

VOGUE AUSTRALIA LIVING

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VL50 THE TOP CREATIVE TALENT OF 2025

K I N E T I C

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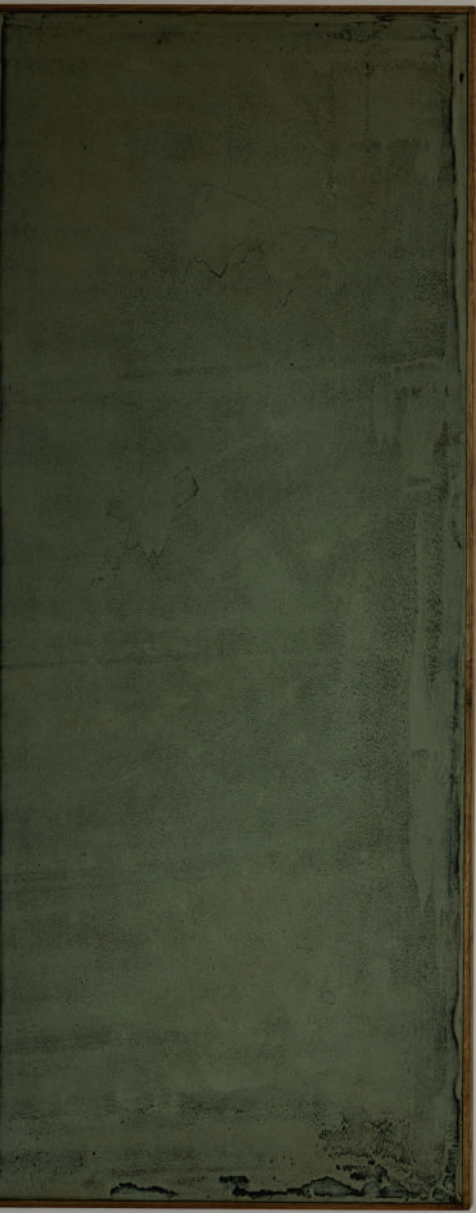


Designing a cliffside home in Sydney's eastern suburbs, DECUS *choreographs* interiors *rich in inspiration* from an old Celine store, a Lionel Richie dance song and materials that MANIFEST the colours of the ocean beyond.

E N E R G Y

This page in the living room of this Dover Heights home, **Sesann sofa** by Gianfranco Frattini for Tacchini from Stylecraft; ceramic **side table** by Remy Pajaczkowski-Russell from Studio Gardner; De La Espada **coffee table** from Spence & Lyda; BM0488 **bench** by Carl Hansen & Søn from Cult; **rug** from Cadrys; **floor** in European oak from Tongue & Groove; *Time swallows the best of us whole* (2024) **artwork** by Tomislav Nikolic from Fox Jensen Gallery. *Opposite page* in the stairwell, **stairs** in European oak from Tongue & Groove; **balustrade** produced by Calce Company in Marmorino plaster; custom **handrail** by Decus and produced by JS Balustrading; **floor** in Calacatta Gold, Honey Onyx, Viola Oro tiles from Onsite Supply and Design and Raggio Verde tile from Bisanna Tiles. *Details, last pages.*





This page in the living and dining areas, Lin Brasil Mole **armchair** by Sergio Rodrigues from Mama Casa; Massproductions Harry **stool** from District; woodfired **vessel** by Sophie Vaidie from Studio Gardner; vintage Manta **floor lamp** by Franco Bresciani; Applique Araignee 3 Bras Fixes **ceiling light** by Serge Mouille, enquiries to Cult; *Meeting point 8 a.m* **artwork** (left) by Arlene Amaler-Raviv; **artwork** (right) by Antonia Ferrer from Studio Gardner. *Opposite page* in a view to the entry, Dessus Dessous pedestal **sculptures** by Lea Bigot from Studio Gardner; **floor** in Calacatta Gold, Honey Onyx, Viola Oro tiles from Onsite Supply and Design and Raggio Verde tile from Bisanna Tiles; **artwork** (left) by Antonia Ferrer from Studio Gardner; **artwork** by Jahanne Pasco-White from Station Gallery.





These pages in the kitchen, custom island by Decus in Fusion Green stone from Worldstone Solutions and Marmorino finish by Triple A Rendering; custom splashback by Decus and produced by Granite & Marble Works in Fusion Green stone from Worldstone Solutions; custom joinery by Decus in American oak; Inoda + Sveje stools from Great Dane; Brodware City Stik kitchen mixer from Candana; Gaggenau stainless-steel ovens from Winning Appliances; vase by Sophie Vaidic from Studio Gardner; wall lights by Sarah Nedovic; floor in European oak from Tongue & Groove; artwork by Michael Cusack from Olsen Gallery.



t is absolute magic,” rhapsodises Alexandra Donohoe Church in reference to the horizon that swims out past the windows of this Dover Heights home in Sydney’s east, a home silhouetted against nothing but sky, at arm’s reach of an ocean caressing sandstone cliffs. “This country has only so much coastline, so it’s a privilege to work in this kind of setting,” she continues. “There’s a sense of freedom and endless space in front of you.”

But rather than get lost in the geography’s primordial greatness, Donohoe Church remained grounded in a theory she applies to all Decus projects. “It’s a backdrop to life,” maintains the managing director and founder of the VL50-listed firm, “every space we design for our clients is purely a backdrop for them to live in a way that establishes calm, security and safety.”

The owners, a couple with two school-age children, had lived in the two-storey house for more than a decade — Donohoe Church believes they bought after it was built in the late 2000s — and were well-acquainted with its flaws and points of tension. “Where things were laid out and how they flowed just did not work,” she says by way of prefacing the rigorous replanning and reconfiguration of the interior.

As Donohoe Church quickly discovered, the owners have big personalities and an even bigger social network — “they’re always entertaining, or going to a friend’s house.” The design accommodates extended family staying for long periods of time, kids who will one day want to spread their wings, and quiet spaces away from the sonorous swell of gatherings, which required a careful balance of acoustic comfort. “I think it’s a forever home for them,” she says of a house that holds space for the abundance of love in their life and its changing seasons.

Her clients’ other concern was that their home should not feel “homogenous”, so Donohoe Church materialised different looks for the living areas and the childrens’ enclaves. “The idea was to try to synthesise things, but for everyone to have a personalised space,” she describes. “Think of a symphony — everyone is playing in tune, but everyone’s got a different instrument and they’re all playing a different set of music.”

This offbeat musicality reaches a crescendo in the entrance, where a staircase the shape of a nautilus shell ascends skyward and a cloud-parting skylight at the summit spills sunbeams down into the double-height void. “Initially the idea was to leave the existing scissor staircase as is with a cantilevered glass balustrade. But we encouraged the clients to consider this ellipse in a rendered finish,” Donohoe Church says of her team’s insistence that they respond to the “boxy” architecture’s prescribed linearity with a bit of softness and romance.

“And it’s not even the first thing you see!” she exclaims as talk turns to the entrance floor, an arresting installation of four marble varieties inspired by the parquetry stone flooring of a Phoebe Philo-era Celine store on London’s Mount Street. Decus hand-selected and arranged every Calacatta Gold, Honey Onyx, Viola Oro and Raggio Verde tile; Donohoe Church admits “heads almost exploded” while puzzling it together. The moss greens and caramelised golds in this marble mosaic surface many times throughout the home, a move that came down to client preference, while “satellite palettes” circulate outer environs including a rumpus room in deep burgundy and the daughter’s bedroom and ensuite in a Glossier-leaning shade of blush.

Colour reaches its natural zenith in the kitchen, where stone in a kinetic spectrum of greens swirls across splashbacks and benchtops. Donohoe Church likens the slabs to a landscape painting — perhaps Mother Nature manifested the view of ocean waves outside in a new form.

One of Donohoe Church’s long-held design dreams comes to full flowering in the kitchen island, a bas relief carved into its sides. “I’ve always wanted to do something like this but never had the opportunity to apply the technique,” she says. “We thought it would be nice to depart from your typical timber or stone island and do something interesting, and it felt really right to explore this bas relief concept.” A pattern was sketched, prototyped and then sampled in micro cement robust enough to withstand scuffs and swinging feet, which comfortably fit into the curved island’s roomy alcove.

This impressive experiment in sculptural relief is framed by floor-to-ceiling stretches of American oak joinery. Detailing is kept to a minimum so as not to cheapen the seamless vision, and the timber’s rich toffee-coloured custom stain was created to diffuse the influx of natural light from a window on the opposite side of the room. In the main bedroom, wardrobes in American oak glimmer with the addition of a grasscloth wallcovering. Look closer, says the designer, and subtle traces of foil emerge. “It’s a little element of ‘party’.”

Donohoe Church further explores the way texture shapes experience with a bedhead in sensual pleated leather, and in the son’s bathroom, where prismatic doors in fluted glass are laminated together at 90-degree angles to form a grid pattern. Her favourite expression of material and format unfolds across the main ensuite’s floor in two types of stone. “We’ve paired a quartzite, beige in tone, with Monet marble, which has a multitude of colours in it — green, burgundy, caramel, white and cream.”

The name of this project, Donohoe Church reveals, is *Dancing on the Ceiling*, “after the Lionel Richie song”. And in this Dover Heights home, Decus choreographs a ‘dance’ with the unselfconscious ease of a body completely naturalised in its environment. ■ [decus.com.au](https://www.decus.com.au)

This page in another view of the dining area, Cathedral **table** by Dimitri Vargas; Bracci **chairs** by Pieter Maes for Van Rossum; **vase** by Martyn Thompson from Studio Alm; **floor** in European oak from Tongue & Groove; Fantasma **floor lamp** by Tobia Scarpa for Flos from Studio Gardner; sheer **curtains** by Simple Studio.



This page in the main bedroom, custom **bedhead** by Decus in Vienna Squaw leather from Pelle Leathers; custom **bedside table** by Decus in American oak, and Monet marble from Worldstone Solutions; custom **wardrobe** by Decus in American oak and Phillip Jeffries Totally Tatami inlay from The Textile Company; BM0488 **bench** by Carl Hansen & Søn from Cult; Society Limonta **bed linen** from Ondene; **rug** from Cadrys; Ledtube **bedside light** from Est Lighting; Pinch Pium **wall light** from Winning Appliances; **artwork** by Michael Cusack from Olsen Gallery. *Opposite page* in the powder room, custom **vanity** by Decus and produced by Granite & Marble Works in Amethyst Wave stone from CDK Stone; Brodware Minim **basin set** from Candana; custom **mirror** by Decus; Studio Dokola **vase** from Studio Gardner; Michaël Verheyden **soap dish** from Ondene; **walls** in Marmorino plaster finish by Calce Company; custom brass **wall lights** by Saul Forge; **floor** in Calacatta Gold, Honey Onyx, Viola Oro tiles from Onsite Supply and Design and Raggio Verde tile from Bisanna Tiles.





This page in the main bedroom's ensuite, Falper Homey **bath** from Rogerseller; Collection Particulière Roi **stool**, Society Limonta **towel** and Michaël Verheyden **soap dish**, all from Ondene; custom **vanity** and **shower** by Decus in Monet marble from Worldstone Solutions; custom **make-up vanity** and **joinery** by Decus in American oak; custom **make-up stool** by Decus in natural oak and upholstered in Dedar Sottosopra fabric; Brodware Minim **basin set** from Candana; **vase** by Floris Wubben from Studio Alm; custom **wall light** by Decus and produced by Saul Forge; **floor** in Monet marble and Champagne quartzite from Worldstone Solutions. *Opposite page* in another view of the main bedroom, PK80 **daybed** by Fritz Hansen from Cult; LinBrasil Mocho **stool** from Mama Casa; Aurélien Serre **armchair**; sheer **curtains** by Simple Studio; Fantasma **floor lamp** by Tobia Scarpa for Flos from Studio Gardner. *Details, last pages.*



