

Keep in touch

Exploring tactile possibilities across all manner of surfaces and feature elements gives this Sydney home its striking presence with a point of interest at every turn.

By Dimity Noble
Photographed by Prue Ruscoe
Styled by Joseph Gardner

THESE PAGES in the den of this Dover Heights home, owners' pre-existing **sofa**; Utrecht **armchair** by Gerrit Thomas Rietveld for Cassina from Space Furniture; custom **fireplace** designed by YSG, built by Promena Projects and hemp-rendered by Fernando De Oliveira from New Era Building Solutions NSW; custom **bookshelf** and integrated **fireplace perch** designed by YSG and built by Promena Projects; custom marmorino **wall finish** in Sage Green by Fernando De Oliveira from New Era Building Solutions NSW; YSG custom **rug**, produced by Tappeti; terracotta **pavers** from Bisanna Tiles; *The Real Housewives is the Tennessee Williams of our times* and *I stand by this statement 100%* (2017) **painting** by Kirsty Budge; *Her Waters and Her Concentration* (2019) **sculpture** by Sanné Mestrom, enquiries to Sullivan + Strumpf; *Paired 5 sculptures* by Katarina Wells from Curatorial+Co. *Details, last pages.*

STYLING ASSISTANT: ANNA DEPRAT

Recalling the age-old proverb, 'a picture is worth a thousand words', a painting by French-Australian artist Stanislas Piechaczek hovers within the entrance of Jason Johnson and Portia Thomson's Dover Heights home. It was the first artwork the couple purchased together during an Easter break in Byron Bay last year. "Stan was doing a residency at Raes on Wategos, where we were staying. I'd just proposed to Portia on the headland, so it's very sentimental," says Johnson.

The canvas's dusty pastel shades, patchy brushstrokes and experimentation with conceptual depth inform much of the interior of the couple's radically transformed coastal sanctuary. The home was designed by Yasmine Ghoniem, formerly the cofounder of Amber Road, now spearheading her own practice, YSG. Ghoniem has honed their hard-edged, freestanding two-storey house with a whimsical energy and converted it into a tactile haven using highly customised finishes and furnishings.

Johnson, the founder and CEO of an executive search firm, has a penchant for collecting art, while Thomson, a sales executive for a US-based software company, is currently on parental leave. With three children and the arrival of baby Jagger, the pair wished to create a fresh start where everyone had space. Loathed to surrender his two-bedroom ocean-view apartment in Bondi's Pacific Apartments — with interiors also by Ghoniem — Johnson had high expectations in the search for a family home. "This is the perfect compromise," he says. "It's rare to find

such a large block in Bondi, so moving just that little step up the hill to this 660-square-metre location was worthwhile. The pool has been an absolute revelation, especially for Portia when we're entertaining families. Plus, I still get magical coastal views from my bedroom."

To allow light to flow through the home, the redesign involved demolishing the central dining room's walls and raising the ceiling in the kitchen and living area, conjoining the oddly configured spaces. "Introducing a more sculptural aesthetic, we carved curved walls and arched walkways throughout," says Sydney-based Ghoniem. This included a curtained entrance to a play nook concealed beneath the stairway's cavity, plus a fireplace with an integrated seating perch and bookshelf. The garden's verdant conifer hedge entices the eye upon entry, and there is the option to draw cream linen curtains across the lounge area, cosying up the space during winter.

"We really wanted to enhance the connection between internal living areas and the various outdoor spaces," says Johnson, pointing out the reclaimed northern courtyard and rear entertaining zone. Handmade terracotta tiles line walls and floors both inside and out, their undulating matte surface complementing areas of retained travertine in the foyer, stairwell, upstairs hallway and rear balcony.

"We also reduced the pool's length, as its edge practically abutted the connecting door to the house, replacing it with bifolds to facilitate an outdoor lounge area," adds Ghoniem.

"That's prime real estate just there," says Thomson, pointing out the cushioned, salmon-pink Trace armchairs by Adam Goodrum, just a toe dip away from the pool's edge. >>



HAIR AND MAKE-UP: DANIELLE BUTCHER. THOMSON WEARS JACQUEMUS DRESS FROM PARILOUR X PARILOUR.COM, AND SHOES FROM BOTTEGA VENETA. BOTTEGA VENETA.COM

THIS PAGE in another view of the den, custom **coffee table** designed by YSG using verdi vera marble and travertine navona stone from Euro Marble and produced by Mediterranean Marble; Seed **vase** from Jardan; checkered silk **cushion** from Planet Furniture; Bernard Schottlander for DCW Editions **Mantis floor lamp** from Spence & Lyda. **OPPOSITE PAGE** owners Jason Johnson and Portia Thomson with Jagger (left) and Franki in the den.



THESE PAGES in the kitchen, custom **island** with black panther marble and oxidised brass designed by YSG; Dita **bar stools** upholstered with sheepskin from Grazia&Co; Curvaceous **vessel** by Katarina Wells from Curatorial+Co.; Collection Particulière **fruit bowl** by Arno Declercq from Ondene; Mist **vase** from Jordan; Detour **vessel** by Katarina Wells from Curatorial+Co.; Nelson Saucer Bubble **pendant lamp** by George Nelson for Herman Miller from Living Edge. In the living area, custom Sunny **sofa** from Jordan; Tshaj vintage Hmong **cushions** from Koskela; Duke **cushion** from Jordan.





THIS PAGE in the dining area, E15 Anton table from Living Edge; vintage leather and chrome chairs from The Vault Sydney with custom powder-coated frames; Detour vessel by Katarina Wells from Curatorial+Co.; Terence Woodgate Solid downlights from Temperature Design; Concentric black walnut wall sconce from Allied Maker; custom marmorino ceiling finish in Blushing Aubergine by Fernando De Oliveira from New Era Building Solutions NSW. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the kitchen dining area, custom dining table designed by YSG with New York marble surface from Euro Marble; custom leather banquette designed by YSG; Zanotta Teti occasional table (used as stool) from Cult; Michaël Verheyden Komm bowl from Ondene; Nelson Ball Bubble pendant lamp by George Nelson for Herman Miller from Living Edge.





« The entire house is steeped in craftsmanship, with the indelible marks of artisans on myriad surfaces. Downstairs, swathes of soothing and tactile sage and toffee marmorino plaster walls complement a blushing aubergine ceiling and the grainy finish of a hemp-rendered fireplace. Upstairs, brusque caramel borders define the nursery's sky-blue walls.

Running his fingers along the underside of an aged, curved brass lip distending from the fireplace, Johnson gestures towards the LEDs studding its outline. "I love how they highlight the rough edge of the poured concrete seat slab beneath," he says. They also trace the underside of the custom brushed-brass handle that curls up the staircase, accentuating the velvety sheen of the walls. This interplay of polished and raw surfaces resonates in the kitchen, with an enlarged oxidised-brass kickboard cladding the black panther marble island bench. The rust stains on the exposed concrete ceiling above match its honey-toned veins, a feature Johnson relishes. Further referencing nature's trace, sandstone selected by landscapers Svalbe & Co was hewn to form plinths and a corner pool fountain, then chiselled by stonemasons to create erosive imperfections. "The cooling trickle of water running through the house is one my favourite features," says Johnson.

Ghoniem initially designed separate main bedrooms with ensembles to enable respite from shared night duties with Jagger when Johnson and Thomson moved into the house. Featuring subtle custom workstations, such as Thomson's adaptive make-up vanity and desk with exquisite bronze-finished cattle-horn handles, they grant optimum use throughout the day, especially as Johnson regularly works from home, as will Thomson in the near future. "Truth be told, Jason has more clothes than me, so weighing up all these factors, we needed to divide and conquer," says Thomson. Flipping convention, the densely hand-brushed eucalypt green walls in Johnson's room enhance the impressive seascape beyond. "Rather than fade the walls, as is the custom, they instead frame the knockout views," says Ghoniem.

Oversize George Nelson pendant lights in the kitchen and living area combine with ceramics sourced from vintage stores and niche local suppliers to celebrate the eclectic aesthetic and relaxed nature that pervades the home. Several Picasso and Norman Lindsay etchings nonchalantly flank the main television. "I got a little excited at a Pottle auction in Vaucluse and came back with 13 pieces," says Johnson, who is equally enamoured of the framed tapestries — family heirlooms that his great-grandmother and her mother crafted — hanging within the nursery and his bedroom. Family, it appears, lies at the heart of all his endeavours. **VL**
ysg.studio

THIS PAGE in another view of the living area, Tom Dixon Mass low square brass and wood coffee table from Living Edge; Michaël Verheyden Eclipse bowl (on coffee table), from Ondene; Gabra Chocolate wool and hemp rug from Halcyon Lake. **OPPOSITE PAGE** another view of the kitchen, kitchen dining and living areas.

THIS PAGE in a main bedroom, LC7 armchair by Charlotte Perriand for Cassina from Space Furniture; Society Limonta pillowcases, quilt and throw, and Michaël Verheyden Potte Present vase, all from Ondene; Rubn Lighting Vogue pendant lamp from Fred International. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the pool area, custom sunlounge designed by YSG; Paola Lenti Isole coffee table from Dedecé; custom pool fence designed by YSG and produced by Metrowelding. *Details, last pages.*

