

G E N T L E

I T A L I A N

A F F A I R

photography rory gardiner + matteo dal vera styling alexandra ponting words andrea tomaz

An ex-gallery and auction house provides the perfect setting to blend Art Deco style with lashings of European elegance



Curated beauty A custom sofa by AP Design House is matched with vintage pieces such as a lamp by Pietro Chiesa for FontanaArte, an Italian glass console, an Art Nouveau sculpted timber mirror from Studio ALM, an Italian travertine coffee table and a glass dish by Jacques Adnet. The 18th-century original oil on linen artwork was sourced from a Parisian market. ->

meet the designer

Alexandra Ponting of AP Design House oversaw the renovation and interior design. apdesignhouse.com.au | @apdesignhouse



INTERIOR DESIGNER ALEXANDRA PONTING has always had a thing for Europe. “I’ve travelled to France and Italy many times from when I was young,” says Alexandra. “I just feel a real affinity, especially to Italy.” So when an Instagram follower asked her to put a European-inspired mark on their newly purchased home in Sydney’s Woollahra, Alexandra was ready.

DECO DIVA This narrow, freestanding Art Deco property on Queen Street’s boutique-and-cafe strip was a former art gallery and auction house that had been turned into two apartments. The brief was clear, yet multi-faceted. The upper apartment would be painted and leased. The downstairs would transform into a beautiful apartment for the client and her two ‘part-time resident’ sons. This project involved establishing a sense of lightness, honouring the Art Deco facade and staircase and creating a curated European ‘story’ throughout. Floor plan changes also had to allow for the property to transition back into one big, single-use house down the track. “We gutted the ground-floor apartment, pulled up floors, got rid of the bathroom, added mouldings and fretwork and made the front entry into a terrace with Art-Deco brickwork, an iron balustrade and lovely French doors,” says Alexandra.

INSPIRED INTERIORS When decorating, Alexandra focused on balancing softness and strength. Muted furnishings and neutral walls were paired with bigger, bolder, romantic furniture pieces that felt substantial. “If you’re going minimal and tactile in finishes, you need to create warmth and strength elsewhere so it doesn’t become a white box,” says Alexandra. “That’s why I’m drawn to Old World Italian ... and I also love the works of designers like Gio Ponti.” Dark terrazzo tiling “gave strength” while Murano lighting created “something so soft and magical”. The Milan-inspired kitchen blends neutral tones, microcement and stainless steel finishes, “but it doesn’t feel austere, because of the furniture”, says Alexandra.

DESTINATION STYLE Aside from Italy, a few other destinations were also referenced throughout. Take a tour around the apartment and you’ll find a Spanish dining table, French bedding, an antique Greek ensuite washbasin and Tadelakt (traditional Moroccan lime plasterwork). Nevertheless, Italy always remains Alexandra’s biggest *amore*. Soon, she will head back there again to find hand-painted, reclaimed Sicilian tiles and Puglian antiques. “I can’t wait,” she says. “I love the Italian way of life. Just the casualness and how warm and charming people are. It’s just so nonchalant and effortless, and their interiors reflect that.”

Cream of the crop Alexandra countered the paucity of light inside by opting for Dulux Vivid White on walls and interiors in all sorts of creams and off-whites. Dark floor tiles add a disciplined and striking contrast. →



Ciao bella "I'm inspired by kitchens in Milan," Alexandra says. "I've always wanted to do a stainless steel kitchen. They're sleek and practical, especially when paired with microcement and Tadelakt, plus the furniture. It also references the property's former life as a gallery." An 18th-century Spanish chestnut and wrought-iron table is mixed with French oak chairs, French and Italian linens, Surface Gallery tiles and Murano sconce. →



So dreamy The peaceful main bedroom is a true retreat. Toile gives the AP Design House bed a classic French feel as does the embroidered Parisian bedspread which was sourced by Alexandra from a Parisian market. A jute rug grounds the space. **Tadelakt touch** The main bathroom's Tadelakt is by Peter Holmes, Tadelakt Sydney. Navona travertine from Granite & Marble Works, travertine vanity by AP Design House, Perrin & Rowe tapware sourced from The English Tapware Company.

style tip Elevate a simple, neutral palette and by layering textures and harnessing the strength of dramatic dark flooring. Murano lights throughout will add an elegant yet powerful finishing touch. "They have a beautiful effect," says Alexandra. →





Sleeping beauty The main bedroom has an AP Design House toile bedhead, Twister side tables by Sophie Davies, ceramic Carmen D'Apollonio lamp base, AP Design House lampshade, Claude Garache art. A lovely mottled 'wall of glass' visible from the bedroom (below right) is a double agent as it's also the ensuite's custom-made shower screen (opposite). **Eclectic ensuite** Sconce, green and clear glass and '60s backlit mirror, all Murano. Antique Greek washbasin and artisan tiles from Lucca. **Deco duty** Honouring the original Art Deco facade and its historical importance was always of paramount importance.

Alexandra's 3 key design tips

1 "Restore period features and give them space for visual impact. Neutral walls help highlight their beauty and history. Add dark floor tiles for extra contrast."

2 "When holidaying, buy classic and durable artisanal pieces. If you love a certain destination, absorb its design style and way of life for inspiration."

3 "You can't get everything straight away. Layer pieces magically over time. It's good to get a base, and then your home will develop through travelling." →



shop it! For timeless appeal, shift into neutrals



1 Louis XV French Provincial-style **bedhead**, from \$2500 plus fabric, Christophe Living. **2** Nest jute **rug** in Natural (2x3m), \$1450, Armadillo. **3** Ideal Lux 'Santa' transparent **wall light**, \$247.99, Ideas 4 Lighting. **4** Nordal 'Bird' **mirror** in Gold (97x100cm), \$886, Amara. **5** Luxury velvet **cushion** in Cashew (50x50cm), \$79, Aura Home. **6** Haven fabric **3-seater sofa** in Mornington Ivory (2.06m), \$1699, Lounge Lovers. **7** Marble **table lamp**, \$149.95, Gigi & Tom. **8** Biscay marble **coffee table** in Beige (56x69cm), \$1499, Temple & Webster. **9** Pomelo Home 'Mori' ceramic **mug**, \$85/set of 4, Hardtofind. **10** Large Australian Impressionist **painting** by Rupert Hutter (1.17x1.38m), \$2800 for framed, Nostalgia Antiques. **11** Acqua di Colonia **eau de cologne**, \$198 for 100ml, Santa Maria Novella. **12** Perrin & Rowe 'Ionian' bench-mounted **mixer tap** in Chrome, \$1270, The English Tapware Company. **13** Chasseur copper covered **saute pan**, \$399, Living by Design. **14** *Curate: Inspiration For An Individual Home* **book** by Lynda Gardener, \$55, Living by Design. **15** Twister waterproof-sealed plaster **side table** (47x50cm), \$2000, Sophie Davies.

Colours and finishes
 FROM LEFT Multi Twill Stripe **cotton fabric** (137cm), \$89 per metre, No Chintz. Aggregato terrazzo-look porcelain **tile**, \$79/sqm, Surface Gallery. Portafino ceramic **tile trivet** in Blue/White (15x15cm), \$10.95, House of Dudley. Marrakesh **natural lime plaster**, \$63 for 16kg bag, Rockcote.



Artisan creation The main bathroom's Tadelakt by Tadelakt Sydney took about a month to cure. "It's a real process of applying layer by layer of lime plaster and working with a little stone," says Alexandra. "The end result is so creamy and soft, but also so hard." Travertine from Granite & Marble Works is matched to a Murano glass shelf and tapware from The English Tapware Company.

still-life styling nina dorn