



over and above

MELBOURNE BUILDER AND DEVELOPER SERGIO AIELLO TOPPED THE LOT WHEN CREATING HIS FAMILY'S HOME HIGH ABOVE COMMERCIAL PREMISES

WORDS BELLA STANIC STYLING GLEN PROEBSTEL PHOTOGRAPHS SAM McADAM



(This page) Interior stylist Simone Aiello and builder/developer husband, Sergio, with their two-year-old son, Christian, and Maltese terrier, Indi, against a dramatically dark feature wall in their Melbourne apartment.
(Opposite page) A 1969 leaf sculpture, designed by Curtis Jere, hangs above the living-room fireplace. Its delicate tracery of wirework is echoed in the Platner lounge chair below it. →



Ignoring advice that black would not work, the Aiellos extended the deep charcoal hue of kitchen cabinets (opposite page, bottom) to the dining-room walls (this page), adding Bill Henson's *Untitled (1997/98)* photograph and a 1940s Murano glass chandelier, shipped from Pasadena. The colour is "now emulated by all who visit", Simone says. The Cassina dining table by Hannes Wettstein is flanked by Wegner 'CH_24' chairs, which pick up the floor's limed American oak tones. (Opposite page, top) In the living space is a tan leather Mariani modular sofa and a Minotti 'Huber' onyx-topped coffee-table. Through the doorway is a glimpse of two paintings by Tjawina Porter Nampitjinpa.



On the upper floor of his latest development – a restrained layer cake of shops, offices and single dwelling just off Melbourne's hip strip, Chapel Street – builder/developer Sergio Aiello surveys his home, so artfully arranged by his wife, Simone, with the satisfaction of knowing it is the real icing on that cake. But all he says of his stylish eyrie is, "We just live above a shop." This downplay brings to mind the remark that notable British landscaper Russell Page made on the virtues of understatement: "[It] leaves the imagination free to build its own elaborations."

And that's exactly what the laconic Sergio does; he builds spectacular elaborations of the imagination, although they're constructions that were first dreamt up by other minds – whether it's the crisp modernism of Melbourne architect, Neil Clehahan, the distinctly Australian style of Wayne Gillespie or the decorative classicism of designer Stuart Rattle.

Sergio co-directs the eponymous Aiello Construction business with his brother, Danny, and it's obvious that the company gets the big-budget building gigs, because the siblings and their artisan team – "many with us for 20 years" – can craft the detail as it has been drawn. In an age of shortcut structure, this gives the Aiellos a distinct edge. But for this particular project – his development of a 600-square-metre South Yarra site (formerly a film lab and a clothing company), which his top-floor home is now a part of – the hands-on builder chose to elaborate on his boy's-own fantasy of a cast-in-place concrete fortress, in the style of Japanese architect Tadao Ando, where dinner could be an over-the-balcony order from the eatery below.

"There wasn't much here when we bought," Sergio recalls of the tiny side street that has now all but erased its industrial past. "It was shabby, and we weren't quite sure how to proceed, so we got architect Clare McAllister involved." The co-director of McAllister Alcock Architects (formerly known as Neometro) had plenty of experience in mixed-use development – and, in a tidy turn of events, actually now works from the first-floor office space of Aiello's realised project. Still, a 10 month →





approval period followed, when they had to stand their ground on important structural and architectural issues before finally getting the go-ahead to build.

Although the architect was given an open brief, one stipulation required separation between the master suite and the bedroom of their two-year-old son, Christian. "All the nans thought we were nuts, but we'd come from an apartment where we had all been on top of each other. A good night's sleep was the goal."

"The 'doof doof' also had to go," adds Simone of the amped-up cars that cruise the adjacent strip at week's end, and the double-glazing that has since softened it. "We love feeling as if we're part of the place, but not all the time."

Citing the mid-century Case Study houses built by Neutra, Soriano, Ellwood, Koenig, Eames et al, in Los Angeles, Simone says that much of their at-home style was informed by these architectural experiments.

The mama for modernism is apparent in the living-room play of Platner wire chairs, Wegner furniture, Eames walnut stools, a 1950s teak console — "found at Geoffrey Hatty's store" — and one of only five chandeliers made mid last century on the glass-making Venetian island of Murano. "I found it in Pasadena," says the interior stylist. "It was shipped over in three fridge boxes, totally disassembled. I was beside myself, ringing the seller in America every morning for two weeks. All the time, Sergio was saying, 'I don't believe we're doing this', but finally enough it's the piece we now love the most."

The story is the same for the filigree leaf that hangs above the living-room hearth. "It's a 1969 piece that I found in California," says Simone of the Curtis Jere-designed metal sculpture that, air-freighted in, announced its arrival at the apartment door with just the delivery-guy's knock. "I just hid it in the laundry, picked my moment, then hung it on the wall," she admits.

"Just put it up and pay!" Sergio cheekily recalls from another room, before softening with, "A happy life is a happy wife. And she always gets it right." ♦



[This page] Notable features in the main bedroom include stunning wallpaper by Eijffinger and Pip Studio, a Poliform bed, Sputnik lights, an Eames chair and a wooden screen. [Opposite page, top left] The balcony pool. [Opposite page, top right] Penguin paperbacks brighten up the study. [Opposite page, bottom] Christian's tented bedroom.

IN DETAIL

ideas from the South Yarra home



INSIDER'S GUIDE TO... CONTEMPORARY LOCAL DESIGNER FURNITURE

Simone's home is filled with beautiful design that uses strong shapes and sculptural forms. For an Australian spin on such a look, as well as an opportunity to purchase investment pieces, investigate new and established Australian local designers, such as Jon Goulder from Perth's Midland Atelier, midlandatelier.com, Takeshi Iue, www.takeshiue.com, Blakebrough-King, www.blakebrough-king.com, and Khai Liew, www.khailiewdesign.com.

(Top) 'Form' wall shelf, \$4598, (right) Midland Atelier 'Amore Mio' low chair, \$4,345, both from Form, (08) 9226 2161, www.form.net.au.

Texture & tone

Simone and Sergio Aiello's apartment proves that contemporary decor and a lofty location doesn't have to equal an absence of warmth or personality. Simone achieved this effect by avoiding the austerity of cold, open-plan minimalism at one extreme and the dusty clutter of hoarded collections at the other. The key to injecting interest and intimacy in such a space is textural and tonal variation. Simone's use of dark timber veneers, rich tobacco-brown leather and worn '50s timber furniture provides the perfect balance for crisp white walls, light oak floors and the contemporary 'frosting' that comes from just a hint of stainless steel, glass and chrome. The magic of surface variation is that what you see texturally, you can also feel physically.



(Left) Anta 'Belle' table lamp by Ostwald and Nolting, \$1535, from Hub Furniture, www.hubfurniture.com.au.

From an urban line drawing to an original artwork that's been digitally reproduced to scale, here are some wonders for your wall. (Above left) 'Cityscape' wallpaper by Olivia White, \$99 per 10m roll, from Graham & Brown, www.grahambrown.com.au, (08) 9328 3035. (Above centre) Pip Studio 'Brocante' paper by Eijffinger, \$998, from Verve Designer Collections, (03) 9532 2003. (Above right) 'Collection' mural wallpaper, from £159, from Catherine Hammetton, www.catherinehammettonshop.com.

(From left) Navlam 'Sandblasted' laminate in Sable Oak, \$116.16 per sqm, from New Age Veneers, (02) 9457 9622, www.newageveneers.com.au. Laminate in Burnished Wood, from \$86 per sqm, from Laminex, 13 21 36.

THINGS TO SOURCE...

DARK JOINERY The use of custom-made dark stained American oak joinery in the study and kitchen helps unite the interior. For a similar look, try Navlam 'Sandblasted' laminate in Sable Oak (above left) from New Age Veneers. If timber is not your thing, try black polyurethane or Laminex's Burnished Wood (above right).

LIGHTING Simone's love of feature lighting is evident through her pendants and table lamps. The white 'Cobra' design by Elio Martinelli on the sideboard makes a statement with its sculptural shape. "I really appreciate vintage items, especially when it comes to lighting," she says.

WALLPAPER Gone are the days of '70s pattern excess, where whole homes were pasted in rolls of wild design and psychedelic colour combinations. Contemporary wallpaper looks can be striking and detailed without being over-the-top and overpowering a room.

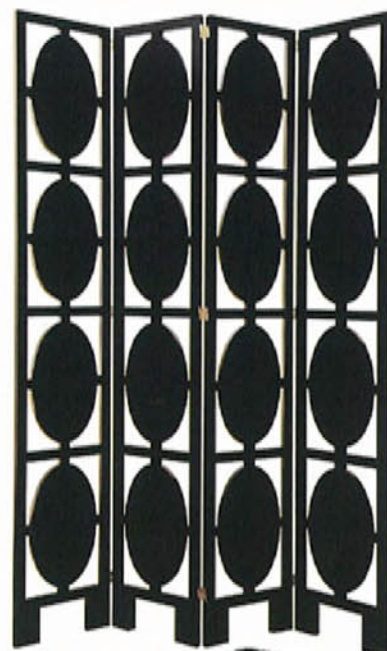


(Above) Stromberg glass vases, \$1100 for a set of three, from Crystal Palace, (02) 4861 1836. (Right) 'Silhouette' screen, \$4780, from James Salmond Furniture, www.jamessalmondfurniture.com.

LOVE THAT, TRY THIS

GLASS The fluid, organic lines of decorative glass vessels certainly look impressive when set centrestage on a sideboard or table. Simone's glassware includes a Tom Dixon vase and a blue candlestick that belonged to her great-grandmother. "Collections don't have to be complicated," she says. "They can be anything from a burnt-out candle glass to a beautiful glass treasure that's been sourced from an antique shop."

SCREENS Often under-utilised, screens are one of the most elegant and functional ways to create decorative intrigue. Simone's bedroom features the intricate, geometric patterns of a timber design, which adds contrast to the plain wall beyond. To find something similar, keep your eye on local antique auctions or bric-a-brac stores or try James Salmond's 'Silhouette' for a modern take on a classic folding screen.



"We used a lot of SOLID LINES in the joinery to create a base for the interior and then looked to source pieces that had a soft, aged CHARACTER to ensure the apartment still had a warm feel," says Simone.



3 really great

DINING CHAIRS

(Clockwise, from top left) Billiani 'Numbers' chairs, from \$320 each, from Hub Furniture, (03) 9652 1222. 'CH_20' chair by Hans J. Wegner, from \$1585, from Corporate Culture, 1300 768 626. 'No. B9 Le Corbusier' chair, \$335, from Thonet, (02) 9332 1600, www.thonet.com.au.



HOW TO... CREATE DRAMA

COLOUR Simone has used dark-stained American oak veneer panelling and joinery, as a contrast to the crisp white walls, to create dramatic impact. Tonal variations on a monochromatic palette are perfect for injecting mood into an interior and are a popular designer trick for making rooms appear larger or smaller. To achieve maximum spectacle, use extreme tonal contrast, as Simone has, with large areas of black and white to underscore the look. **DISPLAY** Ceramics are the perfect objects for introducing strong colour to a room without going overboard. Play with a collection of different shapes and sizes and create your own sculptural installation. They are the ideal pieces for lonely gaps on mantelpieces and shelves. Simone's choice of retro-style blue vases in the bedroom picks up on similar tones in the wallpaper behind, as well as referencing her passion for design vintage objects. For colour and an artisan investment piece, try Bitossi's Rimini Blu ceramics, which have been in production in Italy since 1953.

(From left) Bitossi 'Rimini Blu 184' bottle vase (24cm), \$150, and 'Rimini Blu 12' vase (16cm), \$79, both from Hub Furniture, www.hubfurniture.com.au.



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