



Home IS WHERE THE HEART IS

A move from South London to Sydney led a family to remodel a Victorian house and combine

classic charm with contemporary couture STORY & STYLING HELEN ADAMS PHOTOGRAPHY JASON BUSCH

*"We wanted
A HOUSE TO SUIT MODERN FAMILY
LIVING, BUT WE LOVED THE
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the facts

Who lives here? Leanne, a pharmacist, Alex, an insurance broker, their daughters Olivia, 14, India, five, their dog Bayley and their rabbit, Muffin.

Style of house? A four-bedroom heritage-listed house built around 1870. Alex and Leanne had it completely renovated and added a contemporary extension.

Where is it? Sydney's North Shore.



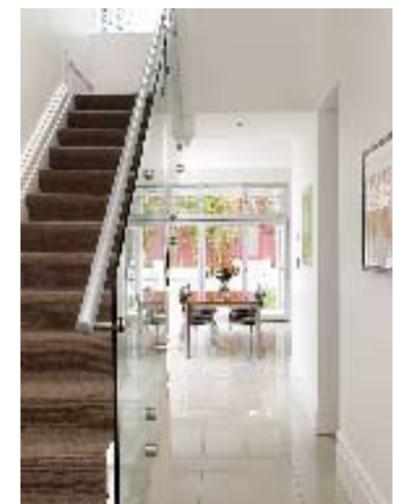
The wrought iron railings and immaculate finish of Leanne and Alex's Victorian house look as though they're straight out of the set of an English period drama. So it comes as a complete yet welcome surprise that, upon stepping through the impressive front door with stained glass windows, their light and airy hallway immediately conveys a feel of contemporary Australian living.

Leanne, an Australian, met Alex in England while travelling, but after living in London for 16 years, they decided on a seachange along with their two daughters, Olivia, 14, and India, five, and moved Down Under to Sydney's North Shore. Looking for a family home, they had one main requirement. "We wanted something modern and open plan," explains Leanne. "We'd bought and renovated an old house in London and it turned into a bit of a nightmare – it completely put us off doing another reno."

After a fruitless 12-month search, they went to view a Victorian house. "As soon as we saw it, we loved the exterior," says Leanne, "but internally it needed a lot of work." Dated bathrooms, a tiny kitchen and a dark feel typical of Victorian houses, combined with its heritage listing, made the couple seriously consider if they were up for the challenge.

To make sure alterations were possible, Leanne trawled the internet to find an architect and arrange a site visit before they went any further. "I talked to four different architects but Melonie Bayl-Smith from Liquid Architecture seemed the most receptive to our ideas. We met on site and we all clicked so we never looked back."

What followed over the next 16 months was a sympathetic remodelling. "We wanted the house to suit modern family >



Not one for traipsing around lots of stores, Leanne was thrilled to pick up most of the furnishings, including the bed and bedside table (top left) from Fanuli Furniture. The pink mosaic feature wall in Olivia and India's bathroom (above, left and right) adds a splash of candy-coloured fun. Positioning the tap to the side of the basin helps tiny hands to reach it, and an adjustable shower head accommodates all heights.



The uncluttered feel of the home connects the modern dining area (above) to the more traditional style of the lounge room (right). The rich chocolate tones of the sofa, armchairs and coffee table, all from Fanuli Furniture, contrast with the creamy walls painted with Porter's Paint in Icelandic Stone. Colour is added with a painting by Georges Doussot and cushions from Papaya.

inside story

What prompted the move to Australia?

Leanne: "We moved back for the lifestyle. We find it more relaxed here and the outdoor lifestyle is great for the children."

Any decorating disasters?

"No, but we had to get rid of a beautiful Jacaranda leaning over the brick wall at the back of the garden. The wall was cracked and dangerous so it needed replacing. Engineers came round to try to save the tree, but it just wasn't possible."

What are your tips for readers wanting to undertake such a big renovation?

"Find an architect you can communicate with and a builder with an aesthetic sense you can trust. I'm a complete perfectionist and Melonie and Stuart were absolutely fantastic."

What do you think has worked best?

"We all love the eat-in kitchen, and the way it overlooks the garden and pool. It really does give the feel of indoor/outdoor living and we spend most of our time in there."

Describe the house in three words.

Alex: "Heritage meets contemporary."



< living, but we loved the bones of it so we didn't want to change those," says Leanne. Melonie agrees. "We really wanted to keep the core spaces and heritage quality of the building and combine it with contemporary living, without taking away from the integrity [of the design]."

To avoid a repeat performance of their renovation in London, the couple were keen to capitalise on Melonie's expertise and utilised her knowledge throughout the entire process of planning and building. "Melonie put us in touch with builder Stuart Wilson, who was fantastic," says Leanne. "When big decisions needed to be made, we all sat around the table and voted. Whatever got the most votes, won." The democratic approach was also popular with Melonie, who feels the project really benefited from the collaborative process.

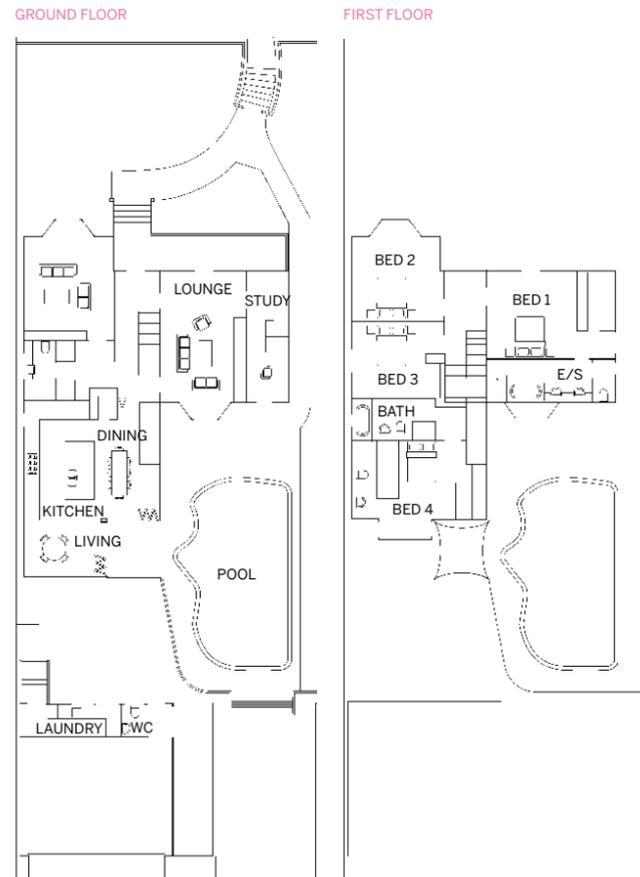
The biggest change to the house is the large extension at the rear of the building, which now houses the spacious kitchen and diner. A haphazard 1970s addition was one of the first things to go. "The back of the house was a strange collection of small rooms that felt a bit like a rabbit warren," says Leanne. These were razed to the ground to create a light-filled open-plan kitchen with two sets of bi-fold doors that open onto the completely re-landscaped garden and pool area. "Stuart also designed the garden area," says Alex. "We trusted him implicitly and left him to it, and are so pleased with the result."

The open-plan kitchen area contrasts with the lounge room next door to it, where simple modern features, such as the >

Sleek, streamlined FURNITURE
WORKS ALONGSIDE PAINTINGS AND
PRINTS BOUGHT IN LONDON ...



The open-plan kitchen/dining area has a modern and slightly industrial feel. Top of the range Miele (top) appliances have been positioned together for a neat finish, while a barbecue hotplate is mounted flush in the kitchen island bench. The gorgeous red glass table (above) from Fanuli Furniture is a true statement piece. The same colour, Porter's Paints Pomodoro Stone Wash, has been used on the outside laundry and garage (right).



"We are MORE THAN HAPPY TO STAY AT HOME AND RELAX AROUND THE POOL"

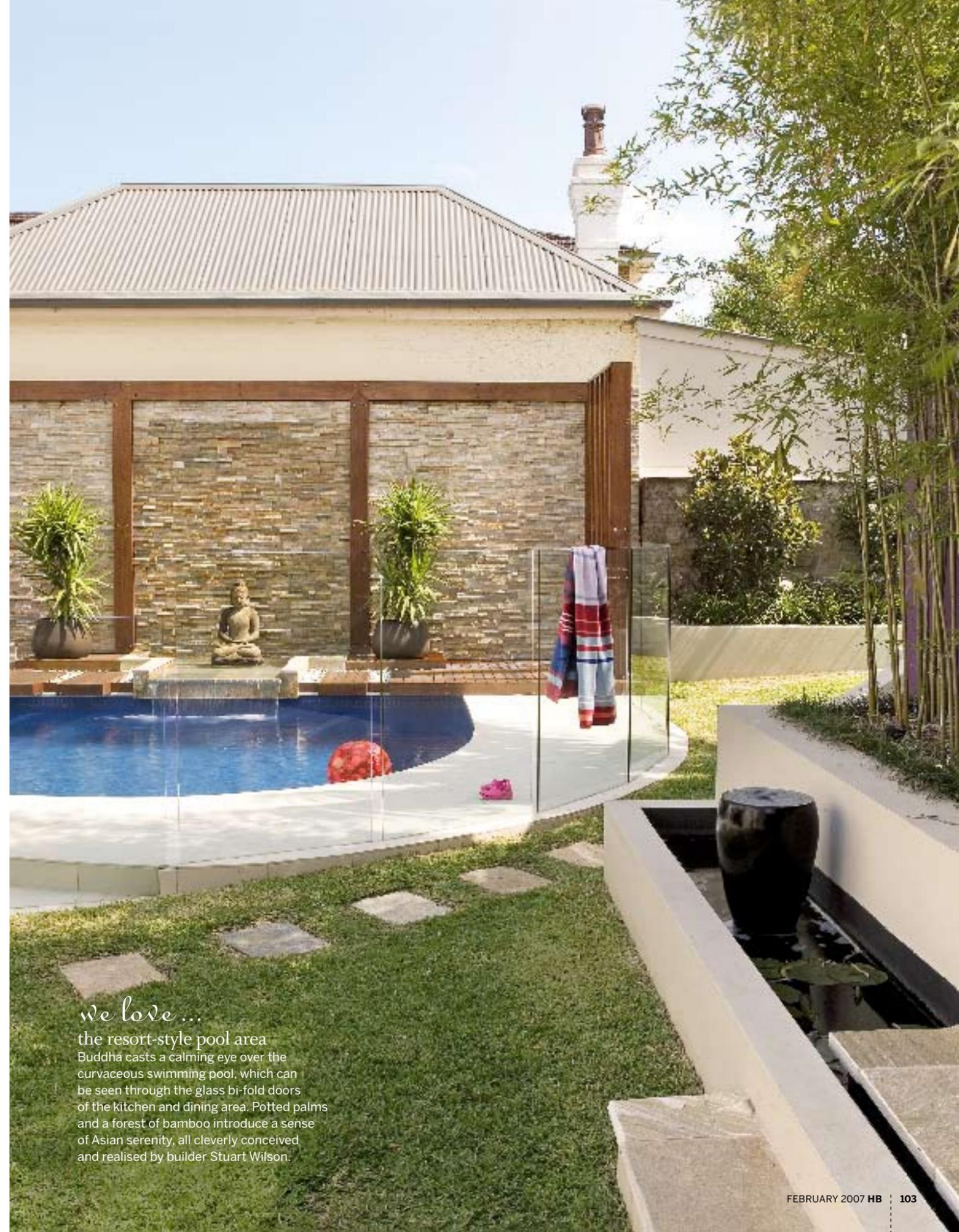
< streamlined fireplace and taupe colour scheme, work alongside period features such as the ceiling cornicing and arched Victorian windows.

The extension meant that the back part of the house could be reworked, so louvred windows at the top of the stairs, on the first level, now bring welcome cross ventilation to Olivia's bedroom. The adjacent pink bathroom is every little girl's dream, and is in marked contrast to the muted colour scheme and rust and brown oversized tiles in Alex and Leanne's room and ensuite. "The bedroom was huge," says Leanne, "so we redesigned the space to include an ensuite and walk in robes. It's still a good-sized space."

Once the major work was complete, all that was left was to furnish it. "I really like one-stop shops," explains Leanne. "I'm not one to pour over hundreds of catalogues, so Melonie helped me a lot with the choices." Sleek, streamlined furniture works alongside paintings and prints bought in London and on vacations to France.

With all the hard work behind them, everyone involved is thrilled with the result. "Melonie and Stuart were such a good team to work with; we would do another project with them tomorrow," says Alex. "Friends joke that we've created our own private resort, but after weekends in London where we felt a bit restless, we are more than happy to stay at home and relax around the pool." ■

Liquid Architecture, (02) 9437 4759, www.liquidarchitecture.com.au. Stuart Wilson Constructions 0412 559 777.



we love ...
the resort-style pool area
Buddha casts a calming eye over the curvaceous swimming pool, which can be seen through the glass bi-fold doors of the kitchen and dining area. Potted palms and a forest of bamboo introduce a sense of Asian serenity, all cleverly conceived and realised by builder Stuart Wilson.