

# SET THE STAGE

With their children growing up fast, one Sydney family seized the moment to transform their home into the inviting haven they always knew it could be.

STORY *Georgia Madden* | STYLING *Jessica Bellef*  
PHOTOGRAPHY *Sue Stubbs*

**FORMAL LIVING** Painting at left by Lynette Corby, artwork at right by unknown artist. Celine sofa, Trit House. Kennedy swivel chair and Clermont 'Layer' coffee table, both GlobeWest. Assorted cushions from L&M Home, Walter G and Westbury Textiles. Bench seat finished in Resene Grey Friars, walls painted Resene Double Ash with trims in Resene Half Merino. Existing pendant lights, mirror, curtains and rug. Original timber flooring.

THE PALETTE

Resene Triple Merino (main walls)

Resene Double Ash (formal living walls)

Resene Lemon Grass (family room joinery)



**KITCHEN/DINING** The recently renovated kitchen required no work apart from the addition of a roman blind, a custom design in Mokum 'Origami' fabric from James Dunlop Textiles. Karen and Matt have owned the dining table and bar stools for many years. Hoffmann dining chairs, Thonet. Existing lighting and tapware. The pressed-tin ceiling is an original feature.

Paint colours are reproduced as accurately as printing processes allow.



“We fell in love with this house from the moment we stepped through the front door,” says Karen, the owner of this fabulous five-bedroom Federation beauty on Sydney’s Lower North Shore. “It was everything we needed. It had great bones, felt spacious, functional and homely, and was well located for our family.”

Karen and her husband Matt – who share the home with their children Lily, 18, Will, 16, Maya, 13, Madi, 10, and Bonnie the groodle – had embarked on a substantial renovation in 2016, opening up the rear of the house to accommodate an open-plan

living/dining space and an all-new kitchen, redoing two of the bathrooms and creating an outdoor entertaining area. Fast-forward four years and it was time to turn their attention to the rest of the house.

“We wanted the house to be inviting, cosy and functional – a place where we could relax and enjoy time together and where everyone feels welcome and comfortable,” says Karen. Luckily, they didn’t have to look far for help: Karen and interior designer Alexandra Mason happened to share the same hairdresser, who made the crucial connection.

“The initial brief was simply to update the two bathrooms and laundry, but that quickly grew to redesigning the main living spaces, bedrooms and home office,

including new joinery, furniture and window coverings,” says Alexandra. “For such a large house, storage was also in short supply, so custom joinery was another important part of the brief.”

Alexandra’s first impression of the interior was that it didn’t really reflect the owners. “They’re a very creative and lively family, but there was a lot of grey and navy in the decorating scheme. It lacked texture so it didn’t feel as welcoming as the home’s occupants. And while they had some lovely furniture, including antiques, many pieces were too big for the space and the overall effect was quite cluttered.”

As a consequence of the too-dark decor and over-scale furniture, many of the home’s beautiful original features ▶

- including pressed-tin ceilings, marble fireplaces, archways and leadlight windows - felt a little lost.

Karen and Matt were keen to keep the traditional feel of the home, while adding contemporary touches that would better equip it for a busy modern lifestyle. "But most importantly they wanted colour, joy, life and a space they could enjoy with their children," says Alexandra.

Updating the house began with editing each room, then adding fresh colour, new furnishings and textural touches for a final flourish. "The furniture had to be beautiful but also forgiving - Karen and Matt didn't want to be concerned every time the dog jumped on the sofa or something was spilt," says Alexandra. To keep the budget in check, she retained as

many of the couple's existing pieces as possible, including art, lighting, curtains, and a pair of walnut sideboards and an arched mirror in the formal living room.

The gloomy grey family room was given a joyful lift with felted-wool wallpaper in a buttermilk tone, comfortable seating and a contemporary rug underfoot, all of which tie in beautifully with the blue-grey of the cabinetry in the adjacent kitchen.

In the formal living room, Alexandra carved out some space by the window for a built-in bench seat and console; it's perfectly framed by one of the home's original archways. Beside it, she created an elegant 'adults only' living space in shades of taupe, rust and petrol blue.

The main bathroom, shared by the three girls, was transformed with a new layout ▶

**FAMILY ROOM** *Lion Island Pittwater* painting by Sue McRoberts. Ralph Lauren 'Stoneleigh Herringbone' wallpaper in Oyster, Designers Guild. Lowlife armchairs, MCM House. Billie coffee table and Dari rug, Jordan. Existing sofa, side table, pendant light and fireplace. The joinery unit beneath the fireplace, an existing piece, was refreshed with new paint in Resene Lemon Grass.



**THIS IS THE LIFE**

The sunny open-plan area at the rear of the home is always a hive of activity. "It's my favourite part of the house," says Karen. "We spend most of our time here, whether we're cooking, eating or just hanging out. We love having people over but prefer to keep things low-key. If we have time to plan, we'll make something that can cook while we catch up with our guests."



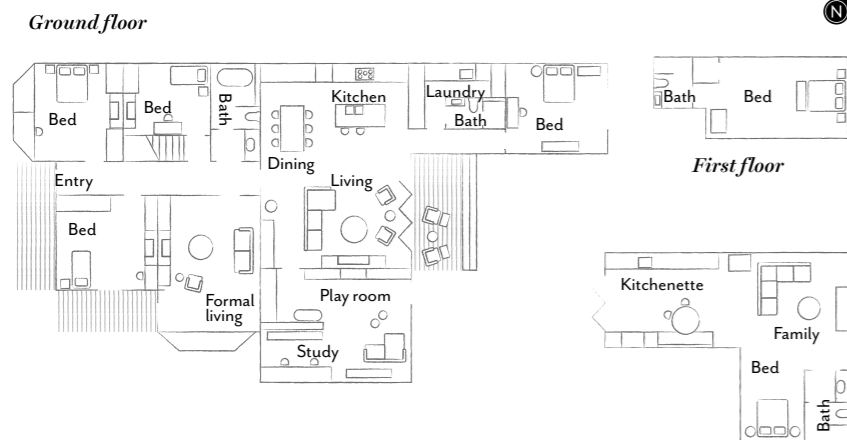
"The furniture had to be beautiful but also forgiving."

ALEXANDRA MASON, INTERIOR DESIGNER



**PLAY ROOM** The windows are original. Elio sofa, MCM House. Striped cushions and ribbed vase, Freedom. Inari floor lamp, About Space. Bold console, GlobeWest. Existing carpet and rug. **STUDY** *Opposite* Joinery designed by Studio aem, built by Destro Renovations. Joinery finished in TrueGrain Black Gold veneer, Briggs Veneers. Leather cabinet pulls, MadeMeasure. Embellish chair, Zuster.

**THE LAYOUT**



including a walk-in shower at one end and a freestanding bath at the other, finished in moody grey marble and limestone. At the other end of the house, Will's bathroom features minimalist space-savvy joinery and subdued tones of soft blue and a pale-grey marble.

"Walking into the house now compared with how it was is like night and day," says Alexandra. "Not only does the house feel ready to take the family into the next phase of life, but it feels like we've reinvigorated the home's soul."

**Studio aem, Surry Hills, NSW;**  
 (02) 9331 0759 or [studioaem.com.au](http://studioaem.com.au).  
**Sydneyside Contracting, Sydney, NSW;**  
 (02) 9417 4300 or [sydneysidecontracting.com.au](http://sydneysidecontracting.com.au).



**GIRLS' BATHROOM** Sirene 'Julia' bath, Cass Brothers. The leadlight windows are original. Door and door frame painted Resene Zeus. Blu Azure marble wall tiles and Aren Bianco limestone floor tiles, all Onsite Supply+Design. Icon towel ring, Astra Walker. Towels, Adairs.

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## THE SOURCE

*Create lightness for just being with textural pieces that are easily adapted according to wants and needs.*



Produced by Shayne Burton.

1 *Tinkers Hole* artwork by Sue McRoberts, POA, Thienny Lee Gallery. 2 Sheer S-wave curtain in Odin White, POA, Wynstan. 3 Foscarini 'Twiggy' floor lamp, \$2610, Space. 4 Kennedy 'Swivel' occasional chair in Slate Blue, \$1675, GlobeWest. 5 Alwin Swirl vase, \$99, Domayne. 6 Smeg 'Linea Aesthetic' gas cooktop, \$1990, Winning Appliances. 7 Smoked & Limed timber flooring, from \$121/m<sup>2</sup>, Royal Oak Floors. 8 Andersson 3-seater sofa, \$2999, Provincial Home Living. 9 Coin Leaf faux plant, \$29.95, Freedom. For Where to Buy, see page 190. H&G