

Revisit the past

Not all old design is good design. This is a liberating belief held by Graham Simmonds, founder and principal designer at Gray & Co, who was approached for the redesign of a one-bedroom apartment at the highly regarded Claud Hamilton building in Sydney's Darlinghurst.

Having already completed the gentleman owner's chiropractic practice, the designer was entrusted to tastefully enhance his home's original 1920 features – the ones that were worth keeping, with a tweak for those that weren't. "I love an old building and all those old details," says Graham. "You want to preserve, but obviously bring them into the modern day."

One such modernised space is the dining nook, which was originally a balcony. "At some point it was closed in to create a sunroom and it would have had doors," posits Graham. "The doors were already long gone by the time we got there." The remaining exposed brick was replaced with wallpaper, and a custom banquette upholstered in Warwick 'Brixham' stripe fabric was introduced for cosiness alongside the custom table and Pierre Jeanneret armless V-Leg chairs in Charcoal from East of Baku.

Cushions are elegantly hooked onto Noble Elements brass knobs. "They're cabinetry knobs – I had the fittings changed so they could be screwed into the frame of the window," says Graham. "There's a restaurant in Paris where I saw a similar detail."

ARTWORKS: OSKAR JOHANNES (MIXED MEDIA), AQUABUMPS (PRINT);
GRAY & CO STORE (SHARON SMITH SCULPTURE), EAST OF BAKU (PLINTH)

LOOKING UP

A small Sydney apartment in a significant building gets a cosmopolitan sense of style. Here's how it was done



2break some rules

The interior-design ‘rule’ of not placing a lounge against the wall has been abandoned in the living space, for good reason. “It was actually quite a challenging room to furnish as there are multiple doorways,” says Graham. “It restricted how the furniture could be placed so you could easily move around and it would functionally work.” A custom-made L-shaped sofa, teamed with a Gray & Co Store side table and Aerin ‘Clarkson’ floor lamp, was the best solution.

Ornate original grapevine-design ceilings are cleverly highlighted by the handmade custom pendant. “No light comes down, it only shines up, so it’s super flattering,” says Graham. “It also means that the ceiling is illuminated when the light is on, so it really showcases the detail on the ceiling.”

There are no windows in the living space, so the dining bench opposite – bathed in sunshine during the day – functions as an extra lounging area.



ARTWORKS: FERGUS MACDOUGAL (BLACK ABSTRACT), SHIBORI TEXTILES (SILK WORKS)



3 keep them guessing

To steer around his interiors looking dated in years to come, Graham intentionally pulls from different styles and eras. “My philosophy around design is that all interiors should feel collected,” he says. “If you choose pieces all from one time period or one store, the fashion will change and you’ll know exactly when that house was done.” In the living space, he’s selected a 1900s cabinet and vintage velvet armchair to sit alongside a Sarah Ellison ‘Forme’ coffee table.

Art is a great opportunity to create a collected feeling. “I don’t necessarily think art needs to ‘go’ with the interior,” says Graham. “You can kind of let it shine on its own.” On the wall beside the kitchen entry, he’s displayed a set of four framed pieces by Chance Purpose, which the client already owned. “They’re 1980s porcelain figurines that the artist smashes up, then pours resin and gold leaf onto.”



“We really wanted the space to feel lived in and collected”

GRAHAM SIMMONDS, INTERIOR DESIGNER



4 make it better with age

In a newly renovated space, imperfections help to add character and lived-in warmth. Graham has fitted out the impressively modernised galley kitchen with floor-to-ceiling custom cabinetry in Dulux Fair Oaks and paired it with Art Of Marble Carrara splashbacks and benchtops.

Character is added to all that newness by using unlacquered brass vintage knobs from Facebook Marketplace and handles from Rejuvenation. “Our client really loves things that age and patina,” says Graham. They will only become more beautiful with age, as will the raw, unfinished red-oak ladder from Ram Hardware. “We didn’t finish the timber, so that means it could get oil marks from hands using it over time, and look a little bit banged up.”



5 take it away

Sometimes less is more, and existing picture rails on the walls proved this. “The ceiling heights are 3.2 metres, but the rails made them look really low,” says Graham. “Even though it was an original detail, we decided to take them away to enhance the loftiness.”

Similarly, a built-in cupboard was removed from the hallway. “In future, if there was ever a working-from-home situation, you could take the chest of drawers out and put a desk in that alcove instead,” he points out. “We wanted that flexibility.” The hall was wallpapered with dark beige grasscloth by Oliver Grace, and a vintage French 1950s wall light added.



6 embrace the unexpected

A challenging layout requires a creative solution. “Here, the client definitely wanted a king-size bed and the only way to successfully do this was to put it right in front of the windows,” says Graham.

Far from looking odd, a return to the original design moodboard encouraged them to lean into the styling. “In initial discussions, we were referencing New York apartments on the Upper West Side and Upper East Side,” he explains. “It’s a very American thing to put a bed in front of a window.” The custom design is flanked by flax-linen curtains on an antique bronze rod, both from Pottery Barn.

The original “haphazardly done” ceiling also forced an inspired change – it was redone and painted Dulux Bogle, echoing other dark spaces in the home. Pensive inky elements like this are countered with unexpectedly playful pieces, such as the Gillie and Marc artwork in the hallway.





7 go into the shadows

When the layout delivered darkness to the entrance, the designer happily ran with it, painting the walls Dulux Bogle alongside the dark marble-tiled floors. “There’s no natural light – it’s basically one square metre,” says Graham. “As a design signature, I really love to play with going from a dark space to a light space. By doing that, the dark feels darker and the light feels lighter.”

The metal table was made to measure. “It doesn’t have back legs and is attached to the wall, so that saves space,” Graham explains. “It’s enough to drop a key on, but that’s about it.” White accents in the checkered Kelly Wearstler bowl, vintage mirror and fringed custom ottoman punctuate this moody vestibule.

ARTWORK FRAMES: GRAY & CO STORE



8 create a comfort zone

“It’s the only bathroom in the apartment, so I wanted it to feel like a powder room for guests as well,” says Graham of the space entered via the hallway.

He avoided tiling the walls to prevent it from feeling cold and added art beside the Deco glass line sconce from Etsy and Newport shaving cabinet from Oti Australia. “It was a way to make it really warm and homey, and feel like a really styled space – there’s only so much you can do with a candle, soap and a hand towel! There’s also additional storage behind the picture frames. You can open them like shaving cabinets.”

A wall was built out to visually separate the shower. “It was a good way to address the change in tiles,” Graham adds. The shower’s honed Carrara marble tiles from Surface Gallery match the counter, sink and splashback stone from Art Of Marble. **10**

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