

HEART OF GLASS

A harbourside home in Sydney revisits its *art deco* roots via inspiration from a *French modernist* topped off with a squeeze of West Indian *colonial style*.

Photographs JUSTIN ALEXANDER
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This page The brief of "a little colonial, a bit art deco and a little industrial" is reflected in the palette, says Alexandra Donohoe of Decus, who chose the colours and furnishings. Her biggest challenge was the rectangular living room, with foot traffic channelled through the middle. To resolve this she created formal and informal sitting areas at each end. In the informal area is a Carl Hansen 'Pappa Bear' chair and footstool, from Corporate Culture. Custom sofa by Atelier Upholstery. 'Round Stepped Deco' pendant, from Charles Edwards, London. 'Art Nouveau' rug from Cadrys. Artwork by Nicholas Harding. Opposite page The console sets a deco tone in the entrance. Flax 'Taccia' lamp from Euroluce. Polished plaster walls finished in beeswax. Stone flooring from Cobblestones by JG.



This page: French art deco cut crystal and glass pendants in the dining room from Eliza Jane Antiques. Dining table from MCM House. Eero Saarinen 'Executive' dining chairs from De De Cè. Glassware from Walter Herman Interiors. Afghan 'Hazar' rug from Cadrys. Joinery by Corall Joinery. Artwork by Geoffrey Dyer. Sculpture by Katusha Ball. Opposite page, top: Original glass bricks were refurbished with black grouting. Bottom: Vintage Moroccan lamp from Elements. Resene 'Blast Grey' on steel windows and doors. Society 'Limonta' cushions from Ondene. Lotion rain drums from Orient House. Leather upholstery from Simple Studio. Patchwork kilims on walls from Cadrys.



These pages The truffle shade on the formal living room walls “adds a sense of depth that you wouldn’t have achieved with off-white”, says Alexandra Danahoe of Decus. Minetti’s ‘Hamilton’ sofa from Die De Co, Vitrore’s Paul Kafka armchairs and footstools from Tyrone Bearing, ‘Round Stepped Deco’ pendant from Charles Edwards, London, B&B Italia ‘Lithos’ coffee tables from Space, Christophe Delcourt’s ‘Iko’ side table from Ondane, custom-made rug from Cadrys, ‘Orta’ engineered timber flooring from Tongue n Groove, Resene ‘Blast Grey’ on windows and ‘Double Truffle’ half-strength on walls. Painting by Bill Whiskey Tjapatjari.



“With luminous walls, light shimmering through fluted glass off the harbour, the home has the wonderful translucency of the faraway places that inspired it.”

Vive la différence! This home on Sydney Harbour, with its window shutters and metal grillwork, stands out stylishly from its neighbours. It’s half a world away from the banks of the Seine, but architect Luigi Rosselli drew inspiration from the luminescent Maison de Verre in Saint Germain-des-Prés. Adding to the home’s formidable *je ne sais quoi*, echoes of colonial French West Indies lend a breezy, subtropical insouciance to its elegant rooms.

Originally, this five-level, four-bedroom home was a 1928 art deco apartment block but, when the owner bought it 10 years ago, it had been converted into a family home. Its triple-brick construction, panoramic harbour views and a neighbourhood “so quiet you can hear a pin drop” drew him to the house. However, it sported a renovated decor from the 1980s – “beige, beige and more beige,” he says. Any hints of its deco origins had long disappeared. Stripped of original details such as cornicing and ceiling roses, it was bland and desperately needed an individual touch.

Hugging the harbour, the house needed reference to the coastal vernacular. The owner favoured French colonial style, found in Martinique and Saint Barthélemy in the Caribbean. “There’s a lot of art deco there and the effect is restrained and elegant,” he says. Adds Luigi, “We wanted to restore the character of the original building, borrowing from P&O Modernist design of the 1930s. But we were after a modern interpretation, not a pastiche.”

Maison de Verre’s industrial take on art deco assumed a major role. The iconic Modernist house boasts fluted glass, glass bricks, perforated metal facings and steel-framed doors – features seen here in the grid patterns on shutters, lift well, joinery and even the rangehood. Faced with an ugly 10-metre wall of 1980s glass bricks that dominated the stairwell, Luigi’s elegant solution took its cue from Maison de Verre, and he painted the grouting black.

He changed the floor plan little. Openings between the living areas were enlarged to create a sense of continuity, with the dining room and kitchen now separated by sliders hung from discreet tracks in the ceiling. What was an isolated kitchen now “belongs to the rest of the house”, says Luigi. “We moved the centre of the home towards the kitchen.” A sense of gravitas and of belonging is created by handcrafted joinery in the dining area and kitchen.

Luigi moved the entry to the ground floor and an internal stairway now leads to the first-floor living areas. Three bedrooms are on the next floor and outdoor sitting areas occupy the upper two levels. The old entry became what Luigi terms “the Middle Eastern room”, an exotic sitting area off the kitchen, defined by antique Turkish rugs adorning the walls and a Moroccan lantern.

The second *pièce de résistance* is the lift, faced in fluted glass and semitransparent mesh, which references the industrial, but also in a practical sense “pulls the multi-level house together”, says the owner. “I’m especially happy with that lift,” adds Luigi. “It’s beautifully detailed.” Curves, a Luigi trademark, in the fireplace, joinery and the ceilings reference the flowing P&O style, with its constant dialogue between the arc and right angle.

With its lovingly crafted joinery, shadowlines, mouldings and cornices, Luigi’s renowned attention to detail is everywhere. It’s also in the stucco walls, treated with beeswax for a delicate faux-marble sheen. With the luminous walls, light shimmering through fluted glass and off the harbour beyond, the home has all the wonderful translucency of the faraway homes that inspired it. ☐

For more go to luigiorosselli.com or decus.com.au.

SPEED READ

» The owner bought a house overlooking Sydney Harbour, comprising a 1928 art deco apartment block that had been converted to one huge, multi-level home in the 1980s.
 » The earlier renovation had obliterated any references to its original era, replacing them with oppressive bulkheads, which created a closed-in feeling, and a bland beige palette. A poor flow of rooms meant the kitchen was isolated at one end of the house. » Architect Luigi Rosselli opened up the spaces by removing walls and the bulkheads. Drawing on the brief of French West Indies meets French Modernist meets P&O art deco, he designed an intricately detailed home with fluted glass, perforated metal, crafted timbers and sweeping curves. » Alexandra Donohoe of Decus chose the colours and the furnishings, finishing the house in elegant art deco-inspired pieces that echo the architecture and a palette underscored by industrial greys.



This page, clockwise from top: Autaban 'Deco' lounges from Spence & Lyda on the terrace that enjoys harbour views. Striped hemp rug from Cadrys. Artek 'Tea Trolley 901' from Anibau. Doors in metal mesh. 'Zuri' quartz bath in the main ensuite from Rogerseller. 'Gris Cehegin' marble vanity from Blaanna. Messina limestone flooring from Onsite Supply & Design. Opposite page: Cassina 'Utrecht' chairs and Gubi 'Cobra' lamp in master bedroom all from Corporate Culture. Society. 'Lilimona' bed linen from Ondene. Cavalier Bremworth 'Tussore' carpets. De Le Cuona 'Heritage' fabric on bench seat from Boyac. Artwork by Ronald John Neal.

