

# Interiors

Mansion  
AUSTRALIA

## Sweet surrender

When the clients trust the process

## Shade shifting

Zeitgeist hues take up residence

## Dream weaver

Armadillo & Co's Jodie Fried





# BRIEF ENCOUNTER

*Replacing a home originally designed by Glenn Murcutt would be daunting for any architect. The stunning result could not have been achieved without very special clients*

Story by SAM DUNCAN Photographs by ROSS HONEYSETT

# W

With age comes wisdom, and the retired couple who commissioned the Woollahra Courtyard House could see the sense in setting the right course, then trusting the process.

Their starting point was to invite three architects to submit a paid concept sketch – a process not unheard of, but it isn't the norm, says Will Fung of CO-AP Architects, whose design came up trumps.

“Usually when you get a client and you do a concept sketch, you might change a dozen times before the end result,” says Fung. “But this stayed fairly true to the original concept.”

And the design needed to be good. The building that CO-AP was tasked with replacing was a Glenn Murcutt-designed home from the seventies. It was one of his lesser-known works, but all the same the Pritzker Architecture Prize winner would need to be consulted, Fung reckoned.

When the clients bought the property, the Murcutt house had been stripped; it was an empty shell. The house next door had been a heritage-listed single-storey weatherboard cottage, but that had since become a double-storey mansion.

Fung wrote to Murcutt seeking his blessing. He explains that it's a respect thing between two architects, particularly when it's





someone as accomplished as Murcutt. Often referred to as Australia's most famous architect, Murcutt wrote back. He expressed his understanding that the context of the street had changed, and gave CO-AP the nod to replace his single-storey design from more than four decades ago.

CO-AP replaced Murcutt's house with a much larger dwelling. Four bedrooms were situated across three levels, with much thought given to ensuring the building didn't adversely affect the sightlines of the houses either side. It was a four-year project that took some time moving through the Land and Environment Court. Neighbouring properties had objected to a two-storey above-ground home.

At first glance, Fung's concept is discreet. But if you hold your gaze long enough the modern design will jump out at you.

Behind a palisade fence and beyond the front garden, the base of the property is white-rendered brickwork, with a top storey clad in an extruded aluminium profile in a dark brown, almost black. There's a line of five big steel window hoods facing the street, lending vertical proportion to the roofline. Their verticality is in keeping with the style of the other houses in the street.

CO-AP's clients only involved themselves in the process of selecting the stone and colour for the interiors. Their touch proved masterful. A retro sky-blue porcelain toilet and two matching basins in the ensuite was a bold move. The colour was commonplace in the sixties but is now hard to get, and the clients secured the last of a discontinued line from Italy. It shouldn't work, but it does. "It provides freshness in an otherwise very serious interior," says Fung. "Pops of freshness and colour that bring a bit of joy."

Also colourful is the green staircase linking all three levels. It leads upstairs to the study and guest bedrooms, or downstairs to the basement with garage and cellar. CO-AP wanted a strong sculptural form, almost like a Richard Serra sculpture, but in steel and painted.

A series of skylights and clerestory windows allow the home to be filled with light







*Left: The retro blue porcelain ware in the bathroom was an inspired choice by the clients. Below: Natural materials such as stone, marble and Australian hardwoods have been used throughout the home*



They went back and forth, from yellow to green to blue, finally settling on green. The pops of colour take their cues from the natural materials used, in particular stone. A variety of figured stones, naturally lit by skylights, are featured in bathrooms throughout the house. Instead of going with a safe white or grey, the blue porcelain in the ensuite ties in with the violet in the marble.

The staircase green works with the natural, honest materials surrounding it: strong horizontal planes of board-form concrete and terrazzo. Australian hardwoods were used for the joinery and bedroom floors.

The interior of the home is flooded with natural light. A series of skylights and clerestory windows puncture the concrete roof, allowing sunlight deep into living spaces and internal rooms. The courtyards also help bring the light in.

The new Woollahra Courtyard House took four years to complete. Almost two were spent on designs and approvals. The builder was meticulous, a factor Fung says was particularly important given so much concrete would be on show.

What he's most proud of: "the fact it got built", given there was so much drama at the beginning, with the daunting prospect of replacing a Murcutt house and opposition from neighbouring properties. He gives the impression it would not have been possible had his clients been more typical. Instead, they signed off on the design, added value where most needed, then watched what is a stunning and unique design come to life. **M**