



FEATURE STORY

Words by Sue Williams



Sydney's best home interiors

Mirror, mirror on the wall, which are this year's fairest houses of all? The answers are often surprising.

When you hear that a home in Bondi has won this year's top residential design award, immediately you imagine a huge penthouse with dazzling views of one of the world's most celebrated beaches.

But not this time. The property that snatched the title is a modest house, buried among apartment buildings, on the urban back streets of the suburb.

And, even stranger, it's completely upside down, with all the living upstairs and the bedrooms on the ground floor.

"It's just a really beautiful home, and one that embodies so much of Australian

residential architecture and interiors," says Stuart Krelle, principal of architects Luchetti Krelle, who served as the chair of the jury deciding the just-announced Australian Interior Design Awards 2023 residential category.

"It's so light, bright and airy. It's a house that's so open, yet also has a sense of warmth and added soul. There's a real softness there and it works so well on every level."

The house – called Nine-Square Bondi after its roughly nine-metre-by-nine-metre size and unusual shape – was designed by the Madeleine Blanchfield

Architects team of Madeleine Blanchfield and Nick Channon.

An old house on the small site was demolished and this was built in its place. Because it was so squeezed between other buildings, the decision was made to flip the design. As a result, the upper level is used for all the living spaces and can be much more open and airy and flanked in greenery, while the lower level is for sleeping.

"It's a very unusual package of spaces, but it makes perfect sense," Blanchfield says. "Having the indoor-outdoor living spaces elevated up off the street,

Above and below: The upside-down Nine-Square Bondi designed by Madeleine Blanchfield Architects.



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Right and far right: The “fun and interesting” 19 Waterloo Street by SJB.

Below: La Palma by YSG Studio is a beach house with a Mexican resort feel.

with a sculptural staircase leading up from the entry, makes privacy much less of an issue and a lot of sense for urban locations.

“The owners just love Bondi and its vibe, and from the living room, they can lean out over the balustrade and talk to people walking down the street, which they do all the time.

“It’s very unusual, but it’s very positive and upbeat and the clients – a couple with three daughters and a dog who had lived a long time in Hong Kong so were very open to ideas – love living there.”

One of the owners is an artist, and the four-bedroom house, with an extra room upstairs that could be a study, guest room or rumpus room, was designed around her collection of artworks and the family’s experiences.

For instance, there’s wallpaper showing the mountains of Hong Kong, and artwork on the splashbacks.

“There’s amazing art everywhere and the house is very much a vessel for that,” Blanchfield says.

Another house in Sydney to receive a commendation in the residential design category is in Surry Hills, known by its address, 19 Waterloo Street.

Another small house with a total site footprint of just 90 square metres and 69 square metres of interior space, the project includes a shop with a one-bedroom apartment over it.



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“It tells an interesting story. At its core, it’s a testament to how we can be doing more with less.” Adam Haddow

Krelle says the architects, SJB, turned what was a challenging space into something that became a lot of fun and interesting. “For such a small footprint, it makes a big impact,” he says. “It’s so daring and clever in what they’ve done and yet it also feels very personal.

“From the street, it captures everyone’s glance because it looks so cool and the interiors are so different and colourful. It’s not a safe choice in any way!”

SJB director Adam Haddow says he found the site buried among the chaos of warehouses and terraces that once served Sydney’s rag trade. It was a corner terrace with decades of additions and lean-tos, that had served as a butcher’s shop, a grocer, a window workshop, a hatter and finally a restaurant.

“Our intent was to deliver a mixed-use house, breaking up the site to deliver more – less for us, but more for others,” Haddow says. “Our ambition: a shop, a self-contained flat and a home. Three uses out of one.

“We were able to create the sense of space and openness by using a split section, using the stairs as a pinwheel around which the house moves.

“It’s more like a treehouse than a real house, and divided into spaces that are served – the study, living and bedroom, which are grand with 3.6-metre ceilings – or in service, like storage, kitchen, robe and en suite with 2.1-metre ceilings.

“It tells an interesting story. At its core, it’s a testament to how we can be doing more with less and that as designers, we’re able to make that happen without compromising on the spaces we love.”

The third Sydney project to receive a commendation, this time for residential decoration, is La Palma at Palm Beach,

by YSG Studio. It’s a beach house with the feel of a Mexican resort, with vibrant terracotta shades on the walls and ceilings, marble cobblestones around the pool and terracotta tiles lining the barbecue area and lounge.

Krelle loves it for its “gorgeous palette”.

“It’s so beautiful and expressive with a vast collection of artworks, which are absolutely integrated into the house’s design,” he says. “It’s very playful and fun and demonstrates such a confidence and a skill, and is so rich as a home.”

YSG founder Yasmine Ghoniem says her clients wanted to be surrounded by energising patterns and colours that instantly transported them to another place – steering clear of the seaside nautical stripes that previously existed.

“All the social spaces now make you think of cocktail hour 24/7 and that’s exactly what they wanted; a relaxed holiday destination where you can breeze about,” she says. “The home also has to function as a holiday rental and, as soon as you arrive, you feel like you’ve landed at a remote Mexican resort you’d happily never leave.

“Even the ombre shades of the kitchen’s new two-tone stone island ... make you instantly think of a freshly poured tequila sunrise!” ■



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