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A cosmopolitan Sydney couple tapped the CREATIVE wizardry of FLACK STUDIO to reawaken the interior of a *heritage* Darling Point mansion.

By YEONG SASSALL *Photographed by* ANSON SMART *Styled by* JOSEPH GARDNER



This page in the entry hallway of this Darling Point home, Natural Beach Stone stool by Hans Severin Jacobsen from Studio Gardner; hall runner from Cadrys; ceiling light by Oscar Torlasco for Lumen from Nicholas & Alistair; walls and ceiling in Maldon from Porter's Paints; steps in Opus marble from Artedomus; *Conjure/Condense* (2019) artwork by Gemma Smith. *Details, last pages.*





These pages in the kitchen, **island** in crown cut walnut timber; **bencht**op in Rosso Levanto marble from Artedomus; **cabinetry** in brushed stainless steel, and **partition frame** in Black Mild Steel from Alustain, all joinery by Jonathan West; Perrin & Rowe Ionian bench-mounted **tapware** with porcelain levers and spray rinse from The English Tapware Company; 13 Cubic **chandelier** by Gaetano Sciolari from Castorina; Cylinder **downlights** by Apparatus from Criteria; **partition glass** in Clear Sparkle Textured Glass and Amber Tanami Textured Glass from Axxess Glass Products; *Second edition (Panel H)* (2023) **artwork** (on left wall) by Esther Stewart; *Urchin palettes* (2024) **artwork** (on back wall) by Lara Merrett from Sullivan+Strumpf.

It only takes a moment to intuit the appeal of Mindaribba, a 1906-built mini mansion perched on the crest of one of eastern Sydney's most desirable tree-lined streets. The Darling Point property features a north-west-facing terrace that glances over Rushcutters Bay, and during the evening's golden hour, casts rays of dappled sunlight throughout the house's rear living area. "You never get tired of it," sighs the impossibly chic homeowner, who traded a beloved open-plan family home in the eastern suburbs for this six-bedroom, heritage-protected beauty. "We came from a very white home..." she explains. "Very modern. Very Sydney," finishes her husband, whose pride and enthusiasm for his new home extends to every corner — man cave, gym and laundry included.

As a couple with two adult sons largely out of the nest, the owners' version of downsizing began predictably, with plans for a neat little high-rise. "[My wife] originally wanted to move me to an apartment," explains the husband, "but every place I went, I got a bit of claustrophobia". Before long, they had flipped the script entirely and were falling for Mindaribba's Queen Anne Federation architecture instead. "There's something about this era of homes that don't date," states the wife, who realised partway through her house hunt that she "just wanted a home that was lived in."

The couple's deeply rooted appreciation for design and interiors is palpable, and the house awakened the wife's desire to pin down a designer she'd long had her eye on: David Flack. "It was Troye Sivan's place in Melbourne and a house in Middle Park," she recalls of the initial creative spark. "He was so different to everyone else." A tour of Flack Studio's previous project in Potts Point effectively sealed the deal, and the couple were soon dining with the designer in Sydney, visiting his Melbourne studio and diving into Flack's Milanese maximalist dreamworld.

Despite a renovation by the previous owners in the 1980s, Mindaribba's heritage status meant that very little could be altered structurally, but Flack delighted in the house's early 20th-century bones. "I immediately fell in love with it," he says, "I was quite fascinated by the series of rooms." Taking an "honour what is there, but amplify it" approach, the designer describes each insertion as "rich in material detail" but respectful of the home's past. "We didn't buy intending to make elemental changes to it," confirms the wife.

Graced with 2.4-metre high ceilings adorned with decorative mouldings and heritage-protected original timber floorboards that Flack Studio simply sanded back, the house was unwieldy at best. Ostensibly a four-year renovation that included a one-year delay from council approval, there were many hurdles to clear, and end result was a complete transformation. "There's not one centimetre of this house that hasn't been touched," says the husband. Improvements, while arguably cosmetic, range from a recreated Queen Anne-style staircase redesigned with a contemporary twist, to what Flacks calls a "Mondrian-esque" steel-frame-and-coloured-glass partition separating the kitchen and dining room and a transporative Porsche green entrance hall. Even the backyard — with its Florian Wild-tended gardens that cascade down to a stainless-steel-fenced pool area — scored a major facelift.

"It's not a sun-filled house," Flack points out, "it has beautiful light towards the back, but you know, it's got this darkness to it. I think that plays into its gothic Queen Anne essence — it's almost telling you that it can take colour, take rich material, and take detail, which it does." To that end, Flack luxuriated in the home's formality and enclosed floor plan, adding slabs of dramatic Rosso Levanto to the kitchen walls and island bench, matched with crown cut walnut joinery by Jonathan West, and bulbous lighting from Flack Studio's collaboration with Volker Haug. There are pockets of functionality hidden in every room; from secret storage spaces in guest bathrooms to a tiny office nook built into a quiet kitchen corner.

The big swings don't end there. In the main bedroom, floor-to-ceiling Arabescato Rosa beckons beyond the bathroom threshold and draws you into a space where a spherical stone tub is paired with a striped black-and-white Bisazza-tiled wall that hugs the curves of the bath. Positioned next door is a four-metre high shower recess, complete with a waterfall, which Flack insisted on. "I said, 'Dave, I just need the one shower,'" laughs the husband, who happily attests to Flack's need to look after his clients and curate every last detail.

Other thoughtful gestures prevail, including amber glass insertions above the doors — a nod to the original pink glass panels positioned above the rear patio doors, which are heritage protected. Likewise, the fireplaces on each floor, which had to be restored and tiling painstakingly replaced, or the vintage Barovier & Toso chandeliers in the dining room, which required five hours to reassemble, and another six months to wait for broken glass replacements from Italy. For Flack, finding creative ways of working around these constraints was the reward. "They become this beautiful thread of detail," he notes, while crediting his clients' incredible "patience and resilience" during the renovation's many roadblocks and plot twists.

It is, by all accounts, a top-to-bottom Flack-ification. More incredibly, it's a home that required little to no housewarming. "[Flack] makes your bed and hangs all the artwork, so you walk into a completed house with your suitcase," explain the owners. "I think that's so special," says the wife. "I walked in and I started crying because I couldn't believe [how] it instantly felt like home." ■ David Flack's book *Flack Studio: Interiors* is out now; flack.studio



This page in the living room, Square 16 sofa by Piero Lissoni for De Padova; Costela armchair by Tacchini; Fountain side table by Glas Italia from Space Furniture; Luar coffee table by Ross Littell for ICF De Padova from Nicholas & Alistair; modular stone plinths by Remy Pajaczowski-Russell and Large White Sculpture (2023) by Patrick Crulis from Studio Gardner; *Corymbia deserticola Gumnut Spheres* (2023) by Maria Fernanda Cardoso and *Inflatable Crown (regency)* (2014) sculpture (on coffee table) by Alex Seton from Sullivan+Strumpf; vintage Persian rug from Cadrys; Oriental Bamboo Weaves blinds in Earth from Blinds by Peter Meyer; Fleur (Me and You) ceiling light by Flack Studio x Volker Haug Studio; artwork by artist unknown.





These pages in another view of the living room with a view of the dining room, So Good **armchairs** by Studioepe for Baxter from Space Furniture; *Corymbia deserticola Gumnut Spheres* (2023) (on coffee table and floor) by Maria Fernanda Cardoso from Sullivan+Strumpf; Fantasma **floor lamp** by Tobia Scarpa for Flos from Castorina; Beam **dining table** by Van Rossum; vintage Cab 412 **chairs** by Mario Bellini for Cassina from Castorina; **shelving unit** in walnut and walnut burl; **bar** in Antique Brown granite from Artedomus; vintage Barovier & Toso **ceiling lights** from Castorina; *Bruce (Me and You)* **wall light** by Flack Studio x Volker Haug Studio; Table Lamp #5 (2023) **lamp** (on middle top shelf) by Yona Lee from Fine Arts, Sydney; *Yes, That's Me All Right! (Goba)* (2024) **sculpture** (middle shelf, on left), Postcard #2 (2023) **sculpture** (middle shelf, on right) by Tim Silver and From The Fire sculpture (right half) by Lynda Draper, all from Sullivan+Strumpf; Motivation yellow **vessel** by Brendan Van Hek; **artwork** by artist unknown.



This page in another view of the kitchen, **rangehood surround** in hammered aged brass from Alustain and produced by Jonathan West; **frame** in Rosso Levanto marble from Artedomus; **splashback** in Sud MEL tile from Viúva Lamego; **joinery** in crown cut walnut timber with Black Japan stain; **pot filler tap** from The English Tapware Company. *Opposite page* in the main ensuite bathroom, **vanity, walls and floor** in Arrabescato Rosa from Artedomus; **joinery** in crown cut walnut timber with Black Japan stain; Astra Walker Olde English heated **towel rail** from Candana; Natural Beach Stone **stool** by Hans Severin Jacobsen from Studio Gardner; **glass insert** (above door) in Amber Tanami textured glass from Axxess Glass Products.







This page in the main bedroom, Bio-mbo bed and bedside table by Patricia Urquiola for Cassina; vintage Kilim rug from Cadrys; *Untitled artwork* (1993) by Susqya Eline Williams from Johans Borman Fine Art. *Opposite page* in another view of the main ensuite bathroom, solid marble bath in Nero Marquina from Zen; Astra Walker Olde English Signature freestanding bath mixer and Olde English vertical heated towel rail from Candana; vintage chandelier by Julius August Kalmar from Castorina; wall in white mosaic tiles and black mosaic tiles from Bisazza Tiles. *Details, last pages.*