

# Domain LIVING BY DESIGN MARY O'BRIEN



Caecilia Potter, the design director of Atticus & Milo, juxtaposed art, original Victorian fixtures and an eclectic mix of objects in her heritage-listed Hawthorn house.

PICTURES: LUIS ENRIQUE ASCUI

## Personal touch creates a home

Caecilia Potter believes in making your four walls your own – and she leads by example.

IT'S time we all put our personalities back into our homes, says interior designer Caecilia Potter, and that's exactly what the designer has done with a humorous and whimsical revamp of her own Victorian house.

"If you write your personality out of your home, it has no story," Potter says.

It was a big project to turn grand 1890s mansion "Huntingtower" into a family home for herself, her husband and two teenage sons. The heritage-listed house was stripped back to its bones and the original oak doors, staircase and ceiling restored to highlight period details.

Design director of Atticus & Milo, Potter was rewarded for her adventurous approach when she

won the residential decoration award at the Australian Interior Design Awards this year. She was also shortlisted in the sustainability category.

The designer wanted to make her house a real home and make it fun. "I wanted people to feel happy and welcome here," she says.

The house reflects her personality and tells her family's story. Her art collection, put together over several years, together with her children's artworks makes a strong statement. A powder room with porcelain animal heads refers to family safaris in Africa and its pumpkin and magenta stripes remind her of the beautiful sunsets there. The study has quotes worked into laser-cut cabinets, referring to

the house's original owner, Herbert Booth of the Salvation Army.

Potter is passionate about recycling. She reused her old furniture, recycling 20-year-old sofas. Some cabinets looked too short in the house with its high ceilings so she placed artefacts on top to make them seem taller.

"A lot of people are a bit wasteful — they feel for a new interior you need new furniture," she says. "Houses are more interesting with an eclectic collection."

She restored the original red baltic floors and repaired them with similar wood. The floors have a natural hard wax treatment that emits no volatile organic compounds. It will improve and develop a patina over time.

Colour has been unfashionable for years but finally people are starting to celebrate it again, she says. She painted the walls a ghostly pale grey with a white trim to allow patterns and artworks to sing.

"I'm not afraid to layer colours and patterns, and have fun with them," she says.

Colourful contemporary paintings hang beside period tiled fireplaces, and funky patterned rugs sit happily with mid-century Danish furniture. A multicoloured cabinet holds its own below a dramatic artwork. The original tessellated tiles and timber details aren't overshadowed by contemporary additions.

Potter is a big fan of wallpaper and has used a charming orange and pink paper with safari scenes to

great effect in the historic tower. She says people shouldn't be afraid of wallpaper; it can easily be steamed off after a few years.

Low-energy LED lighting complements the house's period light fittings. The art is lit with track-mounted LED lights so paintings and lights can be rearranged easily.

"I like to collect — possibly too much," she says, with a laugh.

There are also some quirky light fittings such as the Jeeves and Wooster hat lights in the boys' bathroom and the graffiti light in the upstairs lounge.

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