

SEA CHANGE

Interior designer Alexandra Donohoe Church wanted to challenge preconceived notions of coastal design — so for this North Bondi duplex, she created an elegant, organic space that shuns the usual beach pad clichés.

BY ANNA DELPRAT
PHOTOGRAPHED BY FELIX FOREST

THIS PAGE: in the DINING ROOM, *Lowe Atticus American Oak dining table with Midnight Grey stain from Hub Furniture*; *Gebrüder Thonet Vienna Bodystuhl chairs by Nigel Coates from Space Furniture*; cushion and seat pads upholstered in *C&C Milano Oscar linen in Pepper Pink*, enquiries to *South Pacific Fabrics*; *N55 black pendant lights with clear globes from Viabizzuno*; *Justin Dingwall artworks Mob I, Mob II and Liberty III, all 2016, from M Contemporary*; *Dulux Resene Quarter Truffle paint*.
OPPOSITE PAGE: *Bondi Beach, Sydney*. Details, last pages.





When Alexandra Donohoe Church was commissioned to overhaul this promising North Bondi duplex, she vowed to avoid what she calls “coastal pastiche” — such typical beachside design clichés as “lime-washed oak and artfully placed wicker baskets sprouting fiddle leaf plants”. Instead, the founder and managing director of Sydney interior design firm Decus Interiors set out to create an atmosphere where you don’t immediately feel you’re at the beach when you walk in. Here, the designer talks about how the airy, serene space encapsulates her aesthetic.

This is not your typical beach pad. There’s a little unexpectedness. We chose to make it grey and tonal, to avoid that colloquial beachy look. Coastal can still be sophisticated, light and barefoot but a bit dressed up. The tension in this project is all about the bespoke solid bronze ribbon custom-made by Jamie Sargeant flowing down the staircase acting as a balustrade — it’s the piece of jewellery. It was difficult to create and install, but will patina up so it was worth it.

The owner, Toni, who works in property and construction, came to us after going through a few other designers. Her

work meant that she’d been exposed to lots of different design genres, so it was about finding what reflected her the most. Her brief was for an understated home, which could perform double duty; act sophisticated when required — for large and frequent bouts of entertaining her large extended Greek family — yet possess a stillness for respite from a demanding job. Comfort was key, the home absolutely had to be a barefoot-friendly, for the hordes of nieces and nephews who descend on their respective spaces, and her elderly parents who had to be able to sit down on the sofa. Everything was about the kids, about family.

There’s nothing really more satisfying than seeing something start as a total blank concrete shell and making it into someone’s home. In this project the bottom floor existed but we completely gutted and reconfigured the space and added another storey. We introduced more light through the skylight. The space is open plan so we created a small separation to differentiate the entry space and added little curves to soften it all — it felt too strong otherwise. We added a custom-mixed grey stain to the »



THIS PAGE: *in the ENTERTAINMENT ROOM, Hay Slit side table in brass and Mags Soft Sofa, both from Cult; cushions upholstered in Kelly Wearstler Confetti fabric, enquiries to Elliott Clarke, Cloth Constellation in Indigo, enquiries to Ascraft, and Zak + Fox in Obi Shi, enquiries to Tigger Hall Design; Woodnotes Fourways rug; Sydney-based artist Simone Rosenbauer's In the Sunshine #23 and #52, both 2016, from M Contemporary. OPPOSITE PAGE: Alexandra Donohoe Church.*



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THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: *in the LIVING ROOM*, Moroso Gentry sofa in textured linen by Patricia Urquiola from Hub Furniture; blue Classicon Bibendum chair from Anibou; Michaël Verbeyden tube tables from Ondene; Domi wall light in Grey Frost (in nook) from Articolo; Abrash Solid rug from Cadrys; 1098 Minutes (2) artwork (2017) by Isobel Rayson and Sian Watson Horse Moments sculptures, all from M Contemporary. *In the ENTRANCE*, Anna Charlesworth large shield light; custom bronze balustrade by Decus Interiors. *OPPOSITE PAGE*: *in the KITCHEN*, custom joinery by Decus Interiors; Argento European Oak in Eterno flooring from Tongue n Groove.







« joinery, which took seven tries to get right, and metallic touches like oil-rubbed bronze hardware and tapware. To create that tension we didn't want everything to match so we added the Henry Wilson gunmetal bronze accessories.

Toni was quite specific that she wanted photographic art. We showed her quite a few different works — oils, landscapes, works that were quite tonal and suited the interior — whereas I think the subject matter of the works she chose are more enigmatic. The Justin Dingwall artworks in the dining room are just so visually arresting, because they're soft and pretty but if you look at them closely they're quite eerie. The Simone Rosenbauers in the kids' room are playful, and the colours are really fresh and unusual, so there's that tension again.

In terms of a specific design philosophy, Decus is trying to create a sense of tension, in a great way, in every space. We're moving away from everything matching, colour coordinated, too

straightforward. We try to steer clients in a direction that will fit how they live but we also want to push the envelope a bit. I travel annually and visit the international showrooms — when you source from overseas, the neighbour doesn't have that thing in their home, and that's kind of a big deal for a lot of people.

My greatest design hero is French designer Pierre Yovanovich. He has this incredible way of using texture, shape and volume and combining them all in a very unexpected way. If I speak to that 'tension' concept, it can just be that one element in a entire space that creates that 'ah' moment, a balance that elevates everything or drops everything down a notch. He's the master at that. I prefer layering of textures and materiality rather than layering of colour — I prefer more muted, dirty, washed out, organic colouring than really clean, sweet, sugar-y colours. That's quite evident in this project. *VL*

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THIS PAGE: in the MAIN BEDROOM, custom rattan bedhead and bedside table by Decus Interiors; Society Limonata bedding from Ondene; Tidal rug from The Rug Company; Alan Jones F3G27 graphite on paper from Olsen Gallery. OPPOSITE PAGE: in the MAIN BATHROOM, custom joinery and mirror by Decus Interiors; Onsite Supply & Design handmade tiles in Blanc de Fez; Brodware City Stik weathered brass tapware; Flos Mini Glo-ball wall lights from Euro luce. Details, last pages.

