

J O Y T O



B E H O L D

A 1920s BUNGALOW with Sydney Harbour views and *beautifully restored* heritage decoration is a thing to *delight in*, and so ARENT&PYKE does just that with a charming renovation that *revels* in the details.

By LINDYL ZANBAKA *Photographed by* ANSON SMART *Styled by* JACK MILENKOVIC

This page in the sitting room of this Sydney home, Arflex Marengo sofa from Space Furniture; vintage **armchair** and burl **coffee table** from The Vault; **vase** (on coffee table) from 506070; ClassiCon **daybed** (foreground) from Anibou; Flare **floor lamp** by Pierre Yovanovitch from Criteria; Louis Poulsen Radiohus **pendant light** from Cult.
Opposite page in another view of the sitting room, **bowl** from Connie and Vi; vintage Afghan **rug** from Cadrys. *Details, last pages.*





*These pages in the kitchen, custom **kitchen dresser** and **stair cabinet** designed by Arent&Pyke in Sycamore from Briggs Veneers; **island** and **benchtop** in Caravaggio stone from Worldstone; Fredericia Pioneer **bar stools** from Cult; Franke gooseneck **swivel taps** and Miele VitroLine **ovens** from Winning Appliances; **bowl** (on kitchen bench) from Planet; **bowls** (on kitchen island) from Connie and Vi; **vase** (on cabinet, far right) by Martyn Thompson; **vase** (on cabinet, second from right) from 506070; Kingsheath T-Bar **drawer pulls** from The English Tapware Company; Compass brass **pendants** from Atelier De Troupe; vintage bamboo **lamp** from The Vault; *Smaugscape* (2014) **artwork** by André Piguet from Station Gallery.*



John Keats, the English Romantic poet once wrote, “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: Its loveliness increases; it will never Pass into nothingness...” His poetry finds ebullient expression in the Birchgrove home of a family charmed by its heritage beauty. That the owners weren’t even in the market builds on Keats’s point: time does nothing to diminish the value of homes with history; they remain as desirable as ever.

A 1920s bungalow on a rarefied strip of waterfront, the house had undergone a restoration in the ’90s, the ripeness of its original features preserved. “I really do love this house a lot — it’s one of the most intact heritage houses I’ve worked on,” says Arent&Pyke co-founder and principal Sarah-Jane Pyke by way of comment on the property’s pull and the privilege of having a hand in its future.

The owners, a couple with young adult children, tapped Arent&Pyke to alchemise the spirit of their 100-year-old home into an all-over refreshment.

“It was getting on 35 years” since the last renovation, says Pyke, and the kitchen and bathrooms hadn’t aged quite as gracefully. There was also a disconnect between designated spaces and daily rituals, so the team relocated an inconvenient entry, reoriented the kitchen, redefined the purpose of several areas, redesigned and tiled the semi-enclosed glass terrace, and liberated a “landlocked” living room with no ocular access to the Harbour Bridge beyond (in the end heritage restrictions would allow a small door-sized opening).

Gestureing towards arabesqued ceilings, flourishes of fretwork, handsome architraves and lead lighting in “every single window and door”, Pyke marvels, “the amount of decorative work was so overwhelming that it had to be our first point of inspiration. We were romanced by the original architectural details and instantly knew that we wanted to enhance them.” Still, she concedes, you can’t compete with that level of craft, nor would they replicate the original work. “We didn’t need more of it,” she says. “But we needed all of our detail to rise up and meet it.”

To elaborate, Pyke makes a beeline for the bathroom off the main bedroom downstairs — a private retreat carved out of the building’s sandstone foundations. Through moreish layers of terracotta bricks, zellige tiles, granite tops, microcement-finished walls, hand-made brass handles and shower tiles that Pyke calls Iced VoVos, “because they’ve got a layer of pillowy glaze that sits on top”, Arent&Pyke transforms prosaic requirements (flossing, shaving) into pleasurable acts. Even the bath has Chalcedony blue bubbles for feet.

The adjoining bedroom rolls out through glass doors into garden where the sight of the owners’ boat bobbing in the water is dappled by a big Angophora tree. Inside, terracotta floors, raffia wardrobe doors and low ceilings (visually volumised via clever curved cornices) depart from the lofty dimensions and timber topography upstairs.

The cover of Arent&Pyke’s 2022 self-titled tome reads “Interiors beyond the primary palette”, a descriptor that evinces here in an emotive spread of colour. As special as they are, the leadlight windows in “semi-precious stone-like tones” did not influence the rest of the scheme — Pyke wanted each material and colour to luxuriate in its own loveliness. Immersive ocean-blue kitchen joinery “tethers the space to the shoreline”, the Caravaggio quartzite on top, rippled with rusty gold, mimics the waves of the water out past the connecting terrace. A gracious blue-grey in the living room “is immediately calming”, the daughter’s butter-yellow bedroom “quietly recharges” and the newly converted guest room is “swathed in clotted cream”.

Attempts to define the olive-yellow shade in the entry’s library and sitting room demanded lengthy discussion between Pyke and senior designer Brooke Perry, but who needs labels when the result is so sublime? “While we wanted something uplifting that commanded your presence in the home’s grandest room, creating a sense that you had arrived somewhere, it needed to draw the eye to the two heroes: the ornate coffered and vaulted ceiling, and the entrance doors, which are surrounded by a horseshoe arch of floral leadlights,” Pyke describes.

This particular choice of paint empathises with the room’s rich cognac Arflex sofa from Space, chocolate burl wood coffee table from The Vault and modular Great Dane shelves that carry the family’s collected memories. Its “slightly dirty, grounding” character also harmonises with the home’s acoustics, which on the one hand feel “solid and still”, and yet, Pyke says, “there’s an incredible fresh breeze that flows from the open terrace, into the kitchen and through the hallway, and you can hear voices carry throughout in a comforting, connected way.”

Evidently, the most fun was had designing the upstairs bathrooms, a meadow of daisies sown into their tiled floors. Much of the detail is sartorially inspired (one reference was the Balmain spring 2013 collection, for which designer Olivier Rousteing created dresses from basketwoven raffia). “We were looking to fashion, to this idea of making ancient techniques and contemporary silhouettes best friends, and bringing contemporary shapes into this house in the form of handmade elements,” Pyke says as she points to the intricate bullnose detailing on every custom vanity. Perry still delights in “their tubby legs featuring five bands of stone.”

“Intertwining the language of old and new is fundamental to our work, and while there’s a romantic and whimsical element to our redesign of the home, there’s a strength to it. It doesn’t tread lightly,” Pyke says. “When you have a house this special, you know everything you do has to withstand the next hundred years.” ■ arentpyke.com



This page in another view of the sitting room, Royal System shelving unit from Great Dane; Dimoremilano side table; large vintage vase from 506070; vases (on top shelf, centre and right) from Connie and Vi; *St. Ives* (2020) artwork (on middle shelf) by Michael Cusack from Olsen Gallery; *Weatherzone / Shoreline* (2022) artwork (on shelf, second top right) by André Piguet from Station Gallery.



This page on the terrace, Shoreline deck chair from Vampt Vintage Design. *Opposite page* in another view of the kitchen, bowls (on cabinet) from Connie and Vi.



This page in one of the bathrooms, custom **vanity** designed by Arent&Pyke with Tiberio stone top from Artedomus and Silky Oak cabinet from Briggs Veneers; custom **mirror** designed by Arent&Pyke in Silky Oak from Briggs Veneers; Society Limonta **hand towel** from Ondene; **vase** from 506070; vintage **wall light** from Secondi; **wall tiles** from Di Lorenzo; **floor** in Winckelmans tessellated floor tiles from Olde English Tiles. *Opposite page* in the living room, Gervasoni **armchair** from Anibou; vintage Aurélien Serre AS-01 **armchair** (right) and Dimoremilano **coffee table** (foreground); Mazer **table** by Tom Fereday from Studio Gardner; vintage **mirror** from The Vault; **vase** from 506070; The Bouquet 5 **chandelier** from Great Dane; Orvel Navi **rug** from The Rug Establishment; *Ellipsis* (2024) **artwork** by Michael Cusack from Olsen Gallery.







This page in the main bedroom ensuite, custom **vanity** designed by Arent&Pyke in Medulla granite top from Granite & Marble Works and Birds Eye Maple cabinet from Briggs Veneers; The Water Monopoly Rockwell **bath** and Hawthorn Hill heated **towel rail** from The English Tapware Company; vintage **stool** from Eastwing; Society Limonta **towel** from Ondene; Articolo Fizi Slab **wall sconce** from Est Lighting; **floor** in limestone tiles with Zellige feature tile in Chalk from Eco Outdoors. *Opposite page* in the main bedroom, custom **bedhead** designed by Arent&Pyke in Plushous velvet from Cloth & Print Co; Society Limonta **bed linen** from Ondene; **vase** from 506070; **rug** from Robyn Cosgrove; *Kinning With Lake 6* (2024) **artwork** by Jahne Pasco-White from Station Gallery. *Details, last pages.*

