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#27 /

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# ELEMENTS OF ALCHEMY

With a true fusion of art and design, this coastal home was built around an exclusively Australian art collection. **Erin Irwin** writes.





/ I love those juxtaposing moments art can create. You can bring a dialogue to life between the works and around the subject matter of the works themselves. / ALEXANDRA DONOHOE

**FOR ALEXANDRA DONOHOE**, founder and managing director of Decus Interiors, the redesign of this coastal home was something of an alchemical experiment, fusing together their client's prodigious art collection to create something energetic and optimistic.

The owners of this coastal property wanted a total overhaul of their family home, right down to the kitchen tableware, built around their beloved collection of Australian art. With five children and a passion for entertaining, the family were seeking both practicality and spectacle, turning their atypical beachside home into a refuge of barefoot luxury.

Fusion became key to the brief, working from the bones of a home that was half heritage and half ultra-modern extension. Bringing everything together as Alexandra describes it, was like "piecing together a puzzle". Through the layering of colour, texture and finishes throughout the house, the final design ensures each piece of the client's art collection both informs the home's design and is amplified by it.

Stepping inside, visitors are greeted with a work by **Fred Williams**, whose rugged strokes reflect off the polished metal table placed perfectly below. Though strikingly different in style, the paintings' contrasting use of organic lines and crisp horizons is echoed with stunning effect by objects chosen specifically to compliment them.

Passing through into the living areas of the house, the high ceilings of the modern extension allow for large works to dominate rooms flooded with light. In the dining room, Alexandra kept a neutral palette to allow **John Coburn's** luminous gold triptych pride of place. The organic lines of the dining suite and retro light fittings soften the sharp lines of the architecture and allow the joyful movement of the art to permeate the room. It brings the perfect combination of sophistication and fun to a room designed for both intimate family breakfasts and raucous dinner parties.







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The dark wood panelling connects the room aesthetically to the other living spaces, matching the unexpectedly cosy grandeur of the kitchen. "We worked with the bones of the original heritage house by integrating warm, rich and inviting tones within the study and kitchen," says Alexandra, connecting the two halves into a harmonious whole. This then breaks out seamlessly into the soft light of the main living space, populated with plush custom-built sofas by Decus and interspersed with many of the sculptural highlights of the client's collection, including pre-Columbian Nayarit Style terracotta figures and a pair of Zacatecas figures dating back to circa 100BC – 250AD.

In the children's spaces of the house, the emphasis was both on fun and function. **Howard Arkley's** *Mosaic Entrance* sits proudly at the far end of the children's playroom, complementing the pops of colour amongst the design features, playfully acting almost as a doorway between the real and the imaginary. It also communicates with **Tim Maguire's** painting on the opposite wall, their contrasting styles making their colours burn even brighter. This epitomises the design outlook for Alexandra: "I love

those juxtaposing moments art can create. You can bring a dialogue to life between the works and around the subject matter of the works themselves."

Away from the hustle and bustle, the master suite draws on the classical arrangement of the original house. The calm palette and refined fabrics provide a calm retreat, but even here a sense of fun and play is present. The surrealistic flames of **Tim Storrier's** work, which hangs above master bed, faces a smooth marble fireplace, emphasising a feeling of warmth and peace that is necessary after a long day.

Within this coastal home, the fusion of textures and materials is paramount to Decus Interiors' design, which echoes both the melding of old and new in the architecture and the vast array of works within the client's collection. While each work is by an Australian artist, the wonderful dichotomy of the works is what makes the collection special. Decus Interiors' attentiveness to the sheer volume, calibre and diversity of this collection and their effort to create a space that reflects this, has produced a home filled with daring optimism and delightful contrast. It is a true fusion of art and design.

1 / John Coburn's luminous gold triptych hangs above the dining table.

2 / The pool takes prime position in the outdoor garden space.

3 / Elizabeth Nyumi's painting, *Parwalla*, 2008 hangs in the living area.

4 / Howard Arkley's *Mosaic Entrance*, 1994 hangs in the children's playroom opposite a painting by Tim Maguire.

5 / A painting by Joseph Jorra Tjapaltjarri hangs to the left of a Charles Tjapangati work.

6 / A Sidney Nolan hangs in the entrance hall.

7 / A Tim Storrier painting hangs in the master bedroom.