



THE MAX FACTOR

Luxurious finishes and ornate details concoct a glamorous mood in this bespoke penthouse.

Photographs SHANNON McGRATH Words CARLI PHILIPS



This page in the Retreat Room, a vintage Stilnovo chandelier from Nicholas & Alistair hangs above a custom sofa in Carlucci velvet from Unique Fabrics. Vintage cherrywood tub chairs by James Rosen for Pace Collection. Vintage glass lamp from Designage. Knoll 'Barcelona' ottomans and 'Platner' side table from De De Ce. B&B Italia coffee table from Space. Artwork by John Olsen. Arte 'Camouflage' wallpaper from Unique Fabrics. Opposite page Double-height doors in oak veneer with brass inlay and custom bronze handles made in Paris. Walls are covered in silver travertine slabs. Vintage Murano amber glass wall sconces from Jean-Marc Fray, Texas. Custom high-back chairs in Jim Thompson 'Vesper' fabric from Milgate. Vintage Murano vases from Capocchi.



It kind of goes back to that old craft of what an architect used to be – they designed everything,” says David Hicks of the first full-scale property he has built and decorated from the ground up. “We were detailing gutters and external gates but also selecting wallpaper. This is not the kind of place you move into and put all your old furniture in. It’s something you do as a whole package. It’s a complete product.”

The interior designer is referring to a commission that began as four residences: one on the ground floor, two on the first floor and a penthouse with an infinity pool. All were bought off the plan with one client purchasing the entire first floor and converting it into one. David worked closely with all the owners, and says the personalisation process was very fulfilling. “All three homes are very different and all are bespoke. We have designed their dreams.”

The thrill of working top to toe was not lost on David who wanted to “bring the old glamour back into a modern building”. Inspired by the 1930s Villa Necchi Campiglio mansion by Italian

architect Piero Portaluppi and the star of the film *I am Love*, it’s a little bit of Milanese modernism in the heart of Melbourne.

The Brutalist-inspired facade assumes an abrupt position on the tree-lined, heritage street in Melbourne’s South Yarra. It’s a concrete mix, but sandblasted to appear aged and weathered. In the penthouse, however, the interior is a “bit more of a surprise, a bit more lavish”, says David. “It has that European mentality whereby the outside is quite harsh and brutal, but the interior is luxurious and more ornate.”

This is apparent from the very first step into the lobby with its chevron marble floor, grand void and large Venini smoked-glass chandelier. There’s an elevator for convenience but the fire staircase has been conceived as a grand feature with custom carved treads that lead to a hotel-inspired glass ‘reception vestibule’ with an ebony Art Deco hall table framed by vintage Murano sconces and a custom floor patterned in silver travertine, Calacatta Oro and Portoro marble.

This page The clients’ existing dining table and chairs reupholstered in Groundworks ‘Tiger Gold’ from Elliott Clarke. Vintage Stilnova chandelier from Le Lampade, New York. In the kitchen a vintage Ercole Barovier ‘Rostrato’ chandelier from Italy hangs above the custom island bench in Calacatta Oro marble. Cassina ‘Cab’ bar stools from Cult. **Opposite page** In the open-plan living room a Knole sofa is upholstered in a Brochier fabric from South Pacific Fabrics. Custom armchairs upholstered in Carlucci ‘Palazzo’ velvet from Unique Fabrics. ‘Traccia’ side table in gold leaf by Meret Oppenheim. Custom coffee table in Calacatta Viola marble with custom sled table in Macassar ebony and polished brass.





This page, clockwise from top left: Calacatta Viola marble walls and vanity in the powder room. Vistosi 'Torcello' vintage wall sconces and Italian blush glass mirror from Nicholas & Alistair. A John Olsen artwork hangs in the Retreat Room. Vintage glass lamp from Designage. Vintage glass side table by Fiam Italia. In the master bathroom is a vintage Murano chandelier from Designage. Sahco 'Clouds' curtains from South Pacific Fabrics. Calacatta Oro marble benchtop. Opposite page Vintage Murano glass bedside lamps from Capocchi. Gold vintage sconce from Hannau Roma, Italy. Vintage fox fur throw on bed.



SPEED READ

» Melbourne designer David Hicks created a Brutalist look for the facade of this three-level apartment block in Melbourne's South Yarra, then counteracted it with luxurious interiors. » His bespoke design for the penthouse provided the perfect opportunity to indulge his predilection for glamour, layering velvet sofas, Murano glass chandeliers and moiré wallpaper with brass-inlaid oak doors, gold sconces, marble and parquet flooring. » Reminiscent of a beautiful old hotel, the opulent finishes and ornate detailing make for a supremely indulgent abode.



The floorplan is simple: public areas to the right, private quarters to the left with a small flight of stairs leading to a contained guest area. The Retreat Room with its warm rug, fireplace and velvet couches is in the middle. "It's dark and cosy. In these big apartments it's nice to have a room that's not as precious. You can have stuff out on the bookshelves and picture frames, a study nook. It's a personal kind of room," says David. Powder pink moiré wallpaper and glass lamps exist comfortably with heavy curtains, black leather 'Barcelona' ottomans and the client's vintage cherrywood tub chairs reupholstered in rich, royal purple Carlucci velvet from Unique Fabrics.

Access to the open-plan living, dining and kitchen area is via double-height brass-inlaid oak doors with handles handmade in Paris that are "almost decoration in themselves". Flush with sunlight and layers of fabrics, textures and furniture, it's a thoughtful composition that includes a concentrated use of timber, with joinery in 'Lamora Rift' from New Age Veneers, parquet flooring and the owner's antique dining table and chairs. "The table and chairs are a bit more Biedermeier but we've upholstered them in a contemporary graphic

fabric and combined it with a Persian rug and a vintage Stilnovo chandelier so it's very eclectic. We played with tradition," says David.

At the other end of the spectrum is the contemporary butterscotch Calacatta Oro marble island bench. The breadth of marble used throughout the apartment required careful consideration and the developer and stonemason travelled to Italy to select it, sending images back to David for approval. The same stone has been used in the master ensuite, a modernist bathroom box. "This is where we could be a bit grander. It's reminiscent of a beautiful old hotel, opulent yet simple." The same can be said for the powder room with its eggplant-coloured Calacatta Viola marble walls and vanity. "You have to be brave to use this marble. When you contrast it with something that doesn't necessarily match, that's what makes it work."

It's a sophisticated scheme with a "neutral palette mimicked in a modern way, a classic style without being 'beige'." Indeed, with its refined evocation of nostalgia nuanced with the new, this home may have an austere facade but it certainly has a luxurious heart. 15

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