



ODE TO JOY Working with a toy-collecting client who likes to think outside the box, FLACK STUDIO channels *radical optimism* to design an INDUSTRIAL *imaginarium* in a former Collingwood department store complex.

By ANNEMARIE KIELY Photographed by ANSON SMART Styled by JOSEPH GARDNER



This page on the ground floor of this home in Collingwood, Bastiano armchair by Tobia Scarpa and vintage Gubi V11 armchair from Leonard Joel; French Brutalist low table from 506070; Aspidé table lamp by Gianfranco Frattini for Gubi (on low table) from Cult; Laminator lamp by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni for Flos (in dining area); staircase finish in Honey Dijon from Porter's Paints; *Regression Painting (Nerds)* (2025) artwork by Michael Lindeman (on landing) from Sullivan+Strumpf. *Details, last pages.*



This page in the kitchen, **island benchtop** and **splashback** in Verde Ming marble from Artedomus; **island base** in crown-cut American oak from Ashwood; **joinery** in crown-cut American oak produced by Distinct Joinery; Astra Walker Hob **tapware** from E&S Trading Co; aluminium **kettle** from Pan After; In Common With Arundel Mushroom Surface Mount **ceiling lights** from In Good Company; **floor** in Bezio granite from Artedomus. *Opposite page* in the living area, **bookcase** in walnut from Ashwood; Vitra Akari 120A **pendant light** by Isamu Noguchi from In Good Company; Meadmore Calyx **floor lamp** from Grazia & Co; Stilnovo Ziggurat **table lamp** (top left) from Gibson's Auctions; Vitra Akari 1N **table lamp** by Isamu Noguchi (top right); 1950s **desk lamp** (third shelf, right) from 506070; *Sin título / Untitled (X8 Controla)* **artwork** by Dr. Lakra (Jerónimo López Ramírez) (right) from Outreach Gallery.



In this moment of unprecedented urbanisation, geopolitical instability, climate catastrophe and rapid technological change, do the ancient Greeks still have anything valid to say to us? Damn straight they do, demonstrates designer David Flack who, though not intimately acquainted with Aristotle's *Ethics*, consistently actualises the philosopher's belief that happiness is the meaning and purpose of life — "the whole aim and the end of human existence".

Flack vents it loud and proud in Smiley, the 1970s simplification of a smiling face set into the marbled threshold of his latest reboot — a residence in Collingwood's former department store complex Foy & Gibson. Designed by architect William Pitt, and dating back to 1895, its street-long amalgam of warehousing, showroom and factory floor clearly incurred the developer's carve-up into offices and residences; the latter of which have either kept 19th-century detail intact or decoratively deferred to this era's hyper individualism.

"A little from column A, a little from column B," advises Flack of the imminent meet-and-greet of his 40-something tech-investor client, "who battled cancer during Covid, self-declares as a nerd, and dots her collection of vintage store display toys into a Milanese-ease of whimsy and worldliness." He elucidates on a super-idiosyncratic brief seeking a smile-inducing sophistication, when the door opens to a brightly dressed brunette who calls her antechamber's happy quirk 'smile washing'.

"I did a lot of research in 2020 about taking every opportunity to draw out smiles in a natural way," she says, leading passage to a double-height, umber-walled living room, where a russet-hued helical staircase drills three levels up and large-scale figures, presumed former toy shop displays, invest the air of an Imaginarium into the fabric of old industry. The fantasy is charged by a large Noguchi pendant lamp, hung low to harvest moon effect, and a 17th-century verdure tapestry in which linear perspective insinuates a portal into a different space-time continuum.

"Oh my gosh there's at least 100 hours in the online search for the right one," she says of her quest to find "old storytelling" free of people and creatures for a bricked-in archway that conceals heating while preserving architectural history. "We were particular about maintaining everything that was original... didn't want to touch anything. This is the actual factory floor, and we saved as much of it as we could. I think that space can really take you someplace else."

Perhaps to the fantastical island of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, the beloved book in which a boy enters the realm of his own creation, roamed by untamed creatures. The 20-seat conjoined Happy tables, made by local craftsman Daniel Poole, would certainly suggest so. Chamfered bite-like on their edges and dividing into minor and major options — "no kid's table here" — they assume the anthropomorphic attitude of benign monsters with stumpy legs.

"Entertaining is a big part of this place," explains the client with clarification that as a tech investor she likes gathering bold thinkers and doers around a dining table which, if linear in composition, would limit engagement and "end up a bit 'royal family'".

"I didn't talk about materials, I didn't talk about the shape, I didn't talk about any of the things that perhaps a normal person would," she says of briefing Poole for the custom furniture. "I wanted it to be a happy creature," set in a domestic landscape peopled by fanciful figures whose round hands and barrel heads pin-back to German toy company Playmobil, and the archetypes developed by former cabinet-maker Hans Beck in the 1970s.

"They've all named themselves," she says, calling the living room cowboy Herschel and the bearded surfer dude, seen waving not drowning in upper-level glass-walled bedroom, Herbie. "Ira is under the stairs, but they move around," she says of "a German police officer", who she re-cast in the green and gold of a nearby Babar, the elephant of French children's book fame.

He monitors transit through a kitchen that is an envy-inducing envelope of green Ming marble — a decadent design homage to the warped drive of cinema's greatest anti-heroes. "The villain's lair always looks so much more seductive and sophisticated than the hero's hangout," she shares with the push of a doorway panel, concealed in an oak-faced grid of cabinets, to a hidden war-room (her office) carpeted in 'watch-and-act' orange and blue. It's a particular brand of 'bad' that loves such full-tilt modernism and radioactive mayhem, comments Flack.

"I feel like this was such an opportunity to reconstruct myself," says the client of cancer treatment and her identification with the DC Comics character Doctor Manhattan, a nuclear physicist caught in radioactive test who returns superhuman and blue. "Each environment in here has a slightly different feel, which is very deliberate. As you go on the journey you see space from all different angles and feel connected to a mood of positivity."

She continues up the twisting stair, its aerial appreciation of the 'atmospheres' inducing lightness and a laugh. The reality of mid-level bed, bath and boudoir — a rack of colour-me-bright "girliness" — repeats the metaphor of redemption; a positivity which peaks in a rooftop guestroom and terrace garden by Florian Wild. "I frequently find myself stopping mid-moment to appreciate how beautiful something is and smile. It's a beautiful space — a Happy Haus."

And "happiness depends on ourselves", noted Aristotle of the need to do the exploratory dive into the space of both psyche and structure. Yeah, the ancient Greeks still rock 'it', and Flack ardently reveals 'it'. ■ flack.studio

This page in the dining area, custom dining table by Daniel Poole; Scarpa 121 chairs by Afra and Tobia Scarpa for Cassina from Castorina; Gubi Coco dining chairs reupholstered by Camm Upholstery; blackout and sheer curtains from James Dunlop Textiles and installed by In Vogue Blinds; floor in recycled Baltic pine; Baluch wool rug from Najaf Rugs & Textiles; antique tapestry from Antiques from France; Fortuna (Adventure) (2023) and Fortuna (Health) (2023) light artworks by Danielle Brustman from Sophie Gannon Gallery.







This page in the main bedroom's ensuite, **vanity** and **splashback** in Dedalus marble from Artedomus; **cabinets** in crown-cut American oak from Ashwood; **mirrors** from In Ex Living; Vaarnii 001 **stool** from Anibou; Astra Walker Olde English **tapware** from E & S Trading Co; vintage Persian **rug** from Najaf Rugs & Textiles; **walls** in Manrique Laguna tiles from Tiento Tiles. *Opposite page* in the main bedroom, custom **bedside table** by Flack Studio and produced by The Makery Club; custom **bedhead** upholstered by Camm Upholstery; vintage **armchair** by G. Moscatelli for Formanova from Castorina; mid-century Cubist **side table** from CCSS; Tuscan **bed veil** from In The Sac; vintage Persian **rug** from Najaf Rugs & Textiles; Meadmore Calyx **table lamp** from Grazia & Co; Santa & Cole Tatu Alta **floor lamp** from Nook Collections.



This page in the office, vintage Ico Parisi **desk** from Leonard Joel; vintage Ico Parisi **chair** from Lumini Collections; Meadmore corded **chair** from Grazia & Co; Usha **umbrella stand** by Eckart Muthesius for ClassiCon from Anibou; custom wool **carpet** from Halcyon Lake; Aspidé **table lamp** by Gianfranco Frattini for Gubi from Cult; Teti **ceiling lamps** by Vico Magistretti for Artemide from Stylecraft; **walls** in crown-cut American oak from Ashwood. *Opposite page* in the rooftop garden, Meadmore corded **reclining chair**, Spring **stacking chair** and stone **side table**, all from Grazia & Co; vintage Persian **rug** from Najaf Rugs & Textiles; **balustrade** finish in Honey Dijon and **wall** finish in custom Corbusier Baby Blue from Porter's Paints; **floor** in custom cream terrazzo from Terrazzo Australian Marble; **steps** in Verde Ming marble from Artedomus; **landscape design** by Florian Wild. *Details, last pages.*

