

PETIT RETREAT

Despite its harbour-side views, this Sydney pied-à-terre takes an inward-looking approach with cocooning tones, light plays and smart use of materials

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PHOTOGRAPHS FELIX ROGERS



IN THE DINING ROOM, A CUSTOM HORIZONTAL PENDANT LAMP SUSPENDED OVER THE DINING TABLE MADE FROM STRIPY VINTAGE TICKING MATERIAL EVOKES A BEDOUIN AESTHETIC



'THE APARTMENT HAS GREAT NATURAL LIGHT. IN FACT, IT WAS A LITTLE TOO BRIGHT,' SAYS ITS DESIGNER, YASMINE SALEH GHONIEM. 'SO THE SHARED DINING AND

LOUNGE AREA WALL WAS TREATED WITH A DEEP INDIGO SHADE AS SUNLIGHT TENDS TO BOUNCE OFF WHITE. IT SUBTLY TETHERS THE VIEW VIA ITS FRAMING DEVICE'

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here are certain approaches to appointing a coastal home that have become so often repeated that they are, today, considered decorating law. 'A seamless transition between indoor and outdoor spaces' – or its truncated form: 'indoor/outdoor living' – has been bandied about by decorators and design magazines (even we at *House & Garden* plead guilty) to the point of banality.

'Dark walls make for small rooms' is another, with the virtues of non-committal paint tones with dubiously whimsical names such as 'Banana Dream' and 'Sunflower Symphony' (these are very much real paint names, available in store right now) extolled for their near-mythic ability to create the perception of more space. And then, of course, there's 'barefoot luxury', perhaps the only smug oxymoron in the English language, its natural habitat some whitewashed finca on a far-from-the-crowds Ibiza coastline or Byzantine-church-turned family-bolthole overlooking the Aegean. And while these design concepts have remained evergreen because, yes, they do work especially well when applied to a seaside home, sometimes the ideological road less travelled produces even more impactful and, dare we go there, original results.

'The sophisticated tobacco tones and molten-metallic fixtures provide sheltered respite from the brilliant glare and frenzied activity beyond the windows and terrace. You're cocooned, and the view becomes the bonus rather than the main act,' says designer Yasmine Saleh Ghoniem of this 80-square-metre apartment located in Sydney's inner-city suburb of Darlinghurst, with knockout views of Sydney Harbour. 'That's why I also steered away from designing the layout of the apartment to solely face the water. In essence, it's a retreat anchored in the heart of the city – a microcosm independent of the stellar views.' Yasmine, formerly of Australian architectural firm Amber Road, earlier this year established her own studio – YSG – a multidisciplinary initiative encompassing her existing interiors practice and with this project, she was given ample opportunity to flex her design muscle.

The homeowner, a frequent traveller, needed all the convenience but none of the impersonality of a lock-up-and-go. The space also needed the flexibility to host intimate dinner parties through large gatherings that spilled onto the balcony, as well as accommodate visiting friends on occasion. 'When I first met the owner, he was wearing a faded rock band T-shirt, which instantly cued the vibe I wanted to achieve: a sexy penthouse in moody tones that avoided any trying-too-hard clichés,' says Yasmine.

Before the designer set foot in the space, it had been completely gutted which left Yasmine with an ▶

‘There is no hierarchy between the rooms. Tonal and textural links provide an organic flow between spaces’

YASMINE SALEH GHONIEM

‘WITH ACCESS TO THE BALCONY POSITIONED DIRECTLY OFF THE RELOCATED KITCHEN, A CUSTOM MARBLE ISLAND BENCH-TOP WAS DESIGNED TO SIT AT AN ANGLE,

ALLOWING FOR A CLEAR EGRESS PATH AROUND IT,’ SAYS YASMINE. ‘IN TURN, IT TRANSFORMS THE TYPICALLY FUNCTIONAL ELEMENT INTO A DECORATIVE PIECE’



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP THE LIVING AREA DOUBLES UP AS A GUEST BEDROOM WITH THE DECORATIVE GREY-STAINED PANEL WITH OCHRE LINEAR PULLS CONCEALING A BED BASE AND MATTRESS;

DESPITE ITS CONSIDERABLE SIZE, THE 1.8-METRE TINTED GLASS TABLETOP DOESN'T APPEAR BULKY DUE TO ITS TRANSPARENCY; PRIVACY IN THE LIVING AREA IS PROVIDED BY AN EXTENDABLE SLATTED TIMBER SCREEN

exposed concrete shell for a canvas where everything, from fixtures to furniture, was custom-designed by her (except for the coffee table, sofa and bed). 'There is no hierarchy between the rooms. Tonal and textural links provide an organic flow between spaces,' says Yasmine. However, she points out: 'I knew that the kitchen required a relocation to the opposite side of the apartment, demarcated by a floating island bench instead of enclosing walls, opening the lounge area up directly from the short entrance hallway so that the view could be appreciated immediately.' The entryway now fans out into the living room, which further flows around a corner into the dining room and newly positioned open-plan kitchen. The master suite and bathroom are tucked away behind this, with a second guest bathroom (which used to be a laundry room) off of the living area.

'I wanted the design to have a theatrical quality, taking a cinematic cue with its play of shadow and light upon surfaces, so, like a film set, only the essential elements were included,' says Yasmine of the space, which eschews the idea of 'seaside living' for walls in deep browns and inky blues. 'To avoid oversaturation, I countered this with shades of cooling grey (with the concrete ceiling) and slatted nutmeg timbers,' she says. 'In addition, light hard flooring and carpets that dollop subtle spicy shades underfoot reduce the suffocating nature that could've resulted.' Essentially, it is the ample pooling of natural light that enabled Yasmine to achieve this tricky balance, producing a space that is a seasoned performer: cosy and broody in winter with diminished sunlight, and seemingly more expensive in the warmer months when the dusty pastels flourish.

So, does Yasmine feel she has achieved an unexpected sense of luxury? 'I think there's been a devaluation of the meaning of "luxury" in its overexposure, particularly in the high turnover world of fashion,' she says. 'It's certainly something rare and of the highest value in terms of materiality in the physical sense, but it doesn't have to be ostentatious. I like the sort that is unique and rooted in craftsmanship, incorporating daring palettes and organic shapes.' ■

YSG @ ysg.studio



WITHIN THE BEDROOM, THE CURVED FORM OF THE MAIN BLOCK CABINETRY ALLOWS FOR A LEGLESS INSET SIDE TABLE AS OPPOSED TO OBSTRUCTING PRECIOUS SPACE WITH BEDSIDE FURNITURE



'DREDA' COFFEE TABLE, R2 495, WEYLANDTS



'HARRISON' ARMCHAIR IN BROWN LEATHER, R10 799, CIELO



'FLECK' VELVET CUSHION, R400, MR PRICE HOME



IRREGULAR SMOKY VASE, R799, ZARA HOME



'CHATEAU' RUG IN PLASTER, FROM R10 600, HERTEX HAUS



'IVRESSE' OVAL DINING TABLE, POR, ROCHE BOBOIS



DULUX PAINT IN 50BB 06-163, FROM R179, BUILDERS WAREHOUSE