

Words **CHRIS PEARSON** Photography **TOM BLACHFORD**

MADE TO MEASURE

This page In the formal dining area, antique table from Dealing in Design with antique chairs reupholstered in Armani/Casa 'Portofino' fabric from South Pacific Fabrics. *Autumn Landscape* artwork by Sokquon Tran. Custom console in dark-stained oak with honed Portoro marble top. Murano vase and vintage Murano chandelier from eModerno. Marmorino wall finish by Melbourne Rendering Group. Ceilings in Dulux 'Natural White'. 'Paris' wool and viscose carpet from RC+D. **Opposite page** In the entry, solid-oak 'Chantilly' parquetry from Timberland Floors. Vintage Murano chain-link chandelier from eModerno. 'Luxe Spotted' rug in Charcoal from Cadrys.

A hard-working family home is re-imagined as an elegant entertaining hub with classic Italian design credentials.



Simple lines and perfect proportions, enriched by precious materials, fine finishes and elegant textiles” sums up the Armani/Casa philosophy, and it also neatly encapsulates this handsome four-bedroom home in Melbourne’s south-east. The owner drew her inspiration from the furnishings house with a fashion pedigree, and the tailored result, by interior designer David Hicks, fits her like a glamorous gown.

Fortunately, she had decades to discover the perfect cut. She and her husband built the two-storey, clinker-brick home back in 1980 for their then-growing family. “We eventually had four children and our home was always a hub of activity,” says the owner. During that time they renovated twice, first to extend their dining room, then to add an indoor pool and family room.

But, as empty-nesters, the couple’s needs changed. “Our children all have big families, which means lots of grandchildren, and two live overseas so they often come to stay,” she says. Meanwhile, her husband wanted more open living spaces that flow inside and out. “I loved our house, with its warm, elegant feel. I was reluctant to renovate, but we compromised – my husband would get his open back area and I would get three guest rooms with ensuites.”

In 2019, they asked David to elevate the house from family factotum to elite entertainer. “The original build was solid »



These pages, clockwise from left In the formal living room, custom coffee table in blue-stained burl veneer from Elton Group. Custom sofas in Dedar ‘Edelweiss’ outdoor twill from South Pacific Fabrics and leather from Contemporary Leathers. Cushions in Armani/Casa ‘Portland’ fabric and custom cabinet with doors in Armani/Casa ‘Refined Structures 2’ wallpaper in Brera, all from South Pacific Fabrics. Chinoiserie vase and birds, clients’ own. Vintage Chinoiserie mirror from eModerno. Curtains in ‘Ritz’ fabric from Warwick Fabrics. Fireplace clad in honed ‘Lantern Green’ marble from G-Lux. Custom ottomans in Armani/Casa ‘Namur’ fabric. In the family room, vintage Saarinen dining chairs in Armani/Casa ‘Nanjing’ fabric from South Pacific Fabrics. Vintage bamboo dining table and vintage Barovier&Toso chandelier from eModerno. Sofas were re-upholstered in UV Pro ‘Flat Out First’ outdoor fabric in Silver from Zepel Fabrics. Joinery in European oak with walnut stain and Phillip Jeffries ‘Concrete Washi’ wallpaper from The Textile Company. Area rug from Cadrys. In the formal dining, custom console in dark stained oak with honed Portoro marble top. Murano vase from eModerno. *Autumn Landscape* artwork by Sokquon Tran.



« and well executed,” he says. “But the rear was dark. The clients wanted to connect the spaces and open up the rear informal living areas to each other and the garden. And they wanted a main bedroom suite as a retreat on the first floor.”

The front section downstairs retains the original layout, with the addition of a cloak room and powder room. Meanwhile, David extended and opened up the rear, so the family room, dining room and kitchen flow seamlessly into one vast space. “As we removed major supports for the level above, we had to cantilever beams of the original structure over the rear spaces, then conceal the beams,” he says. “We introduced a series of coffers which delineate the spaces without restricting flow.”

The kitchen was opened up, with structural elements concealed in striking travertine blades. Meanwhile, David juggled the first floor, sacrificing one bedroom and a large family bathroom to create the desired ensembles and an enlarged main bedroom suite.

For the interiors, Armani/Casa was the *sine qua non*. “Throughout we referenced Armani interiors and fabrics, with

monochromatic backgrounds interspersed with striking black and occasional bursts of intense colour,” says David.

The palette in the formal areas includes neutral greige polished plaster, custom Armani green silk carpet and green marble in the fireplace, which all set the scene, while a layering of Armani/Casa fabrics plays one against the other, tying the blue-green theme together. At the rear, the same background palette is infused in more black, in the marble and a dark oak dining table offset by shimmering Armani vinyl on the dining chairs and textured outdoor fabric on the family-room sofas. Upstairs in the bedrooms and bathrooms, the neutral palette is also peppered with pops of blue and green that take their cues from the formal living spaces.

Texture, celebrated in a captivating continuum from raw to smooth, takes a leading role. “We combined stucco, ribbed walnut, herringbone parquet, raw travertine, polished marble, bronze, silk, textured wallpaper, bouclé and, yes, Armani fabrics, to create a rich, layered, tactile palette,” says David. “The inspiration was loosely based on great Italian design, »




This page, from top In the family room, Knoll ‘Platner’ side table in bronze with ‘Verde Alpi’ marble top from De De Ce. Custom lacquered coffee table in Dulux ‘Russian Toffee’. Clients’ sofas re-upholstered in UV Pro ‘Flat Out First’ outdoor fabric in Silver from Zepel Fabrics. Joinery in European oak with walnut stain and Phillip Jeffries ‘Concrete Washi’ wallpaper from The Textile Company. Indian rug in green from Cadrys. The kitchen island bench is clad in honed Portoro marble and walls clad in honed unfilled travertine both from Parthenon Marble. Joinery in lacquered Dulux ‘Natural White’ and European oak timber veneer in walnut stain. Qasair ‘Albany Argyle’ dual rangehoods and Wolf and Sub-Zero appliances, all from E&S. **Opposite page** Splashback and benchtop in honed Portoro marble from Parthenon Marble. Vintage Barovier&Toso chandelier from eModerno.

« with its structured, almost Brutalist personality. Ribbed timber and raw travertine are juxtaposed against slick marble, which hints at more excessive opulence. Refined and raw, robust and fragile, understated and dramatic, simple and ornate materials all work in synergy and in contrast to each other.”

Decoration, he says, is intrinsic in the grain of the marble, the texture of the raw travertine, the ribbed oak stained in a warm walnut, and bronze trims. The living-room coffee table is custom made from blue-stained burl wood and lacquered in a piano-gloss finish. “The simple ‘Parsons’-style table provides the perfect shape to showcase such an intricate yet simple material, mesmerising with its undulating lines and patterns,” says David. The two custom cabinets in the living room are also a favourite. “They are a nod to Armani/Casa in their grand black piano-gloss frames and shimmering metal-beaded wallpaper inserts – the wallpaper from Armani, of course.”

The owner is rapt with the finely fashioned results. “Every time we walk in the door, we appreciate the beautiful finishes and attention to detail,” she says. “I loved our meetings, where David had all the samples laid out so we could work out the fabrics and finishes. But, even then, I had no idea of the minute details. The spaces all work really well. We’ve already hosted a few events and it’s been effortless. And I could probably spend all day in our bedroom – it’s like being in a six-star hotel room.”

“I am proud of the whole project,” adds David. “I love the outcome, with its attention to detail and the fact that I know this house from top to toe. But most satisfying of all is the happiness we have brought to the client.”  davidhicks.com



SPEED READ

» The owners had lived in this two-storey brick house in Melbourne’s south-east for nearly 40 years, during which they raised four children. » In 2019, as empty-nesters, they found the house no longer suited their needs. They wanted to give it a refresh by opening up the rear to create one large open plan connected to the garden. Also on the wishlist were three new ensuite bedrooms for their adult offspring and a growing army of grandchildren that regularly come to stay. » They hired interior designer David Hicks to work his magic. First up, he made structural changes, such as knocking out walls, extending the rear and reshuffling the bedrooms upstairs. » For the interior decoration, he took his design cues from Armani/Casa, a favourite with the owner. The furnishings and fashion icon is celebrated in the neutral palettes, with pops of colour, and simple lines, using tactile and sleek glossy surfaces, expressed in timber, marble, silk and bouclé fabrics, the raw juxtaposed against the elegant and sophisticated. » The result combines the luxe of hotel style with the easy-living functionality of a family home; the formal and the informal dextrously intertwined.



This page In the main bedroom, upholstered wall panelling in Armani/Casa ‘Nola Oro’ and curtains in Armani/Casa ‘Nanjing’ from South Pacific Fabrics. Custom bedside tables lacquered in Dulux ‘Russian Toffee’. Custom bedhead in blue velvet from Unique Fabrics. Opposite page In the main ensuite, floor, wall and vanity clad in honed Calacatta Oro marble and wall in honed unfilled travertine, all from Parthenon Marble. Victoria + Albert ‘Worcester’ freestanding bath from The English Tapware Company. Vola tapware in Polished Chrome from Mary Noall. Panelling in ‘Tobago’ high performance wallpaper from Instyle.



1 ‘Paris’ bath in Snowdrop White, \$15,740, from The Water Monopoly. 2 Custom ‘Agapito’ Italian Murano glass wall/ceiling sconce, POA, from eModerno. 3 ‘Scribe’ dining chair in matt gold and greige velvet, \$1320, from James Said. 4 V&A William Morris ‘Willow Bough’ curtains in Mink, from \$143.45, from Tuiss Blinds Online. 5 Knoll ‘Platner’ side table, \$2618, from De De Ce.