



MODERN *history*

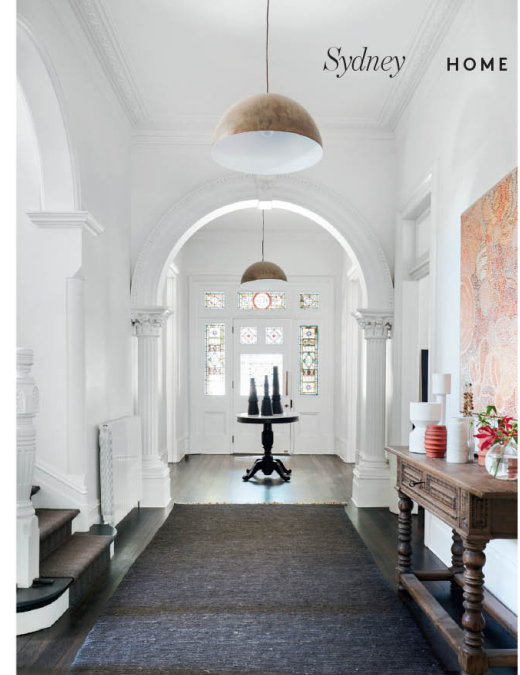
A sensitive update to this handsome heritage house has made it fresh and relevant for a family of six.

Photographs PRUE RUSCOE Words JUDY PASCOE Styling AMANDA MAHONEY



This page The dining area has a table from MCM House and chairs from Coco Republic on a rug designed by Suzanne Gorman and made by Tappeti. Waterford Crystal 'Etoile' pendant light from Cult. Curtains in Ivory linen and gold velvet from Zepel Fabrics. Artwork is by Doris Bush Nungarrayi. Opposite page The imposing facade with front door painted in Dulux 'Traditional Cobalt Blue' and trims in Dulux 'Raku', 'Flooded Gum' and 'White Duck Quarter'. The garden is by Vale Green Life.

These pages In the living area, a sofa from Jardan, coffee table from GlobeWest with decorative objects from Becker Minty, and a side table from Blu Dot sit on a custom Tappeti rug. Cabinet from Zuster with an artwork by Justin Feuerring above. Floor lamp is from West Elm, and wall sconces are Nemo 'Applique de Marseille' by Le Corbusier from Cult. Floorboards are original kauri pine. The expansive entrance hall has a rug from Armadillo & Co. Round table from Pottery Barn. Ralph Lauren sideboard from The Country Trader with an artwork by Nellie Ngampa Coulthard above.



The challenge facing interior designer Suzanne Gorman and the owners of this 1896-era Italianate home in Sydney's Mosman was how to respect its history and incredible detail while making it warm and welcoming for family life. Previously used for a variety of purposes including a nursery school, a boarding house and then commercial offices – including, for many years, the headquarters of advertising agency Mojo – the impressive two-storey home called Alma has had many lives.

Owners Linda and Nick Roberts were living in the US and looking to return to Sydney when the house came up on their internet searches. "It was for sale for quite a long time," says Linda. "No one seemed prepared to take it on. I think we were a bit naive!"

Divided into offices complete with a compactus room, coffee kitchens, and male and female bathrooms – plus parking for around 14 cars – though not derelict, it was certainly in need of some TLC. The iron lace on the upstairs verandah had gone, replaced with some flimsy timber railing, the fireplaces had been boarded up and the chimneys were falling off.

Enter Suzanne Gorman of Studio Gorman, referred by a friend, and very excited at the prospect of this blank canvas. As the house is on the State Heritage Register, the owners had engaged heritage architect Margaret Skilbeck from Architelle who brought historical expertise as well as flair to the detailing, such as the scalloped timber trim on all the windows at the back of the house.

"The first thing we did was establish a floor plan and a spatial flow," says Suzanne. While the owners and their four children 'camped' in the upstairs hallway (quite commodious), the renovation swirled around them. Although there was not a vast amount of structural work required (the deck, swimming pool and garage were the only additions to the footprint), the project was a massive undertaking, lasting around seven years. Original features such as the shingles and multi-paned windows at the back were restored or replicated and sympathetic timber railings added to the new deck. The most recent work has been



the double garage with guest accommodation which is particularly pleasing to Linda in that it looks as if it has always been there.

The generosity of size and the number of rooms – 24, including seven bedrooms – meant that a lot of furniture and accessories were needed, and Linda and Nick had brought just a few pieces from the US. “It was important to respect the history and character of the house but not to make it stuffy,” says Suzanne. “We didn’t want museum rooms,” she adds. “Each space had to have a meaningful purpose, fulfil a function and be used regularly. I wanted it to reflect the owners and their quirky sense of humour and love for entertaining.” To that end she sought robust pieces that could withstand the rigours of children and dogs. The colour palette is warm and rich without being overwhelming. Walls throughout are painted in Dulux ‘Natural White’ while deep plum and duck-egg blue and pops of black and white in accessories, fabrics, rugs and handles provide punctuation points.

In the spacious dining room, Suzanne set the MCM House table and Coco Republic chairs on a custom rug from Tappeti, whose oversized floral pattern in plum echoes the colour of the velvet sofa in the adjoining living room. Curtains in ivory linen with a deep gold velvet band add “a bit of luxe and glamour while keeping it real”, says Suzanne. “The house is a mixture of highs and lows. There are some really amazing pieces, such as the ‘Etoile’ Waterford Crystal chandelier from Cult and the bespoke rugs from Tappeti, and then more sensible items.”

One of Suzanne’s favourite spaces is the upstairs living room. “I had never done one of those before,” she says. “But when we started work on the house the children were really small and there were enough bedrooms so I thought it would be a cosy space for Linda and Nick to retreat to when the kids had gone to bed.” It certainly has a bolder look with curtains in a graphic black-and-white fabric custom-designed by Chrissie Jeffery of No Chintz, yellow chairs from Jardan and a duck-egg blue MCM House sofa. It emanates grandeur without pastiche and demonstrates perfectly how old and new can work together harmoniously. Just like the whole house really. 📌

For more go to studiogorman.com.



This page Handpainted joinery with Limoges handles from Mother of Pearl & Sons lends an air of grandeur to the kitchen. Calacatta marble bench top with timber butcher’s block. Thonet bentwood stools. ‘Gadsden’ glass pendant lights. Opposite page, clockwise from top left Waterford Crystal ‘Etoile’ chandelier from Cult hangs above the MCM House table. Chairs from Coco Republic. Artwork by Lisa Lacroix from Otomys. In the family room, Ercol ‘Chiltern’ chairs from Temperature Design surround a table from MCM House. Pendant light from The Family Love Tree. Artwork by Paul Ryan. Wallpaper by Anna Spiro from Porter’s Paints. The maid’s staircase has been closed off at the top but was kept as a folly. In the family sitting area, a ‘Joe’ sofa from MCM House sits on an Armadillo & Co rug. Floor lamp is by Pierre + Charlotte.





SPEED READ

» Returning to Sydney from the US where they had been living, Linda and Nick Roberts bought Alma, an imposing 1896-era house that had been used for a variety of purposes over the years including a school, a boarding house and commercial offices. » They consulted heritage architect Margaret Skilbeck, and then engaged interior designer Suzanne Gorman to reinvigorate the expansive spaces while respecting the history of the home. » Suzanne introduced handmade tiles, handpainted joinery, bespoke rugs and fabrics to complement the heritage features and lend an appropriate sense of gravitas without being stuffy.

» A palette of warm neutrals with pops of plum and duck-egg blue and a mixture of high and low items make for easy family living.



"IT WAS IMPORTANT TO RESPECT THE HISTORY AND CHARACTER OF THE HOUSE BUT NOT TO MAKE IT STUFFY ... WE DIDN'T WANT MUSEUM ROOMS."



This page: The master bedroom is underpinned by a rug that the owners brought back from the US. Heatherly Design bedhead and ottoman. Linen bedcover from Francalia. Custom velvet cushions from Zuster. Bestlite lamps from Cult. Ethan Allen 'Hannah' bowfront chest of drawers with *Painting 223 (Moonee Beach)* by Alan Jones from Olsen Gallery above. Pendant light is 'Anders' from Pinch. Opposite page, clockwise from top left the upstairs sitting room has a sofa from MCM House, Jordan side chairs and leather ottoman on an Armadillo & Co rug. Brass bowl from Country Road. Nemo 'Crown Minor' pendant light from Cult. Curtains are in a bespoke fabric by No Chintz. Artwork is by Rex Turnbull. The balustrade was painted white to lighten the interior. Runner is herringbone sisal. The ottoman by Arthur G is in a Shilo Engelbrecht fabric. The master bathroom has a Modà bath from ACS with tapware from The English Tapware Company. Side table by Daniel Boddam. Limoges handles in duck-egg blue from Mother of Pearl & Sons on original doors. Custom mirror with bronze bamboo frame. Visual Comfort sconce from Laura Kincaid.