

Hidden BEAUTY

A trusted interior design team has masterfully transformed an ugly duckling into a beloved family home with timeless charm.

STORY Sarah Wormwell | PHOTOGRAPHY Jen Wilding & Simon Whitbread

KITCHEN Underbench and island joinery in American oak and Elton Group Evener in Anthracite Oak Groove, Debrich. Handles, Two Tease. Tall joinery in TrueGrain Pebble FSC, Briggs Veneers. Splashback tiles, Onsite. Tossb pendant light, Hub. Stools, Gebruder Thonet Vienna. Flooring, Woodcut.
DINING Vibia pendant lights, Koda Lighting. Table, The Wood Room. Sofa, Apartment 91. Outdoor limestone pavers, Eco Outdoor.

It's the stuff of fairy tales. Over a hundred years ago council records deemed this home on Sydney's Lower North Shore the "ugliest house on the street". Over the decades, several renovations failed to improve the home's aesthetic. Yet in 2019 when the property again became available for sale, the current owners recognised immediately that its "innate beauty" lay in its perfect proportions for easy family living.

Perched on a large, flat block, with bedrooms located together on the upper floor and an abundance of communal space on the two floors below meant it was ideally suited to a family of six - four of whom were in their early teens.

Determined to "look past the ugly" the owners enlisted interior designer Meryl Hare of Hare + Klein, whose work they had long admired, to "fairy godmother" the home into the best version of itself.

Initially the brief was to simply refresh the interiors, particularly the kitchen and dining to ensure they became the heart of the home. The ground floor layout was typical of the Federation period: a series of rooms running off a long, dark hallway with poor connection to the garden.

"The central idea was to improve the flow of the home, to get the energy circulating front to the back and to brighten the interior with natural light," says Meryl.

It quickly became evident structural change would be needed to realise the home's full potential. Meryl recommended architect Linda James of James Design Studio be recruited for her ability to thoughtfully transform heritage homes. Crucially she also suggested landscape architect, Matt Cantwell of Secret Gardens be engaged at the same time - so landscaping could be considered from the outset.

Stripping away layers of previous renovations became James' starting point. "While the home wasn't an exemplar of late Federation architecture, taking it back to its origins and using the era as inspiration helps it sit harmoniously in the neighbourhood," she says. ▶



KITCHEN/LIVING Curved lines soften the interiors, echoed through the Apartment 91 sofa, Jordan nesting tables, as well as the Space lamp and stools. Joinery in American oak, Debrich. Tossb pendant light, Hub. Stools, Flooring, Woodcut. **DINING** Pendant lights, Vibia. Table, The Wood Room. Outdoor setting, Cotswold. Pavers, Eco Outdoor.

LIVING Sconce, Giffin Design. Stool, Ondene. Hare + Klein 'Aceto' rug, Designer Rugs. **FORMAL DINING** Walls in Phillip Jeffries 'Manila Hemp' wallcovering, The Textile Company. Fireplace surround in Portoro quartzite, Worldstone. Moooi 'Meshmatics' chandelier, Space. Molteni & C 'Asterias' table, Hub. Gubi 'Beetle' dining chairs, Cult. Artworks by Merryl Greaves.



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perfectly suit our needs.”

THE OWNER

HALLWAY Steel-framed glass doors, made by Skyrange Windows, allow light to flood through to the entrance hall, drawing the eye toward the heart of the home. Walls in custom-coloured waxed-stucco finish, Hermosa Painting Finishes. Wall light, Allied Maker. **BATHROOM** The roughly hewn Nagoya Mosaic-Tile Co wall tiles from Academy Tiles are a robust choice for a bathroom frequented mainly by teenagers. **GAMES ROOM** The Cole & Son ‘Safari Totem’ wallpaper from IconRadford adds a touch of whimsy to the downstairs hideaway. Joinery in Laminex Blackened Elm. Artwork by Joanna Kitas, and cushions, all Apartment 91. Sofa, Jordan. Ottoman, Cult. Rug, Armadillo.



THE PALETTE

- Phillip Jeffries ‘Extra Fine Arrowroot’ wallcovering
- Cole & Son ‘Safari Totem’ wallpaper in Ginger & Taupe
- Phillip Jeffries ‘Manila Hemp’ wallcovering in Daydream

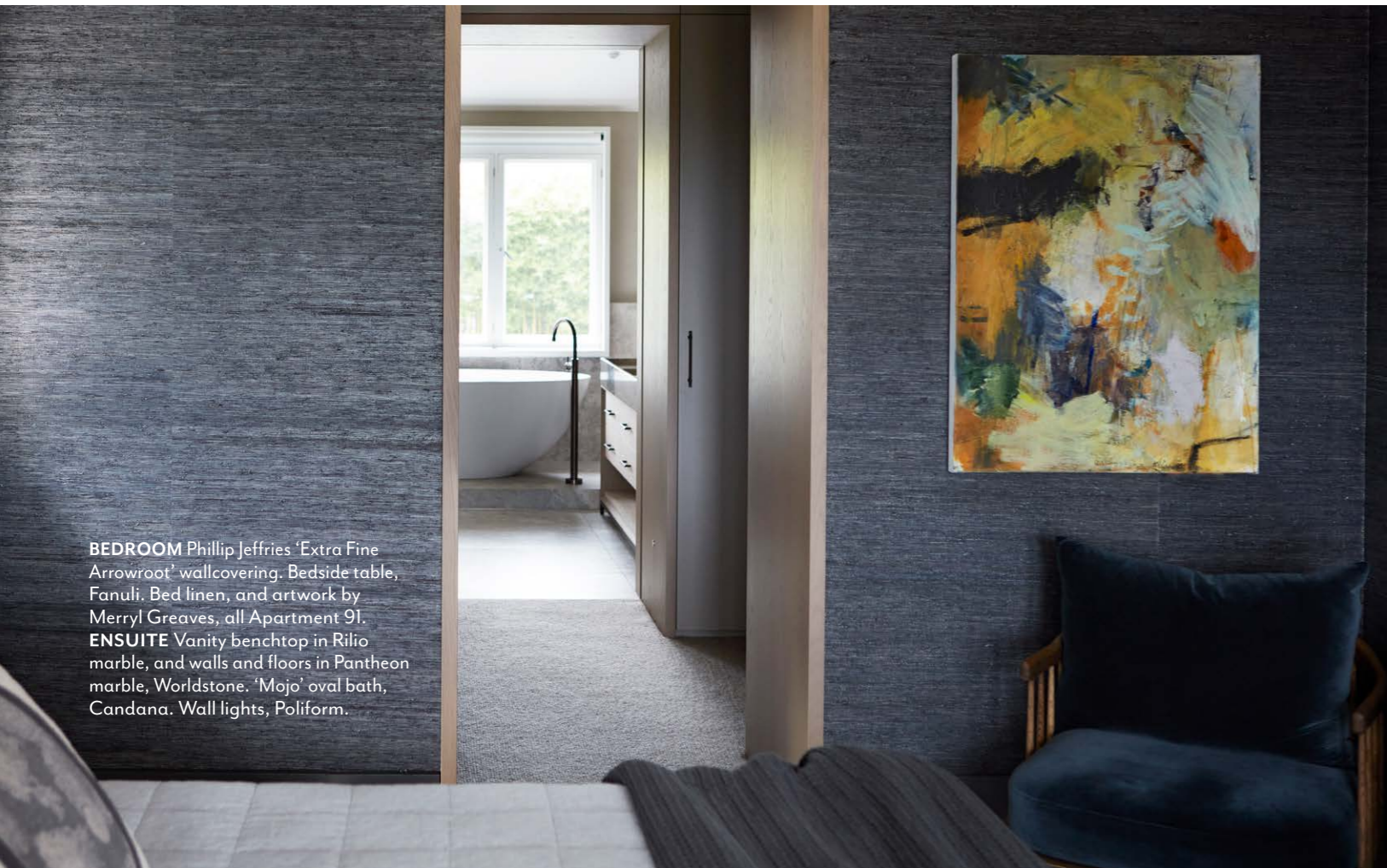


“The central idea was to improve the flow of the home.

MERYL HARE, INTERIOR DESIGNER



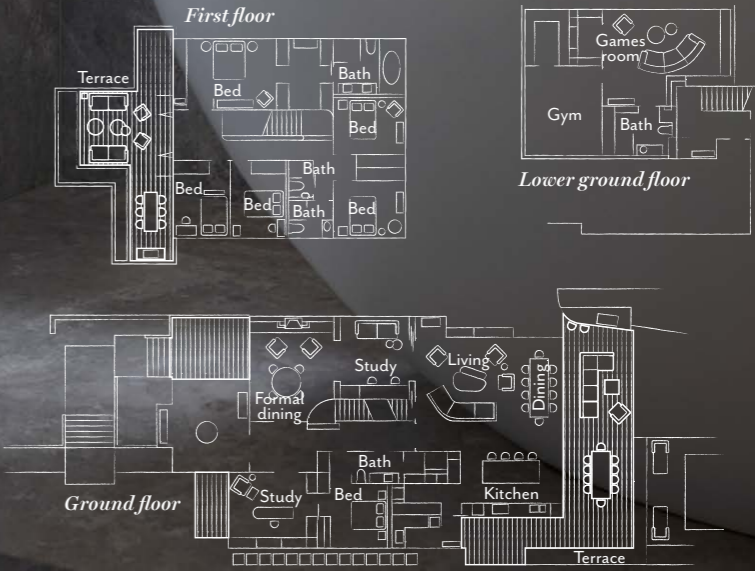
Paint colours are reproduced as accurately as printing processes allow.



BEDROOM Phillip Jeffries 'Extra Fine Arrowroot' wallcovering. Bedside table, Fanuli. Bed linen, and artwork by Merryl Greaves, all Apartment 91.
ENSUITE Vanity benchtop in Rilio marble, and walls and floors in Pantheon marble, Worldstone. 'Mojo' oval bath, Candana. Wall lights, Poliform.



THE LAYOUT



ALFRESCO Tribu sofa, Cosh Living. Dining table and chairs, Cotswold. Cushions, Apartment 91. Paul Bangay rug, Cadrys. Landscape design, Secret Gardens. Limestone pavers, Eco Outdoor.



James' design reimagines Federation features. A hexagonal bay window was squared off, the existing entrance was retained, but elongated in height and width for greater elegance. Rough cast render - typical of the period - was applied to the entire exterior to unify the whole.

For the interiors, Meryl and her colleagues, Maddie Helyer and Kristie Nixon, who also project managed the renovation, devised a new tonal palette of layered textures and natural materials. The lightened scheme pulls you from the the front through to the open plan and out to the garden. Steel-framed glass doors are key to the enhanced flow, allowing better connection between rooms even when closed. An angular "faux" French staircase has been reworked. Its new, elegant curves emphasised by the addition of a skylight above to flood the space with light.

While the owners articulated the importance of a new kitchen and living space, Meryl was given complete creative freedom. "With great trust comes greater responsibility," says Meryl, who intuited that a comfortable, casual elegance was required as well as robust choices.

Hardwearing herringbone sisal and hemp wallcoverings in high-traffic areas as well as a concrete kitchen benchtop are beautifully understated - yet functional for energetic teens and keen entertainers.

On the upper level, Meryl's vision again proved correct. The floor now hosts a spacious main suite as well as four children's bedrooms and a "his & hers" kids' bathroom. Yet the home's crowning glory is a top floor terrace, with views across the harbour, with a second outdoor entertaining area.

"In my wildest dreams I couldn't have imagined how much our home would perfectly suit our needs - it has just made life so much more comfortable," says the owner. "It's an added bonus that we also think it's truly beautiful." ▶

Hare + Klein: hareklein.com.au. **Sandlik:** sandlik.com.au. **James Design Studio:** jamesdesignstudio.com.au. **Secret Gardens:** secretgardens.com.au.

THIS IS THE LIFE

“Engaging our landscape architect from day one was some of the best advice we received,” say the owners of hiring Matt Cantwell from Secret Gardens. “He transformed the overgrown backyard and also replaced an unused swing set with a fab firepit. It was completely finished from the day we moved in, which has been fantastic because we use it all the time.”

“Taking the house back to its origins ... helps it sit harmoniously in the neighbourhood.”

MERYL HARE

OUTDOOR ENTERTAINING Landscape design and firepit, Secret Gardens. Scatter cushions, Apartment 91. ‘Stanley’ stools, Jardan.



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THE SOURCE

For a pared-back, relaxed mood, accent classic furniture and neutral tones with warm hints of orange and blue.



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Produced by Marissa Foye.

1 Pablo Designs ‘Bola Disc’ **pendant light** in Brass, \$949, Enlightened Living. 2 ‘Lido’ **cushion cover** in Gum (55cm), \$75, No Chintz. 3 ‘Absurd’ **cushion cover** in Ginger, \$172, No Chintz. 4 Dawns Hues **artwork** by Ash Leslie (85x75cm), \$3500, Saint Cloche. 5 ‘Matterhorn’ **rug** in Basalt (300x200cm), \$1050, RJ Living. 6 ‘Twill’ **counter chair** in Solid Ash, \$903, DesignByThem. 7 Inartisan ‘lanthe’ **sandstone vase**, \$299, Aura Home. 8 ‘Elysian’ floor-mounted **bath filler** in Brushed Nickel, \$429, ABI Interiors. 9 ‘Sunny’ two-and-a-half seater **sofa** in Ocean linen, \$10,941, Jardan. 10 ‘Caral’ **throw** in Harvest, \$220, Sheridan. **H&G**