

**Woolarina** n. Someone who feels the urge to pirouette barefoot on pure wool carpet.



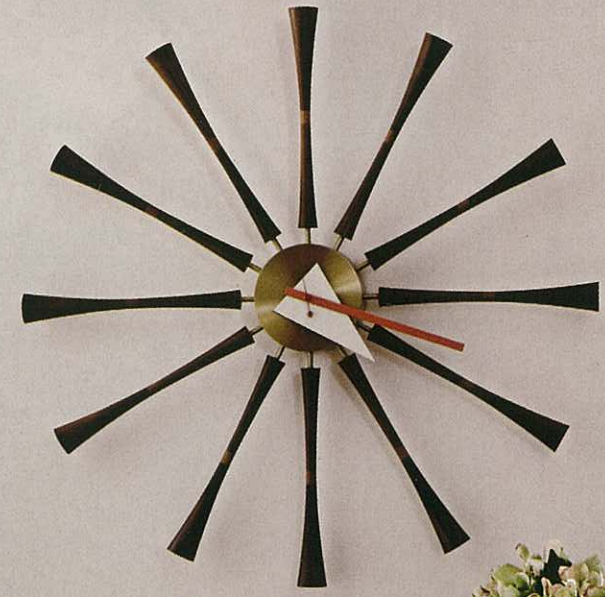
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# before & AFTER

As part of extensive alterations to a 1970s house, interior designer Caecilia Potter cut an above-head horizontal strip out of the entry-hall wall to facilitate the flow of natural light from an adjacent kitchen. Sympathetic to the aesthetic of the original architecture, she furnished this small crank in the hallway with a George Nelson 'Spindle' clock and an Augusti Chinoiserie-style side table from Cavit & Co. Details, last pages.



## A new CHAPTER

SENSITIVELY REWORKING ORIGINAL FEATURES IN WITH MODERN INSERTIONS AND CLEVER REJIGGING OF SPACES BRINGS A '70s-ERA MELBOURNE HOME INTO THE 21ST CENTURY.

PHOTOGRAPHER DEREK SWALWELL PRODUCER/WRITER ANNEMARIE KIELY



The garden-enveloped family room was refreshed with a 1970s-inflected re-furnish. Murray Hilton's photograph *New Dunes* hangs above Antonio Citterio's yak-upholstered 'J.J.' armchairs for B&B Italia from Space Furniture, the 'shagadelic' mood of which is matched by Objekto's 'Moebius' coffee table from Hub Furniture Lighting Living. The 'Ptolomeo' book tower and Artemide's 'Tolomeo Mega' floor lamp are the modern design legacies of the '70s era.

**T**he history books may broad-brush the 1970s as one long energy crisis, but Melbourne interior designer Caecilia Potter fondly recalls the era through the rose-tinted glasses of her youth. “It was the decade that opened with black-and-white TV, then exploded into full colour, key parties and flares,” she says of the everywhere expression of freedom and feminism. “Cue graphic, monochromatic patterns layered with vibrant black colour and texture. Oh, what a joy!” she says.

Potter, design director of practice Atticus & Milo, makes with these memories by way of introducing a recent project: the renovation of a Hawthorn concrete block home built in 1973 by architect Gordon Cope-Williams. His style was emblematic of an era obsessed with Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian houses — stripped-down structures with low roofs and open living areas, all fitted around gardens that were mini idealisations of mountain scenes. But while the medico couple who bought it in 2011 loved the house for its footprint and feel, their three little girls instantly tested its storage and spatial layout.

“The clients wanted this to be a celebration of what was there,” says Potter of their plans to sympathetically rework the composition of red-brick floor, raked ceiling, blackened steel, cedar lining, concrete block and garden framed through a two-storey curtain wall. “But it had bad insertions of cabinetry that just didn’t work, too many tight spaces, broken heating pipes embedded in the slab, lots of inappropriate additions and poor exposure to natural light.”

She points to photographs of the old pentagon-planned kitchen with its small entry point and says that with the simple swap of the kitchen and ‘meals area’ many issues were sorted. The new kitchen benefits from the relocation to a bigger rectilinear space, the informal dining area does double-duty as a study, and the curtain wall was cleared of the light- and sight-obstructing kitchen bench.

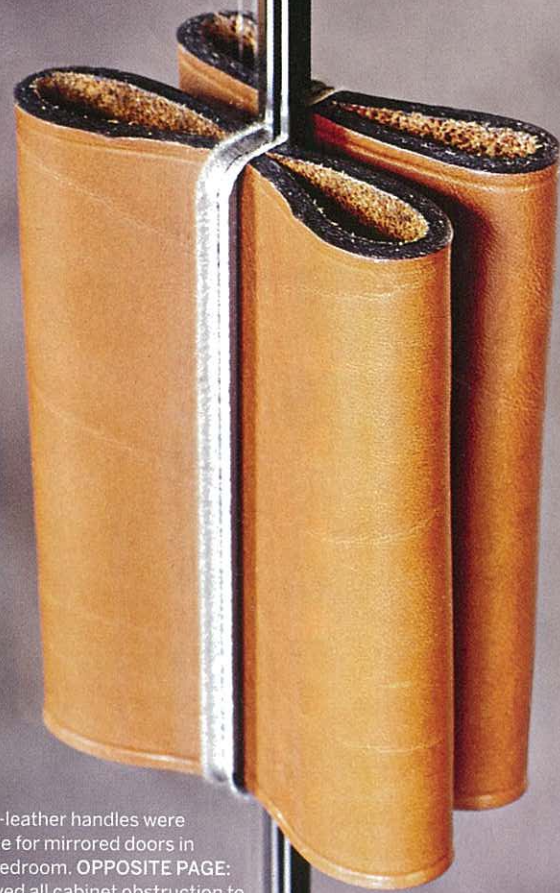
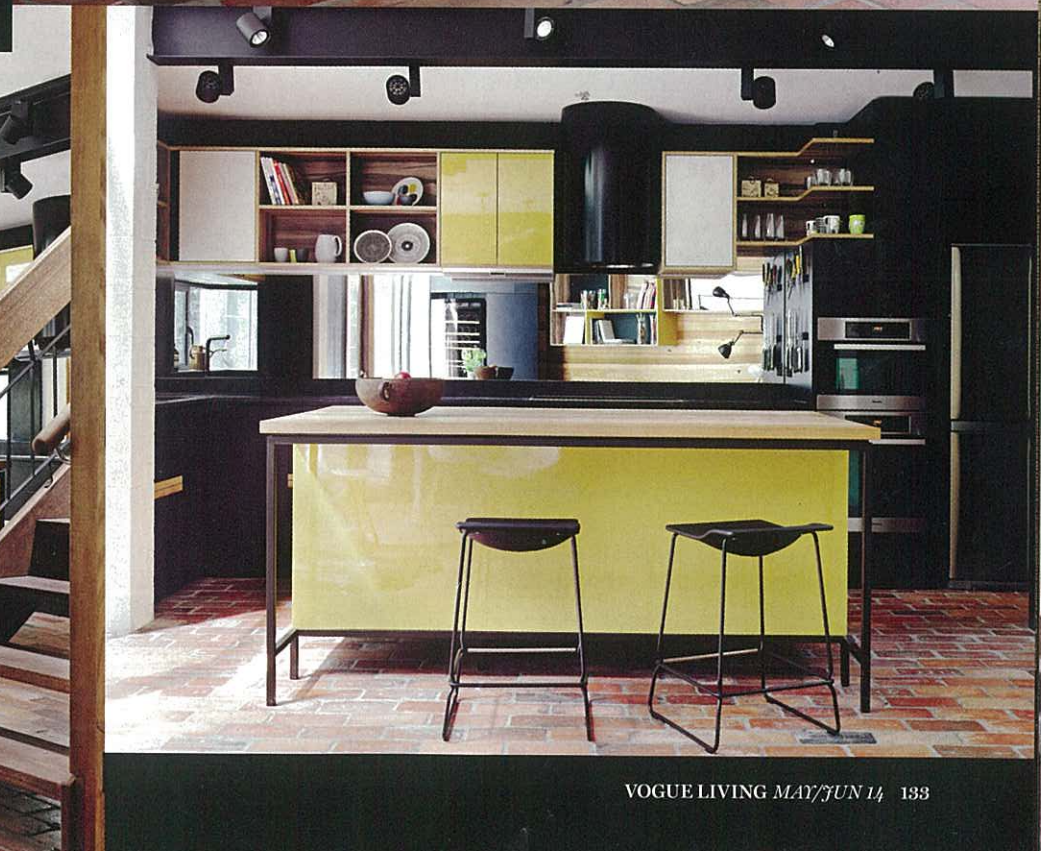
“The challenge was to find contemporary materials and finishes that both respected the original architecture and played with it,” says Potter, pulling from a sample box that explored ’70s colour, shape and style without being subservient to it. “These glossy black concave circle tiles from Perini are the perfect smarten-up for the curving cabinet wall. They remind me of the era, but their upside-down reflection of the garden gives a futuristic edge.” Recycled messmate benches, ’70s-inflected Alpi plywood cabinets and slim terracotta tiles sensitively and creatively took the original architect’s design intent into another era: a considered renovation that has since been shortlisted in the Residential Design and Residential Decoration categories at this year’s Australian Interior Design Awards.

Potter confides that the house at some stage supposedly harboured “swingers” (a rumour lent weight by the lock-and-key wrought-iron gates that once secured the master bedroom); this scuttlebutt, she laughs, is the source of her exuberant bathroom schemes (one a hot-pink flashback floored in Bravura black-and-white tiles) and a leather-dressed master suite. While these spaces revel in salacious narrative, the downstairs schemes are more puritanical.

In the formal dining room, Potter created spatial dynamics by angling the existing table under a ’70s pendant light. The defective slab heating was replaced with a teardrop-shaped ‘Ove’ wood heater by Oblica, while existing furnishings (chairs, chandeliers and tables) were restored and underscored with suitable secondhand pieces.

Thinking about what pleases her most in a “joyful” job, Potter says she loves the mix of materials — modern nuances of the old inserted so seamlessly that ’70s style is no longer seen as a 40-year throwback but a continuum of creativity. “When a story has been started, you shouldn’t rewrite it,” she says, advising on how to make old architecture fit a new age. “Rather, add a new chapter that’s not a copy of the last, but an adjunct that elicits an emotional response.” **VL**

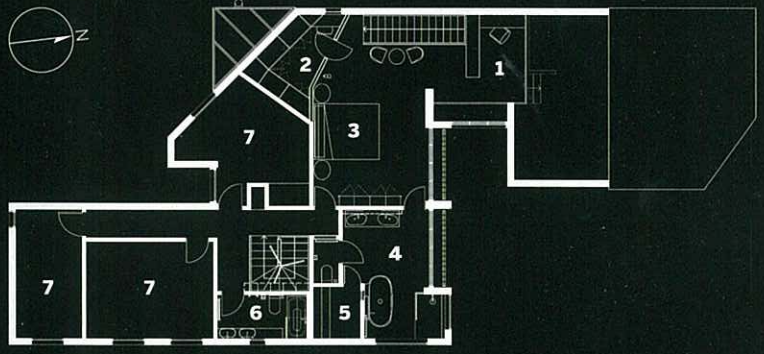
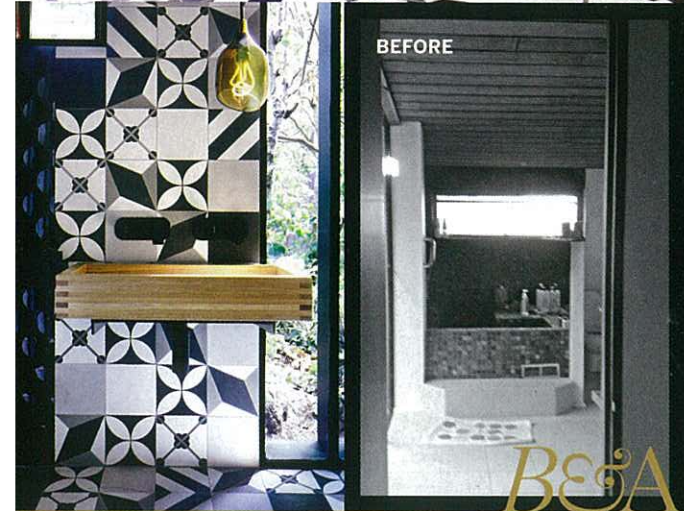
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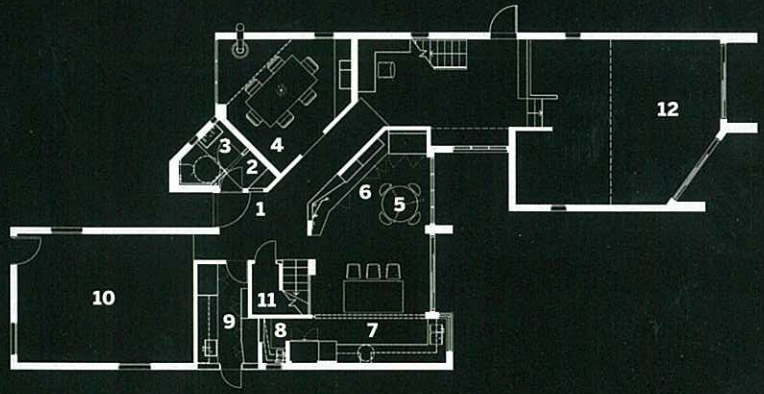
saddle-leather handles were custom-made for mirrored doors in master bedroom. OPPOSITE PAGE: Potter removed all cabinet obstruction to reveal curtain wall (see ‘before’ shot) and opened the meals area. TOP RIGHT, in dining room, a composition of blackened steel, 2-pac finish high-gloss black ‘Topelo Honey’, leathers-in-finish ‘Bue Brown’ granite from CDK Stone and ‘Last Minute’ bar stools from Hub Furniture Lighting Living. Sited across the dining room, BELOW LEFT, from the kitchen, a table in the dining room, TOP LEFT, under a ’70s pendant light. Potter used ‘Chylum 1’ chairs by Bonacina Antonio from Hub Furniture Lighting Living, an ‘Ove’ wood heater by Oblica and a Ross painting Path 2013.



Innvironments 'Kowloon' wallpaper in Merlot from Instyle serves as a suitable backdrop for Lavina Rees' painting *Aviator Girl 2004*, vintage Arne Vodder teak nightstands from Grandfathers Axe, stonewashed Vida linen sheets from Seneca, and Tobia Scarpa's 'Foglio' wall light and Achille Castiglioni and Pio Manzù's 'Parentesi Suspension' light, both from Euroluca. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** keeping the formal gestures of the 1970s ensuite (see 'before' shot) while making a modern homage to an era-ending black-and-white television in the new ensuite. **TOP LEFT** and **FAR LEFT**, Potter specified graphic encaustic cement tiles and coordinated her test-pattern tribute with a Falper 'Scoop' bath from Rogerseller. The graphic scheme was repeated in a downstairs powder room. **BELOW**, fitted with an 'Estella' American Oak basin made by Plantation Oak, from Artedomus; and a Decode 'Vessel' pendant light in Bronze from ECC Lighting. Details, last pages.



**LEVEL 1**  
 1 study mezzanine 2 walk-in wardrobe 3 master bedroom 4 master ensuite  
 5 sauna 6 children's bathroom 7 children's bedrooms



**GROUND LEVEL**  
 1 entry 2 coat room 3 powder room 4 dining room 5 meals area 6 home office 7 kitchen 8 pantry 9 laundry 10 family room 11 store room 12 lounge

**Aim of the renovation?** "To respect and celebrate the original architecture, while improving light, spatial plan and tripling storage, all within the existing footprint," says Caecilia Potter.  
**How long did it take?** Design and build each took six months.  
**Would you do anything differently?** "We would have loved to have the opportunity to do the extension and family room revamp at the same time, but this is being staged."  
**Aspects you're happiest with?** "I love the sense of light, space and fun! There is joy in its boldness of pattern and colour, which inspires an emotional response from the client and visitors."  
**Materials used:** "We preserved as much of the existing fabric as possible, such as the old brick floor, cedar wall and ceiling lining. I love the new flame-black Alpi plywood, Perini circle tiles, encaustic tiles, Cotto split terracotta tiles, fuchsia Bolon flooring and metallic jute wallpaper."  
**Designer/architect:** Atticus & Milo, (03) 9882 0088; atticusmilo.com.au.  
**Builder:** AJ Hewitt Construction, 0419 598 179.  
**Joiner:** Lanoff Construction, (03) 9587 4911.