

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

High ideal

An imposing penthouse perched above a beach in south-east Melbourne presents living on a grand scale, yet it's also a warm and welcoming home for a large family.

This page In the TV room, looking towards the dining area, solid European oak floorboards with coloured light-grey oil from Dinesen. Walls in Venetian plaster by Who Plastering, Byron Bay. Custom banquette in Mokum 'South Beach' outdoor fabric from Zepel. Custom wool loop rug by Halcyon Lake. Custom dining chairs upholstered in Kravet outdoor fabric from Elliott Clarke. 'Eole' floor lamp by Pierre Augustin Rose from Studio ALM. Sheers in Mokum 'Lino' in Whitewash from James Dunlop. **Opposite page** In the main bedroom, 'Kore' carpet from Halcyon Lake. 'Roly-Poly' coffee table in Chalk from Toogood, London. Apple sourced from Paris flea market. 'Classique V' pendant light by Joseph Dirand from Ozone, Paris. Gubi 'Pacha' lounge chair from In Good Company. Bench seat custom upholstered in Dedar 'Amaral' fabric from South Pacific Fabrics. Solid bronze sheep from Antiques on Old Plank Road, Chicago.

This is penthouse living on a grand and dramatic scale. Port Phillip Bay sweeps before the curved, double-height facade like a VistaVision movie, while the apartment, designed by David Hicks, provides a sumptuous, dress-circle seat of the unscripted spectacle beyond. He has deftly ensured that neither the interiors nor the view upstage each other – the head-turning penthouse and its epic panorama share star billing. But, paradoxically perhaps, despite its imposing scale, this is also a cosy and comfortable family home.

In 2018, David was asked to design the interiors in the St Kilda waterfront development, created by architects Fender Katsalidis in the style of a plush resort. From lobby to library, private dining rooms to spa, even a cinema with gold-class seating, the spaces exude his signature classic luxe, with marble taking a leading role.

He customised many of the apartments, including this owned by media mogul Antony Catalano and wife Stefanie, shared with the younger six of their nine children, aged four to 19. “A dramatic shift in apartment design recently has created more appeal to families,” says Antony. “Our 800sqm property has the space of a family home, including four living areas, with amenities to rival a six-star hotel.”

Embracing the seventh and eighth floors, the penthouse boasts glazing on three sides presenting views across the bay and back towards the city. “The clients are young and fun, with a large family,” says David. “The focus was on creating spaces for their diverse needs.” That included a mix of generous entertaining areas and private spaces for precious time-out – for both parents and children, together with six bedrooms. And, while the luxe materials and fittings had to cater for discerning adults, they also had to be hard-wearing, with no sharp corners, for impetuous children.

“We required individual spaces where adults can retreat and find peace away from the chaos that comes with a big family but also spaces where the kids can have fun,” says Antony. “Our kitchen bench had to be five metres long, so we could have nine barstools!” And a humungous dining table, seating 14, would offer “a special place to come together. Some elements are dramatic because of the sheer size and scale, but our home also had to be warm and welcoming,” he adds. “We asked David to blend rich textures and minimalism to create rooms that are uncomplicated, yet inviting.”

With access to a front balcony and a rear outdoor area, respectively, two vast living spaces occupy opposite ends of »



This page, from left In the kitchen, solid European oak floorboards in light-grey oil from Dinesen. Benchtop in Calacatta Paonazzo honed marble from G-Lux. Custom plaster stools with seat pad in Pavoni 'Veneto' leather from South Pacific Fabrics. Joinery in European oak veneer stained to match floorboards. 'Highline' pendant light in white from Archier. In the living and dining areas, custom sofa and dining chairs upholstered in Kravet outdoor fabric from Elliott Clarke. **Opposite page** Custom dining table in solid oak, stained to match floorboards, from In Good Company. Custom dining chairs upholstered in Kravet outdoor fabric from Elliott Clarke. 'Mushroom' pendant light by Stephen Antonson from Liz O'Brien, New York. Walls in custom Venetian plaster by Who Plastering.

SPEED READ

» In 2019, the owners bought this expansive six-bedroom, two-level penthouse with jaw-dropping views of Port Phillip Bay off the plan. » They asked interior designer David Hicks to design them spaces for a large family with six children, with generous entertaining and communal areas, together with smaller, more intimate break-out areas for quieter moments. » Materials are simple but classic, including lashings of marble, solid-oak flooring and textured walls in a Venetian plaster finish, with much of the inspiration drawn from the beachscape beyond the windows. » The elegant and glamorous finishes are also designed to be robust to withstand the rough-and-tumble of its younger occupants. Oversized furnishings feature outdoor upholstery fabrics and no sharp corners. » But, despite the penthouse's grand scale, it's still cosy and family friendly.



« the lower floor, with the main bedroom suite between. Living, dining and kitchen enjoy bay views, dramatically enhanced by a soaring double-height void. Meanwhile, at the opposite end, a family lounge with a large semicircular bar abuts the garden and pool.

The hallway sports three sets of double doors. “This creates a sound lock, enabling both ends of the floor to be used while the central area remains private,” says David. The upper level boasts five bedrooms all with ensuites, a family bathroom with a mammoth marble tub and a huge kids’ lounge. “For the finishes and fittings, while Antony and Stefanie wanted warm minimalism, using only neutrals, they still had to be elegant and glamorous. The aesthetic is about oversized pieces, special materials and refined detailing,” he says. And it’s largely inspired by the beachscape beyond.

Copious curves on fittings and furnishings echo the sinuous facade and the ocean waves while being child-friendly and playful, highlighted by a sheep in the stairwell which reflects the mood and the palette, white, grey and black, with black-veined white marble, black metal trims and bleached-oak floors.

In the family area, Cote D’Azur marble on the bar top and fascia is “reminiscent of a stormy sea. Featuring a light blue-grey background with lashings of dark blue and charcoal, this stone is dramatic, yet paradoxically calming,” says David. “It mimics the tones of sand, water and sky.” By contrast, he clad the powder room in green onyx from top to bottom, creating a jewel-like space.

“The generous space enabled us to use slabs of this unique stone providing a big gesture with its organic green and cream patterning,” he says. Similarly “the vast sea” of solid oak flooring boasts wide-gauge boards to reflect the sheer size of the areas they cover.

David coated walls throughout in textural Venetian plaster. “It gives a layered, organic three-dimensional finish – large flat »



This page Stairs in solid European oak, coloured with light-grey oil, from Dinesen. Walls in custom Venetian plaster by Who Plastering.
Opposite page, from top In the powder room, vanity and walls in honed Onice Verde onyx from Corsi & Nicolai. Custom taps, in Gunmetal finish, from Brodware. Bar in Cote D’Azur honed marble from G-Lux. ‘Diiva’ barstools from Grazia&Co. Porta Romana ‘Bronte’ wall lights from South Pacific Fabrics. *Is This Our Final Twist* artwork by Todd Hunter.

expanses of plasterboard in grand spaces can look underwhelming,” he says. “Like whitewashed stone, it reminds me of perfectly imperfect buildings in Greece. Romantic and free-spirited, it plays against the slick joinery and stonework.” Fluted plaster panelling graces the entry and TV room, “the graceful and rhythmic pattern adding to the serene layering of materials”. Echoing the natural theme, the mammoth curved sofa in the living room has an ebb and flow, narrow at each end, deep in the middle, creating a relaxed daybed vibe. While white, this was smartly upholstered in outdoor fabric to cater for active children. And, in the family room, the monumental U-shaped modular sofa sports a white outdoor linen.

In the entry, the elegant ‘Ring’ chandelier by US artist Stephen Antonson is a perfect counterpoint to the white fluted walls. Meanwhile Antonson’s descriptively named ‘Mushroom’ pendant light playfully sits above the bar in the dining room, echoing the organic shape of a floor lamp opposite.

“I love the simplicity, especially the bathrooms bathed in marble from head to toe, with their oversized baths and huge vanities,” says David. “These large gestures are breathtaking.” And, after some time in the business, he can still surprise himself. “Antony pushed for Venetian plaster throughout. I had thought it might be too full-on, but now it is one of my favourite features,” he says.

“The apartment fills us with excitement every time we walk in the door,” says Antony. “It’s got spectacular views, it’s big, it’s different, it’s fun and it feels like home.”

davidbicks.com



This page and opposite page, bottom In the main ensuite, steps, bath and floor all in Calacatta Paonazzo honed marble from G-Lux. Cast bronze ‘Crocodile Nera’ stool from Eccotrading Design, London. Custom tapware, in Gunmetal finish, from Brodware. Venetian plaster walls by Who Plastering. **Opposite page, top** In the main bedroom, custom bedhead in Kravet outdoor fabric from Elliott Clarke. ‘Ellie’ limestone bedside tables by DenHolm. ‘Embrun A’ wall light from Ozone, Paris.



5 SIGNATURE STYLE KEY PIECES



1 Kelly Wearstler ‘Melange’ sconce in Alabaster and Antique Burnished Brass, \$1850, from Becker Minty. 2 ‘Majuli’ stool, \$2990, from Boyd Blue. 3 ‘Elysian’ kitchen mixer in Matte Black, \$230, from ABI Interiors. 4 Isabelle Beaumont ‘Sami’ coffee tables, \$4213/set, from 1stDibs. 5 ‘Lisa’ sectional curved sofa, \$15,060, from Boyd Blue.