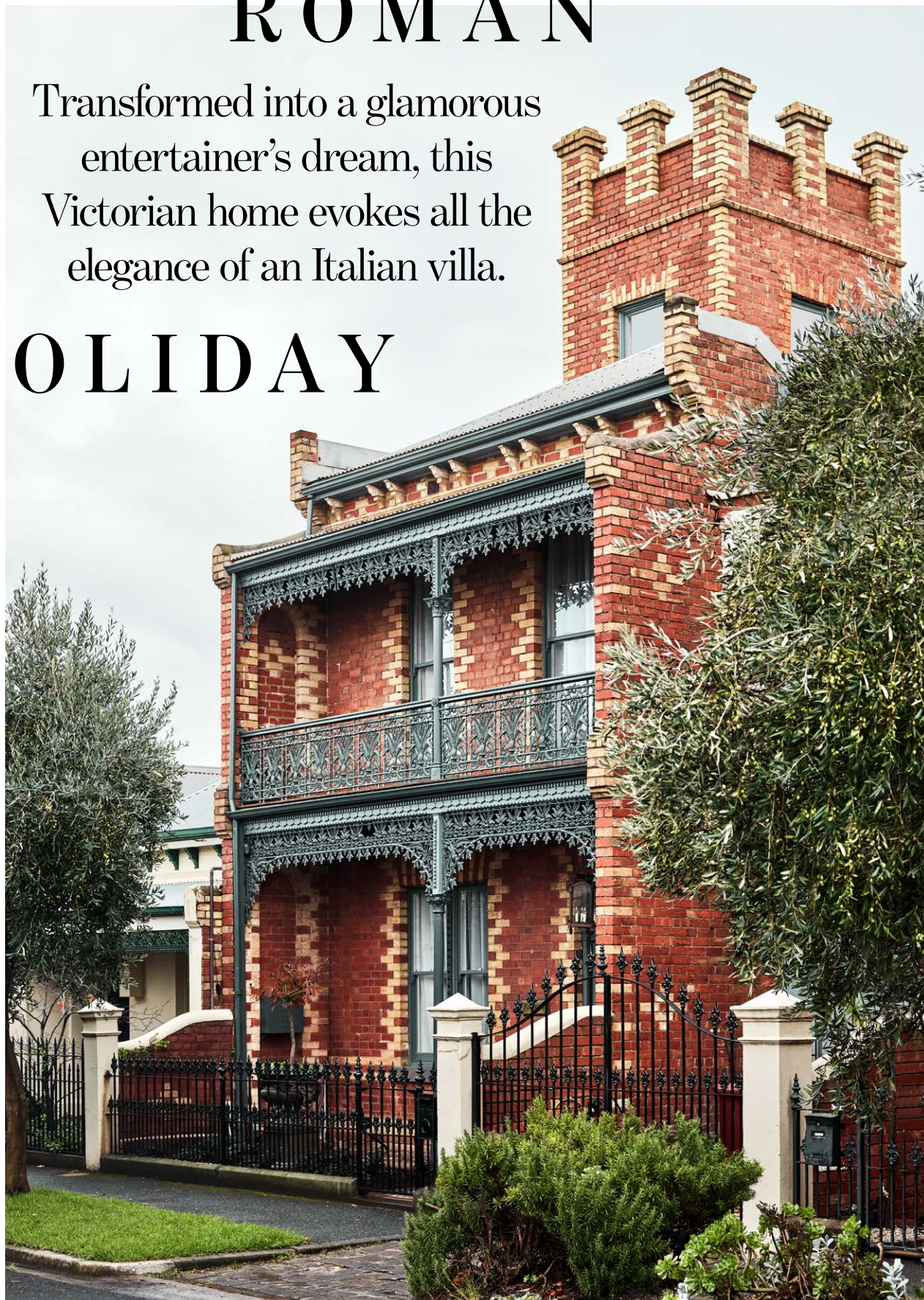


# ROMAN

Transformed into a glamorous  
entertainer's dream, this  
Victorian home evokes all the  
elegance of an Italian villa.

# HOLIDAY

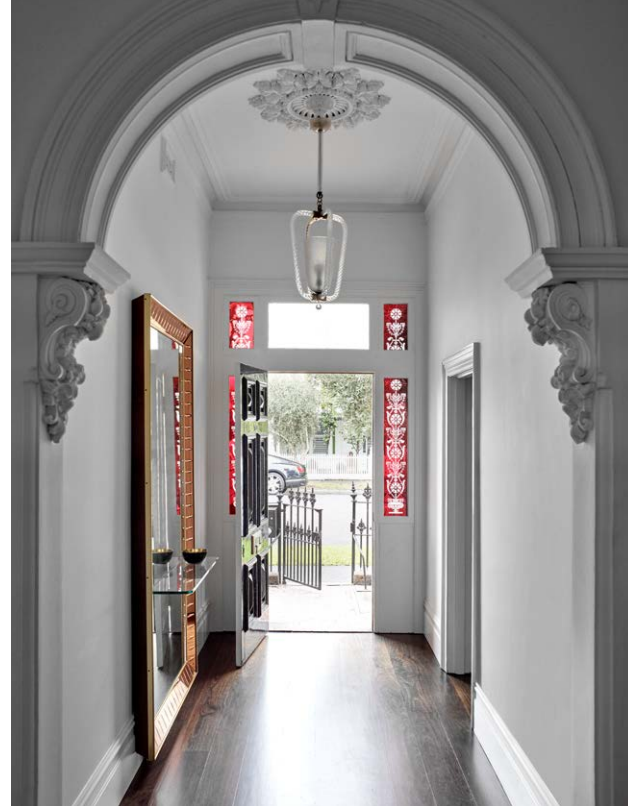


Words **CHRIS PEARSON** Photography **MARK ROPER**



**This page** Plush velvet Italian armchairs from Nicholas & Alistair with their elegant profiles make a style statement in the informal living area. Edra 'Ciclad' coffee table from Space. Vintage onyx dish from 1stdibs. 1930s Barovier & Toso six-shade Murano chandelier and 1970s La Murrina chandelier, both from Nicholas & Alistair. Shearling rug by David Hicks from Cadrys. Chairs reupholstered in linen and antique oak dining table, all from Graham Geddes Antiques & Antiquities. *Reverie* diptych by Agneta Ekholm from Flinders Lane Gallery. Walls in Dulux 'Vivid White'. Existing timber floorboards were re-conditioned and custom stained. **Opposite page** The elegant facade, complete with turret, has been faithfully preserved.





This page, clockwise from top left A 1940s Barovier & Toso Rostrato Murano pendant light from Nicholas & Alistair hangs above the kitchen island, which is clad in honed Cote D'Azur marble from G-Lux. Tapware from Zucchetti. Platter from Dinosaur Designs. Joinery in Dulux 'Vivid White' two-pack polyurethane. An archway, mouldings and stained-glass windows all lend gravitas to the heritage hallway. Vintage Murano mirror from Peninsula Antiques e Moderno. 1930s Murano pendant light by Archimede Seguso from Nicholas & Alistair. David Hicks bronze vessel from David Hicks Editions. Soapstone sculpture by Zimbabwean Shona carvers from Graham Geddes Antiques & Antiquities. **Opposite page** The bold marble on the island adorning both the bench and the cascading sides is a flamboyant artwork in its own right. Timber joinery on far wall in Makassar ebony. Oven from Gaggenau.

From dowdy dowager to charming contessa, this grand four-bedroom home in Melbourne's south has enjoyed a miraculous makeover. "We have taken a Victorian lady, given her a facelift, dressed her in Italian couture, adorned her with jewels and sent her on a Roman holiday," says its interior designer David Hicks. "Now she is well travelled and glamorous."

After the owners bought the house in 2002, she did decades of dutiful service as a functional family home. But, with their two children grown up, the couple wanted to elevate their cherished 1880s property to something more special. So, in 2020, they turned to David to make it happen. "They loved the way we integrate the new with old and that we design with a minimal palette that is also rich and luxurious. And, keen on mid-century Italian style, they had seen this, too, in our work," he says.

What David found behind the castle-like brick facade – complete with landmark turret – was a world away from that vision. "The house was dark, with orange timber floors and heavy timber mantel mirrors. The kitchen was in plain white laminate and the bathrooms in white gloss tiles," he says. "Designed when living requirements were different, the rooms were small, segregated and cramped." The solid shell and ornate detailing, such as cornices and ceiling roses, outweighed those shortcomings. "The substantial walls and plasterwork make this house so appealing. You can feel the history."

The practical brief was to open up the spaces and let in the light. "The clients wanted the house to feel larger and lighter, with »







**This page** The custom mirror from David Hicks Editions neatly reflects the home's period style and makes the space appear larger than it is. Antique oak dining table and chairs – reupholstered in white linen – all from Graham Geddes Antiques & Antiquities. 1950s Italian sideboard, 1930s Venini table lamp and 1970s La Murrina chandelier, all from Nicholas & Alistair. **Opposite page** In the formal living room at the front of the house, Edra 'Essential' sofa by Francesco Binfaré from Space. 1950s Italian armchair, vintage Italian coffee table and 1930s Venini 'Reticello' chandelier, all from Nicholas & Alistair. Walls in Dulux 'Caps'. Artwork by Dale Frank from Neon Parc. Curtain in Dedar 'L'âge d'Or' from South Pacific Fabrics. Custom Nepalese silk rug from Cadrys. Vintage Italian vase on mantel from Peninsula Antiques e Moderno.





**“WE STREAMLINED THE LAYOUT, WHILE RETAINING THE EUROPEAN STYLE OF ROOM OPENING INTO ROOM. THIS KEPT THE HERITAGE FEEL ...”**

**This page, from top** In keeping with the home's heritage features, David has eschewed open plan instead enlarging the internal openings for a better flow where appropriate. Antique oak dining table and chairs from Graham Geddes Antiques & Antiquities. Artwork by Agneta Ekholm from Flinders Lane Gallery. Vintage Italian armchair from Nicholas & Alistair. David Hicks shearling rug from Cadrys. **Opposite page** The luscious and sinuous 1930s Italian velvet sofa from Nicholas & Alistair is one of David's favourite features in the house. Edra 'Cicladì' coffee tables from Space. Vintage chandelier from Nicholas & Alistair. Rug from Cadrys. Artwork by Dale Frank from Neon Parc.



« a better connection between the rooms and better flow.” They also asked David to reconfigure the first floor to provide a larger main walk-in robe and ensuite, and bigger bedrooms.

Most importantly, they wished to up the style stakes by making the home more elegant and sophisticated with an after-five aura. “The clients love entertaining,” says David. “The wife, of Italian heritage, is passionate about food, design and fashion. They wanted something luxurious, yet simplified and European in feel, while also honouring the heritage aspects of the house. So we streamlined the layout, while retaining the European style of room opening into room. This kept the heritage feel while opening up the house and injecting it with a classic sensibility.”

The floor plan for the more formal rooms at the front downstairs was retained, while in the informal section at the rear, David removed sections of walls and doors to foster a smoother flow and let in the light, while keeping within the existing footprint. Upstairs he shifted walls to create larger bedrooms and bathrooms.

“We simplified the plan, while restoring the heritage details. To keep the integrity of the house, walls were replaced, where needed, with brick and hard plaster, cornices matched to existing detailing, and doors and architraves replicated,” says David. »





## SPEED READ


» Having lived in this grand 1880s home in Melbourne's south for nearly 20 years, the owners wanted to give it a brand-new look. » They engaged interior designer David Hicks to reconfigure the layout, opening up the house to create a smoother flow and letting in the light, while also honouring its heritage. » Lovers of all things Italian, the couple asked him to turn a family home, where they had raised two children, into something more adult, elegant and sophisticated, and geared to after-five entertaining. » David combined a rich palette of materials, such as marble, ebony timbers, solid plaster, bronze, glass and velvet, to create the ambience of an Italian villa, while always honouring the home's period features.



**This page, from top** The glamorous custom bedhead, in Dedar 'Tabularasa' from South Pacific Fabrics, elegantly echoes the outline of the mirror downstairs in the dining room. 1950s wall-mounted bedside tables by Osvaldo Borsani and 1980s Murano wall sconces, all from Nicholas & Alistair. Custom bedcover in Dedar 'Tabularasa' from South Pacific Fabrics. Custom bench upholstered in Rubelli 'Caterina de' Medici' fabric in Nuvola from South Pacific Fabrics. Vintage Pierre Jeanneret armchair from 1stdibs. Custom viscose carpet by Pro-Spective Installations. Walls in Dulux 'Caps'. In the main ensuite, wall and floor tiles in honed Cote D'Azur marble from G-Lux with honed Elba marble wall tiles from Artedomus in the shower. Tonic tapware, Sfera basins and Hydrotherm towel rail, all from Rogerseller. Joinery in Dulux 'Vivid White' two-pack polyurethane. **Opposite page** 'Alberto' fluted knobs from Mother of Pearl & Sons. Vintage Murano wall sconces from Peninsula Antiques e Moderno.

« New dark timber joinery and a carefully curated palette of finishes have taken the grande dame to a whole new level, while also honouring the old house. "We did not want anything to jar," says David. With the clients' leaning for all things Italian, he chose a rich, natural materials palette on a minimal canvas. "We wanted the background to be simple yet tactile, so we opted for an off-white, bone-coloured hard plaster on the walls. Then we used marble to create a distinct Italian feel, with its beautiful organic pattern and glamorous feel. Next we layered other sumptuous materials such as Makassar ebony timber and silk carpet to provide the feel of an Italian villa." With their translucent sheen, warm bronze, crisp chrome, fluted glass and plush velvets also come to the party with their after-five aura.

David worked closely with the client to select an eclectic array of elements, from mid-century Italian furniture and lighting to contemporary items, with some pieces custom made. A special find was the mint-green vintage Italian sofa in the informal sitting room, with its sweeping, organic curves and plush texture. "It is so unusual and unique," he says. "We wanted the furnishings, textiles, light fittings and artworks to provide the rich tapestry to the spaces, like a gallery of curated items. I am so proud of the end product, which is cultured and sophisticated."

While borders have reopened, now that their home has had the villa makeover with striking results, the chances are these lovers of all things Italian will want to stay put – for a while, at least.  [davidhicks.com](http://davidhicks.com)

