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and a PR queen



TRADE SECRETS

COLOUR, LAYOUT & DESIGN AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



Parks and **RE-CREATION**

Fate led architect Phil Abram to this parkside home in Sydney, a hidden gem that he has polished and transformed into a bright, resort-like retreat.

STORY & STYLING **CHRIS PEARSON** ♦ PHOTOGRAPHY **MAREE HOMER**



LIVING Split levels and bright accent colours create a stage-like sense of drama. Iko Iko chair and footstool, Jordan. Tango mobile, Flensted. Hat moulds, Victory Theatre Antique Centre.

KITCHEN Phil Abram at the breakfast bar, which serves up park views, thanks to Centor bifold windows. Zinc benchtop, Craft Metals. Designer buy: Hay stools in White, \$806/each, Cult. For Where to Buy, see page 236.

This is the life

This house is a breath of fresh air, literally and figuratively, for owners Phil and Freda. The high-ceilinged living room, with its green views, is where they spend much of their time. "I love sitting there and looking at the park," says Phil. But the kitchen is also a significant magnet for these two passionate cooks. "In winter, the sun streams into the kitchen," says Phil. "This house makes me feel young."





KITCHEN Timber inlays in the joinery forge a visual connection with the rest of the open-plan space. Smeg rangehood, Barazza cooktop, Abey Australia. "The rangehood is like a piece of sculpture," says Phil. Artworks by Drago Marin Cherina.

KITCHEN/DINING A slender storage unit incorporates display space for some of Phil and Freda's Clarice Cliff wares.

LIVING This built-in bench takes advantage of the split level between living and dining spaces. On the upper level, a 3m-long Jordan sofa is perfectly proportioned for its position under a 4.7m ceiling. The massive glass carboy was once used for storing wine. The woven basket was purchased from indigenous weavers on a trip to Uluru. Freda's large artwork is a landscape of the adjacent park.

Designer buy: Eames Elliptical coffee table, \$1152, Living Edge. For Where to Buy, see page 236.

For architect Phil Abram and his wife, Freda, a fashion designer, finding this home was a happy twist of fate. The empty-nesters had sold the family home and were renting in Sydney's eastern suburbs when Phil chanced upon a charming hidden cul-de-sac he never knew existed. Soon after, a colleague spied a neglected terrace for sale that she thought might interest him as a project. It happened to be in that very street.

The property was scruffy, unloved and split into two flats. Built in the 1880s, the original house had been extensively renovated in the 1970s and sported the exposed clinker brick and mission-brown timbers typical of the era. Yet the location worked its magic on Phil and Freda. Facing north-east, the house overlooked parkland dominated by majestic Moreton Bay figs. It also had that rare commodity for the area, off-street parking for two cars, together with side access, which would be useful for Phil's clients.

Having previously lived in a rambling Federation home, Phil and Freda wanted something easy and breezy this time around, with living areas that could open up to connect the back of the house with the parkland. This was the brief Phil shared with colleague Anna Bowen-James, who also worked on the project.

"After a Federation home, we wanted to freshen things up," he says. "We wanted a resort-style home, open, light and airy, something that made us feel like we're on holiday." >



Trade secrets

As an architect, Phil knows the value of being completely in tune with the site and proposed building before tackling any design changes. While living offsite, Phil sectioned off part of the house and used it as his office for an 18-month period leading up to the renovation project. "It let me understand the house better and pick up things you don't during an open-for-inspection," he says.



'THE BUILT-IN BENCH PROVIDES A TRANSITION AND ALLOWS FOR SPLIT LEVELS WITHOUT RAILINGS.' PHIL

< Phil also had a professional interest in this radical departure. "For many years, people would come to me for renovations of old houses, but my palette is broader than that," he says. I relished the opportunity to show I could create something with a young identity, that feels relaxed, open and light."

In a bold move, Phil lopped off the back of the house, leaving the front section for a study and powder room, and raised the living areas, with the dining area on one level and the living area a few steps above. By doing this, and excavating into the rock below, he was able to tuck in three rooms underneath and still have soaring 4.7m ceilings in the living room, while keeping to the existing envelope and council heritage restrictions.

To the right of the entry is Freda's studio. Beyond this are the laundry, dining, kitchen and living spaces. Upstairs there's the main bedroom with bathroom and dressing area, while the lower level accommodates a bedroom, bathroom and generous office.

Clever design devices forge a link with the past. "I wanted to respect traditional aspects of old houses, such as architraves and skirting," says Phil. "But rather than express them, I put them flush with the wall. It's a contemporary take on traditional detailing." Similarly, the timber windows reference both the old and the new. "There's lots of glass," says Phil, "but it's all framed bifolds, for a sense of containment. I used traditional-style doors and windows, >

DINING An extendable table from Great Dane Furniture can accommodate up to 14 diners. For Phil, American rock maple for floors and joinery was a logical choice. "It is light-coloured and durable," he says, "it's even used in bowling alleys."

Artwork by Iclilio Martich Severi.

STAIRCASE Freda makes her way down the open, wall-mounted treads.

MAIN BEDROOM Charlotte, an elegant Burmese, enjoys the run of the house. Oriental bedside chest, Kazari.

Designer buy: James Street striped quilted bedcover, from \$679, Moss River. For Where to Buy, see page 236.



LOWER GROUND FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR





'WE WANTED A RESORT-STYLE HOUSE, SOMETHING THAT MAKES US FEEL LIKE WE'RE ON HOLIDAYS.' PHIL

< but we can throw them totally open during summer, so that it becomes like a pavilion."

Handcrafted timber features prominently; Phil inherited a passion for this from his father, a cabinetmaker. American rock maple, used for the floors and joinery, ensures a connection between spaces. The kitchen's meticulous detailing also gives a nod to Scandinavian furniture design. "The skirtings are left off and the cabinets raised, so the floor floats underneath," says Phil. "It all feels like a piece of furniture."

Inspiration for the interiors came from the couple's collection of Clarice Cliff pottery – "We love the simplicity of the shapes, the boldness and gutsiness of the colours, and the geometry" – and Freda's own artworks, which celebrate various phases of the couple's history, from holidays in Byron Bay and India to their time in this new home. "We really have personalised the house with stories from our own lives," says Phil.

Philip Abram Architects; Paddington, NSW; (02) 9363 2222 or www.philipabramarchitects.com.au.

H&G



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Porter's Paints
Peat (exterior)

Resene White
(interiors
throughout)

ADD A DASH OF

Bristol Tangy
Orange

Taubmans Irish
Stone

Orange and green pick up the turning colours of outdoor foliage through the seasons.

COURTYARD With its mossy ground cover and weathered timbers, this space has a serene Japanese feel. Care was taken to preserve the mature golden robinia.

BATHROOM Here, the American rock maple flooring has been laid with v-profile joints, creating a relaxed beach-house ambience. Oriental chest, Kazari.

EXTERIOR Originally a single-storey worker's terrace, the house dates to 1886.

STUDY Freda at work on her fashion designs. On the wall behind, her paintings record various events in the couple's life. Smart buy: For similar rug, try Orson & Blake. For Where to Buy, see page 236.