer suited how we wanted to live”, says the owner. It was begging to be reinvented into a luxurious and spacious residence, maximising the amazing views and befitting the location. Architects Imogene Potter and Simon Wilson immediately noted the house’s defensive response to the morning sun and its tentative connection to the harbourside setting. “We imagined the external skin of the building as a way of filtering the views and light,” says Imogene, and this informed their choice of sculptural faceted concrete and slim steel elements for the facade.

Maintaining the existing concrete floor slabs as a framework the architects, along with Bill Clifton of Robert Plumb Build, created a robust structure that relies on massed planting, >



**This page** A six-metre steel shelving unit is a dramatic addition to the living area separating it from the stair. Curated items on shelves include custom planters by Robert Plumb, ceramics from Geoffrey Hatty Applied Arts and steel sculptures by Korban/Flaubert. 1930s Jindrich Halabala chairs from Nicholas & Alistair sit with a ClassiCon ‘Bell’ side table from Anibou. The fine Le Klint ‘Pliverre’ floor lamp from Great Dane contrasts with the sturdy Flos ‘Taccia’ table lamp by Castiglioni set into the shelf behind. **Opposite page, from top** K.i.s.s curtains in Putty from Unique Fabrics filter the strong light while not obscuring the outlook. Artek ‘Side Table 606’ by Aino Aalto from Anibou. The pool is a magnet for the owners’ grandchildren and a great backdrop for entertaining. The house looks out on the tennis court.



These pages “The interior is a balance of big gestures and fine detailing – working through the scale of the space and introducing intimacy helped define the quality of the pieces,” says Sarah. The soaring double-height ceiling and expansive glazing promote a feeling of luxury and openness. B&B Italia ‘Tufty-Too’ sofa from Space. Minotti ‘Song’ coffee table from De De Ce. A vintage bronze Japanese vessel from Geoffrey Hatty Applied Arts sits on top of the SP01 ‘Smith’ table from Space. Abrash bamboo silk rug in Storm from Cadrys. Astep ‘Model 2065’ pendant lights by Gino Sarfatti from Mobilia. K.i.s.s. curtains in Putty from Unique Fabrics. Flooring throughout is a custom terrazzo mix cast in situ.

« deftly executed by Spirit Level, to soften the amalgam of concrete, steel and glass. Approached along a landscaped driveway the property is accessed at the highest level, descending to the five bedrooms and library on the middle floor, and to the double-height living, kitchen and dining areas on the ground floor leading to the pool. On the lowest level a self-contained guest apartment faces onto the tennis court. Six bathrooms and a cellar round out the amenities.

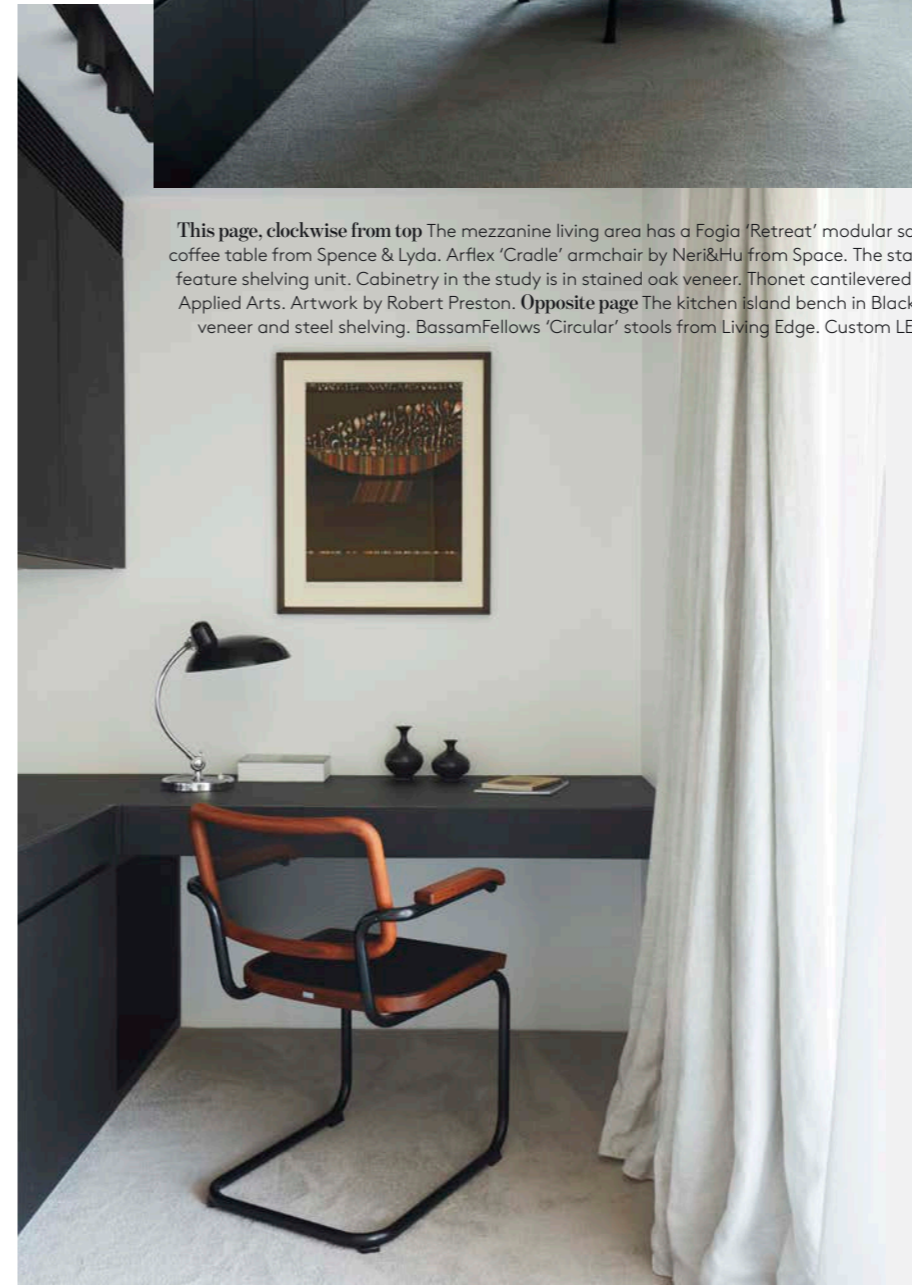
The mood throughout is one of quiet luxury. The owners favoured a monochrome palette, so the materials were restricted to blackened steel and timber for the stairs and living room shelving, and stained oak for the joinery in the

kitchen and other areas. The island bench features an in-sync black granite benchtop – Black Forest in a leathered finish – which adds texture and “gives life and movement when lit”, says Imogene. As the project progressed, muted blues and greens were also included to reflect the context of the house set among the trees and by the water.

Space is emphasised with voids in the living and dining rooms creating a feeling of generosity. The two-storey steel shelving that separates the stairs from the living area is a dramatic addition, that “emphasises the height of the room but is given human scale because of the detailing and the books and personal objects it holds”, says Imogene. »



This page, clockwise from top The mezzanine living area has a Fogia 'Retreat' modular sofa and Handvark 'Studio' floor lamp, both from Fred International. 'Innate' coffee table from Spence & Lyda. Arflex 'Cradle' armchair by Neri&Hu from Space. The staircase in blackened steel and timber is separated from the living area by the feature shelving unit. Cabinetry in the study is in stained oak veneer. Thonet cantilevered chair in walnut and mesh from Anibou. Vintage lamp from Geoffrey Hatty Applied Arts. Artwork by Robert Preston. Opposite page The kitchen island bench in Black Forest granite keeps to the monochrome theme. Cabinetry in stained oak veneer and steel shelving. BassamFellows 'Circular' stools from Living Edge. Custom LED linear pendant light from The Lighting Guild. Glass vase from Cassina.





**SPEED READ**

» Architects Potter & Wilson were engaged to breathe new life into an 80s 'box' located in Sydney's Balmoral on a sloping site with mesmerising harbour views. » Using the concrete floor slabs as a framework they articulated a svelte structure in concrete and steel spread over three levels and including a pool and tennis court. » As the owners preferred a monochrome palette, the interior language of the house is blackened timber and steel expressed in the staircase, the joinery and the black granite kitchen benchtop. Muted blues and greens were added later in the project to reflect the house's position surrounded by trees and water. » Sarah Johnson Studio and Karen McCartney of Design Daily curated the furnishings, introducing a mix of vintage and contemporary pieces with a focus on ceramics, sculpture and glass accessories to add personality and interest to the cavernous spaces.

This page The main bedroom has a De La Espada 'McQueen' bed from Spence & Lyda. The wall behind is panelled in a Martyn Thompson Studio jacquard. Bed linen from Bedouin Societe. Boiled wool throw from Jac+Jack. 'Møller #63' bench from Great Dane. Opposite page, from top Artworks by Sokquon Tran in the dressing room adjacent to the master bedroom. In the bathroom, an Apaiser 'Chi' bath with Brodware 'Minim' tapware, all from Candana. Walls in Carrara marble from CDK Stone, floor in terrazzo cast in situ by Allseal. Bespoke vanity with Carrara marble top.

« The double-height glass doors and windows draw in an abundance of nature – blue sky, bush and the ever-present glittering harbour.

The furnishings, curated by Sarah Johnson Studio and Karen McCartney of Design Daily, serve to temper and soften the structure and the strong graphic nature of the design. Contemporary Australian pieces, as well as vintage finds, form the backbone, complemented by international design classics. "There are unconventional elements, a mix of high and low," says Sarah, "with pieces sourced from Etsy, 1stdibs, local auctions as well as special buys such as an exquisite c1960 table lamp in glass and metal, and a Japanese bronze vase."

The shelving presented a challenge but also provided an opportunity for expression and personality. "The clients are very art focused and we all worked together to find glass, ceramics and sculpture to populate the shelving in a creative and interesting way," says Karen. Plants in custom-made bronzed metal pots by Robert Plumb were also added to give life and a hit of greenery.

To counter the strongly masculine form of the structure the designers introduced some femininity with the selection of curvaceous pieces such as Patricia Urquiola's 'Tufty-Too' sofa for B&B Italia and Sebastian Herkner's 'Bell' table for ClassiCon as well as vintage 30s Jindrich Halabala armchairs. "These chairs were a defining early purchase and the flourish of their curved construction set the tone for other pieces," says Karen.

Another early selection was the Martyn Thompson jacquard fabric that is used as panelling behind the master bed. "It is muted and mysterious while adding a note of tactility," says Karen. Sarah adds, "The interior is a balance of big gestures and fine detailing. Working through the scale of the space and introducing intimacy helped to define the quality of the pieces."

With so many wonderful and flexible spaces inside and out, the family love entertaining, with the pool and tennis court a particular focus for friends and family including active grandchildren. "The house feels welcoming, calm and contained, creating its own little world," enthuses the owner. ■

*potterandwilson.com; robertplumbbuild.com.au; sarahjohnson.studio; designdaily.com.au; spiritlevel.com.au*

