

Clear



direction

Interior designer *David Hicks* mixes pure lines with a touch of French-influenced MODERN MINIMALISM in his *new* home, a BRUTALIST apartment in Melbourne's Toorak.

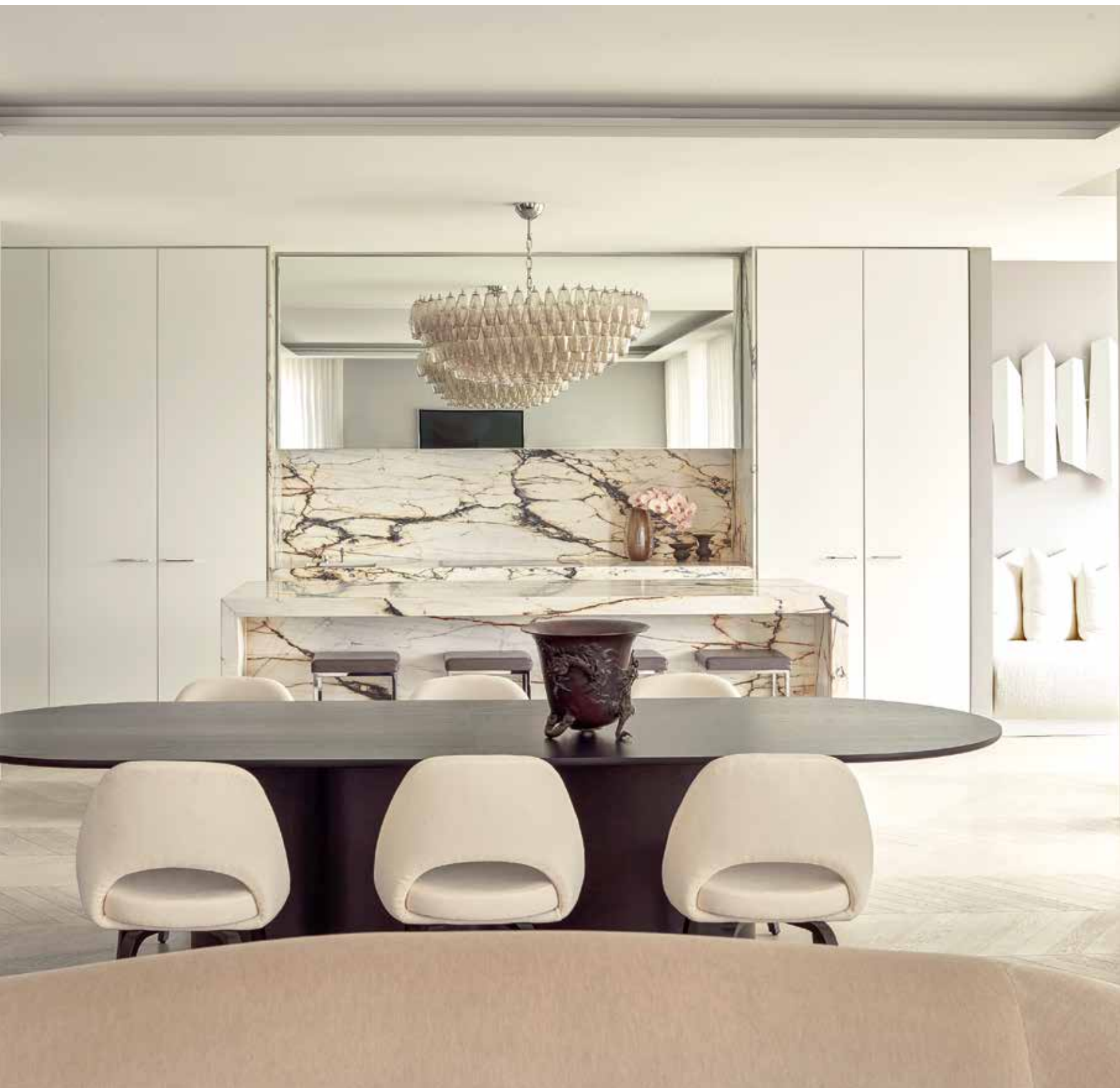
By Annemarie Kiely Photographed by Mark Roper

THIS PAGE in the sitting room of this Toorak home, Jett sofa from David Hicks; Damian coffee table from Interior Secrets; 1930s Rostrato Murano glass lamps by Ercole Barovier; custom steel drum side tables; decorative sheep figure from Old Plank; Khmer Angkor Wat sandstone male deity torso statue from Christie's; 2015 mirror wall sculpture by Christophe Gaignon; shearling rug by David Hicks for Cadrys. **OPPOSITE PAGE** homeowner and interior designer David Hicks in the living area, Tulip side table by Eero Saarinen for Knoll from Dedee; bronze vessels found on a trip to Sri Lanka. *Details, last pages.*



THIS PAGE in the entry vestibule, 1980 **sculpture** by Emilia Palomba from a gallery in Fuveau, France; **wall** painted in Dulux Caps Quarter; Slimtech Delight Marquina Nero marble-effect porcelain **floor tiles** and **border** in Paonazzo marble from Signorino. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the dining area, vintage Saarinen Executive **chairs** by Eero Saarinen for Knoll reupholstered in linen, enquiries to Dedece for reissue; European oak **dining table** designed by David Hicks, produced by In Good Company; antique brass **pot** found on travels through Asia. In the kitchen, **island**, **splashback** and **benchttop** in Paonazzo marble from Signorino; 1958 polyhedron Murano glass **chandelier** by Carlo Scarpa for Venini from Fabio Ltd. In the dining alcove, circa 1990 **wall sconce** by Mario Torregiani from a gallery in Fuveau, France; French oak chevron **flooring** with custom stain.





From fashion's most lauded to academia's most laurelled, it is agreed that elegance seeds in the dry soil of rigour and precision. Cristóbal Balenciaga equated it with elimination, Cecil Beaton with soap and water, Marcel Proust with moral purity and Coco Chanel with refusal — holding back on the impulse to keep adding more. Chanel's ethos of subtraction — “Before you leave the house, look in the mirror and take one thing off” — now proving in spectacular survey show at the National Gallery of Victoria, seemingly underpins the order and effect of Melbourne designer David Hicks's new home; a Coco-like construct of bouclé-textured ease balanced by a judicious layering of costume-meets-couture accessories.

The Hicks mix of classic luxury with customised furniture and exotic quirk does not explicitly defer to the French designer but it proves the same potency of underdressing in precisely tailored monochromes. “Elegance is a function of simplicity and comfort,” says the eternally youthful Hicks as he declares celebrating 21 years in practice and his “surprising” circle back to the reductive “architectural” design that hallmarked his first projects. “I don't believe in trends or following them.”

Leading the home tour from a vestibule cast in a punchy contrast of black and white stone through an enfilade of rooms found on the first floor of a brutalist apartment block in Toorak, Hicks expounds on his disavowal of fads with the reveal of a wing that drinks in the skyline of Melbourne.

To the right is a lounge-room play of pigmented whites in a scheme that favours the mid-century sensuality of such French visionaries as Serge Roche and Jean Royère. To the left sits an imperious island hewn from Paonazzo marble that animates under the light of a vintage Murano glass chandelier.

“I like the irregular, rust-veined imperfections of the marble aligned with extreme precision,” says Hicks. “That space between control and no control is what makes modern minimalism human and warm but it relies on a mastery of detail to mediate those opposites.”

Decrying the general lack of mastery “out there” and ubiquitous want to lean into stylised looks, Hicks says he envisioned his kitchen as a veritable homage to Venice appending at one end with an all-white dining alcove and at the other with a pantry corridor concealing contents behind satin-white doors and displaying crystalline vessels collected for their shape. He lifts one globular '60s bowl and notes that, as per the Italian want to elevate the prosaic, he likes to line it with a white napkin, pour in potato chips and pop it next to an aperitivo just mixed in the jewel-box bar.

Going in search of said “entertaining wellspring”, the designer leads back into the main living area and flings open a pair of mirrored doors made to reflect city lights to guests seated at a dark ellipse of customised oak dining table.

The gesture funnels sightlines straight into a black hole where neon-bright cocktail mixers bedazzle, and a dozen different gins confound choice. Delighting in its drama, Hicks informs that he is partial to a good Margherita and a glass of Ruinart champagne then points to the fine art follow-on of the box's depthless black in the nearby Dale Frank painting; a gilt-edged portal into an otherworldly place that tips the surrounding polite cream completely off kilter. Hicks's cosmic undermining of tailored sobriety continues in the north-wing winter room, a cossetting space where the seating is low to the ground, the palette muddies into textured variations of taupe, and the gravitational pull exerts from an astronomically inclined mirrored disc by French artist Christophe Gaignon.

“I bought it so long ago in a Paris flea market,” he says of work by a then little-known artist now favoured by the likes of Jacques Grange and Christian Liaigre. “It reminds me a bit of Anish Kapoor... I have bought a few over for clients, but they are now almost off-the-scale in terms of price.”

Entreating a look behind the room's open-ended partition wall, where a long stretch of desk became the main office during lockdown, Hicks tells that this room is off limits to his two Tibetan spaniels, Dash and Jett, who would likely destroy all things sheep, including the decadent shearling rug designed in collaboration with Cadrys and a sculpted bronze-and-wool effigy found at Chicago antiques dealer Old Plank. “My cleaner calls him Shaun the Sheep,” says Hicks. And while it's easy to read jingoist subtexts into “Shaun” about our country's commerce and culture riding on the sheep's back, Hicks thinks our national design identity now skews far more European.

“I feel like we could be anywhere in the world in this and many other Melbourne homes,” he says with the add that his business is becoming more focused on full-design development, from first schematics to the build and final audacious furnish. “Interestingly, clients are wanting less, but wanting it better. Downsizing is the wrong term to use because they still want to feel space and seat 12 people around a dinner table but they demand simpler, more sensory schemes that are resistant to the tides of change. They are asking the big questions about real value.”

Historically, such pause for existential reflection and the return to clean lines parallels global crises, à la the penitential purity of minimalism that followed the meltdown of financial markets in the late 1980s and early '90s.

“We are definitely in a moment that calls for cleansing and questioning,” says Hicks of his surrounds and the wider world's want to pull back to first principles and dig deeper into process until all that remains are the facts of the situation. “What does it all mean? Who am I and what do I really want? Design is again asking the right questions.” **VL** davidhicks.com

THIS PAGE in the living area, presumed Jeanneret **chairs** by Le Corbusier designed for Chandigarh, found in India; custom rock crystal **tabletop** from Marché aux Puces, Paris; brutalist brass **coffee table base** from 1stDibs; vintage Lalique glass **vase**; Beovision **TV** from Bang & Olufsen; **fireplace** designed by David Hicks; **fireplace surround** in Paonazzo marble from Signorino; bronze Buddha head **sculptures** from Thailand; sandstone head **sculpture** from Afghanistan; **rock crystal** from Brazil; plaster **torchière** after Serge Roche from The Vault Sydney.





THIS PAGE in the main bedroom, **upholstered wall feature** in Dedar Dalie Papaveri Tulipani fabric from South Pacific Fabrics; vintage Murano Rostrato **lamp bases** from Peninsula Antiques e Moderno; custom macassar ebony veneer **side tables** designed by David Hicks; shearling **rug** by David Hicks for Cadrys. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in another view of the sitting room from the entry vestibule, 1940s Murano glass **chandelier** from Nicholas & Alistair. In the formal/winter sitting room beyond, vintage Soriana **armchairs** by Afra and Tobia Scarpa for Cassina from Goldwood By Boris (enquiries to Mobilia for reissue), reupholstered in Lelièvre Lama fabric from South Pacific Fabrics; Platner **side table** by Warren Platner for Knoll from Dedece.



THIS PAGE in another view of the entry vestibule, 1947 **table** by Osvaldo Borsani from Alfies Antique Market; Indian bronze **urli** from Orient House; *Tom Welling* (2007) **artwork** by Dale Frank from Anna Schwartz Gallery. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the powder room, **vanity** in Paonazzo marble from Signorino; Vola **tapware** from Mary Noall; 1970s Fontana Arte **mirror** from 1stDibs; 1930s Rostrato Murano glass **wall sconces** by Ercole Barovier from a gallery in Faveau, France; late 20th-century bronze crocodile **stool** from Marché aux Puces, Paris. *Details, last pages.*



