

These pages, from left In the main living room, custom sofas by David Hicks have been upholstered in Kravet 'Performance' outdoor fabric to make them childproof. Custom coffee table by David Hicks in solid oak made by John Bastiras from In Good Company. 'Alta' plank premium flooring from Kustom Timber. V-groove ceiling treatment in painted cedar shiplap board from Cedar Sales. The house has a sense of monumentality yet is elegant at the same time. Classic honed travertine from Parthenon Marble. Mounds of topiarised *buxus* in the garden soften the imposing facade.



ROCK OF AGES

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



Taking many cues from Italian modernism, this four-level family home combines function and form with spectacular and imposing results.

This page The V-groove ceiling lends gravitas to the dining area. Custom dining table made by John Bastiras from In Good Company. Knoll 'Platner' chair and Knoll 'Saarinen Executive' chairs in velvet, all from De De Ce. Custom credenza by David Hicks in polished stainless steel. Vintage Murano 'Triedri' chandelier from Peninsula Antiques E Moderno. Vintage Mazzega sconce from Nicholas & Alistair. Artwork by John Olsen. 101 Copenhagen 'Guggenheim' vase in Coffee from Becker Minty. **Opposite page, from top** Custom sofas upholstered in Kravet 'Performance' fabric. Custom coffee table made by John Bastiras from In Good Company. Knoll 'Platner' side tables from De De Ce. John Olsen artwork. Honed terrazzo flooring slabs from Signorino. 'Alta' plank timber on stairs from Kustom Timber.



With a commanding presence, this five-bedroom house has a monolithic quality owing to its sheer size and expanses of travertine both inside and out. Elegance and robustness, sometimes seemingly at odds, step out in tandem, proving that the owners can have active children – three in this case – without waving glamour goodbye.

In 2018, the owners asked interior designer David Hicks to design them a home from the ground up to replace a humble brick dwelling that squandered a prized site. Tucked away in a cul-de-sac in Melbourne's inner south-east, the elevated location soaks in sweeping views of the city, a serpentine loop of the Yarra River and parklands of mature eucalypts. "We were drawn to the unfettered views to east, north and west," says the owner, who simply needed a house that would capitalise on those virtues.

"We wanted a resort-style feel, where we could feel forever on holiday, but also stylish with attention to detail," he adds. He drew inspiration from Melbourne modernist architect Wayne Gillespie, whose career spanned 30 years from the 1970s. "Wayne created homes with a box-like symmetry and a European feel," says the owner of the pure uncluttered lines that meld with the features of classical Italian villas. But, while Wayne favoured masonry, the owner chose stone to bring the family's new home to life.

All of this made David a perfect fit for the project. "Being a simple modernist building, the design direction would be focused from the inside out, which is how we work," he says. "This allows the windows and other structural elements to be positioned in sympathetic places, rather than working around these elements after the fact." David worked closely with landscape designer Jack Merlo on the external finishes and final design. »



« “The overall look was heavily based on brutalist Italian style. Repetition in the structure allows for a rhythm that flows through and gives a meditative feeling,” says David. That is also aided by the limited palette and natural hues. “The clients wanted something warm, subtle and minimal, but with glamorous elements using texture and neutral tones as the decorative layer.” On a practical level, the ground floor “had to be multipurpose”, he adds, “with a large open feel connecting with the outdoors, where the clients could entertain, stage a formal dinner party or simply hang out and watch TV. With three children, it had to also be ‘bombproof’.”

Spanning four levels, the home includes a wine cellar, theatre, playroom and a gym in its basement. Here, too, David has included a day spa area complete with ice bath, golf simulator room and, yes, skateboard ramp. On the ground floor, to the right of the entry, are the living areas, with kitchen and dining at the rear, and to the left sit a guest suite, powder room and butler’s pantry. The first floor, meanwhile, features a master suite with generous walk-in robe and study area, together with three children’s bedrooms, all with robes and ensuites opening onto a TV area. The top floor, with its prize 360-degree panoramas, is entertaining central – a glass box complete with a barbecue and built-in dining table, a U-shaped bar and a spa bath floating alluringly in a reflection pond.

With a brief for hardy surfaces, David and Jack introduced external cladding in travertine “to bring solidity to the structural elements and frame the glazing”, explains David. “We continued this monolithic treatment internally to meld inside and out. This minimal yet brutalist cladding, paradoxically perhaps, gives the house its decorative layer.” In keeping with the mid-century Italian feel, David specified terrazzo for the main entry and hallway flooring. “It is hard-wearing, textural, decorative and subtle, bringing a soft contrast to the travertine walls.”

Oak flooring delivers warmth and family friendliness to the living areas, set down a couple of marble steps to foster the cosiness of a conversation pit. As the open plan is a large expanse, David wanted to avoid a ceiling that was “a sea of plasterboard”, so he introduced white timber panelling which is also carried through to the top-level bar and the basement gym. Beautiful Calacatta Oro marble lends luxe to the kitchen and bathrooms. “The white, cream and gold tones bring a freshness and glamour,” he says.

While the palette layers warm neutrals, the formal lounge is “darker and moodier”, while the family areas are “lighter and fresh”. “It was a weaving together of whites, creams, tan, gold, nudes and bone colours, like a sophisticated chocolate éclair,” says David. To reconcile the client’s love of pale neutrals with the »



This page An interplay of terrazzo, marble and travertine is used to dramatic effect in the kitchen and informal dining area. Cassina ‘Cab’ bar stools from Mobilia. Knoll ‘Bertoia’ leather-covered dining chairs from De De Ce. Vintage Italian chandelier by Toni Zuccheri from Nicholas & Alistair. Honed terrazzo flooring slabs from Signorino. Joinery in oak veneer in custom stain and two-pack in Dulux ‘Natural White’. Calacatta Oro marble on benchtop from Parthenon Marble. Vola tap from Mary Noall. **Opposite page** With several eating areas, this house is geared towards entertaining large numbers of people. Custom table in Corian surface. Knoll ‘Bertoia’ leather-covered dining chairs from De De Ce. Calacatta Oro marble from Parthenon Marble.





DAVID AND JACK
INTRODUCED TRAVERTINE
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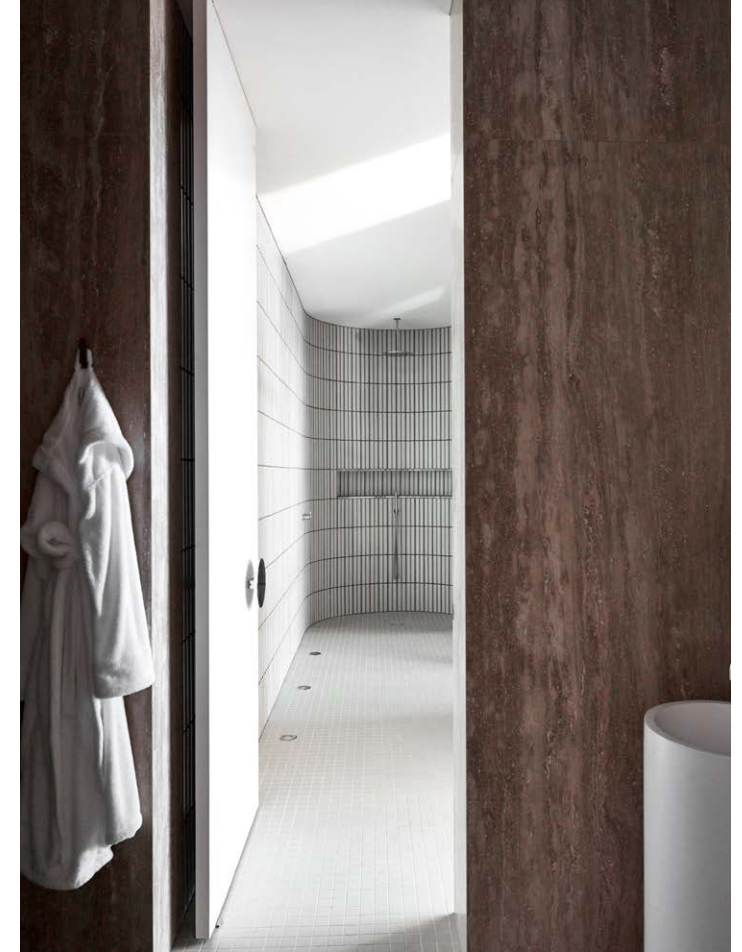
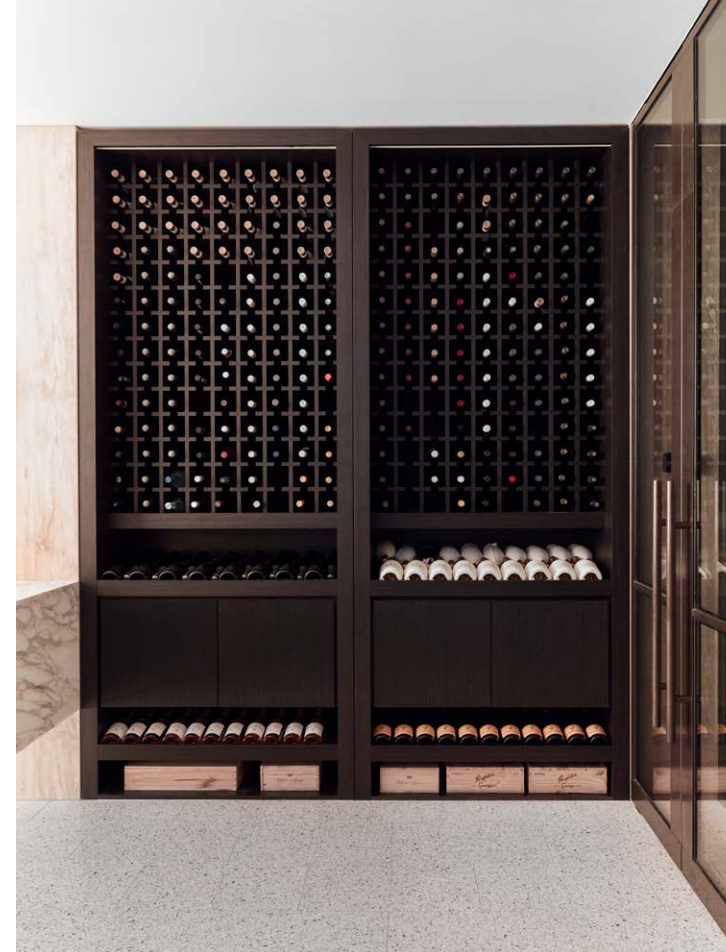
This page The palette is darker and moodier in the front living room. Etel 'Alta' armchair by Oscar Niemeyer from Mama Casa. Vintage B&B Italia 'Soriana' chairs re-upholstered in Lelièvre bouclé. Vintage sofa re-upholstered in gold velvet. Custom 'TRV' coffee table from Willy Rizzo. Knoll 'Tulip' table by Eero Saarinen from De De Ce. David Hicks custom cantilevered lacquer side table. Custom 'Crystal' shag rug from RC+D. Custom rock crystal chandelier by Christopher Boots. Curtains in Dedar 'L'Âge D'or' fabric in col.1 De L'Aube Au Crépuscule from South Pacific Fabrics. Wall in Portoro marble from Parthenon Marble. **Opposite page** Ivy provides dense ground cover on a bank that slopes down to allow light into the underground gym.



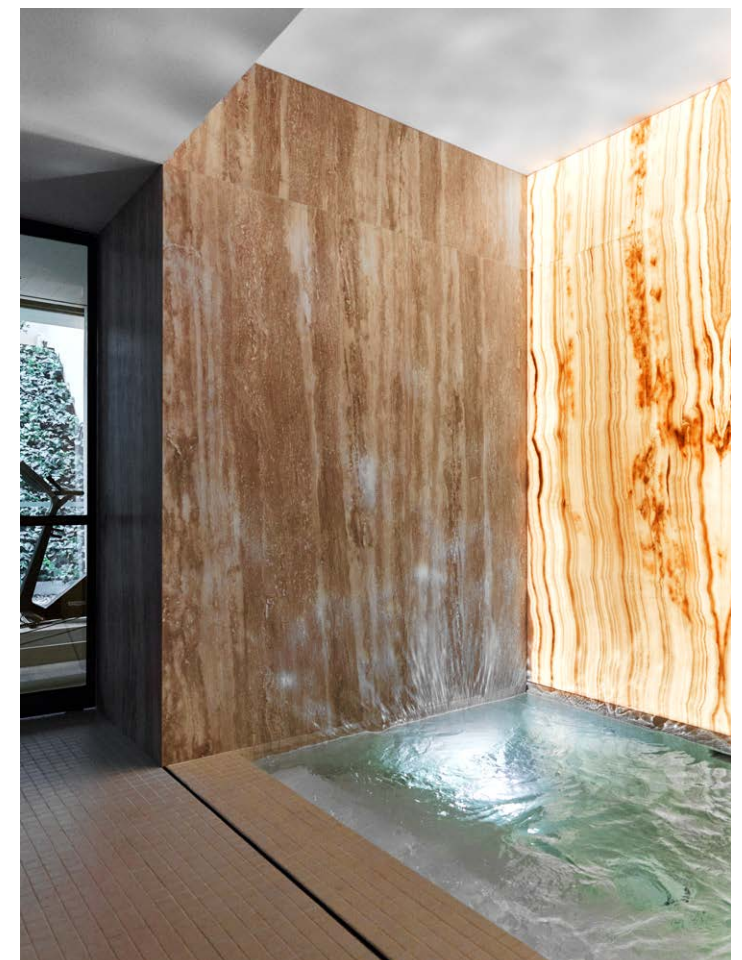
«‘bombproof’ brief, he specified outdoor fabrics to keep the cream sofas pristine. Combining classic and contemporary pieces with an Italian bent, the chunky and curvaceous statement furniture lends a gravitas to match the architecture: vintage ‘Soriana’ chairs by Afra and Tobia Scarpa, ‘TRV’ coffee table by Willy Rizzo, an ‘Alta’ lounge chair by architect Oscar Niemeyer and vintage chandeliers.

Perhaps the biggest challenge was the staircase, which illustrates the detail throughout. Extending through all four levels and forming the spine of the house, it is cantilevered, with only two fixing points per floor, as the owners wanted it to float off the travertine wall running through the middle, with a 50mm gap between the two. “Because of its sheer scale and precision, this house is breathtaking,” says David, whose favourite feature is the basement ice bath with a double-sided illuminated onyx wall that is experienced in the hallway on the other side while ensuring privacy.

“I love everything about the house,” says the owner. “How the stone ties in with the glass, how it flows into the garden and all rooms connect to the view. It’s about the total environment rather than just the house itself.” ■ davidhicks.com; jackmerlo.com



This page, clockwise from top left The custom oak-stained wine cabinet in the basement cellar is an entertainer’s dream. Terrazzo honed flooring slabs from Signorino. The powder room and the adjacent shower room in the basement serves the spa and also a home cinema. Mosaic floor tiles and Inax ‘Izumo’ wall tiles, all from Artedomus. ‘Lunar’ freestanding basin from Apaier. Vola tap from Mary Noall. The ice bath in the basement with its illuminated double-sided wall in onyx from Parthenon Marble which glows in both this room and the hallway outside. In the basement gym, luxury equipment custom made by PENT. **Opposite page** The rooftop bar, with its district views, is a popular gathering place. David Hicks custom sofa upholstered in Kravet ‘Performance’ outdoor fabric. Knoll ‘Bertoia’ leather-covered bar stool from De De Ce. Vintage Melchiorre Bega side table from Nicholas & Alistair. Custom silk rug from Bayliss.





This page, clockwise from top A bold artwork, *Visiting Mr & Mrs Andrews* (2020), by Kate Bergin from Scott Livesey Galleries, provides an element of whimsy in the main bedroom. Crystal lamp base with silk shade from Cromwell. Vintage Italian stools from The Vault Sydney. Vintage console from Nicholas & Alistair. Murano chandelier from Peninsula Antiques E Moderno. Escape Velour carpet from Supertuft. Fabric wall panels in Rubelli 'Swing Street' from South Pacific Fabrics. In the dressing room, oak timber veneer with custom stain. 'Hanmadang' seagrass wallpaper in joinery panels from Domain Textiles. Vintage Murano chandelier from Smith Street Bazaar. In the ground-floor powder room, vintage Murano sconces from Nicholas & Alistair. Benchtops in Portoro honed marble from Parthenon Marble with ribbed oak joinery. **Opposite page** In the main ensuite, Calacatta Oro marble on floors and benchtop from Parthenon Marble. Vintage Rostrato chandelier from Peninsula Antiques E Moderno. Custom Nero Marquina carved-marble bath. Hydrotherm towel rack from Rogerseller. Inax 'Izumo' finger tiles from Artedomus.



SPEED READ

» When the owners bought this prime site in Melbourne's inner south-east, a humble brick bungalow squandered the 270-degree views. » They asked interior designer David Hicks and landscape designer Jack Merlo to design them a home that did justice to the site, with an indoor-outdoor connection, that was also practical for an active family with three children while also stepping up for sophisticated adult entertaining. » Taking his cues from Italian brutalist modernist architecture, David presented them with a home that employs repetition and lashings of marble and stone, especially travertine, to lend luxe. Extending the theme, terrazzo flooring delivers a subtle contrast. » The calming neutral palette includes whites, creams, tan, gold, nude and bone hues. » The furniture inventory combines classic and contemporary pieces with an Italian bent, chunky and curvaceous statement items that lend gravitas befitting the architecture and interior finishes.