

LABOUR OF LOVE

Antiques dealer Jamie Allpress invites us into his recently completed Melbourne home to show us how antiques can be integrated into a modern environment

WORDS JAMIE ALLPRESS
PHOTOGRAPHY RUSSELL WINNELL

Finally, our home, which we purchased in 2003, is complete. When my wife and I bought it, it had a hurricane-wire fence, aluminium cladding and aluminium windows. As the '80s was a decade of shockingly lazy modifications, we ripped up carpets, purple wallpaper and ply covering beautiful fireplaces, took walls out, removed doors and bungalows to the rear and extended them to the same height.

Having stripped and French polished many beautiful Melbourne homes, the first thing I did was remove all doors and fireplaces, strip them and have them painted. Everything was modernised and painted the same colour. Downlights highlight artwork and key pieces feature dimmers to set the mood.

The architect drew floor-to-ceiling windows and doors for the entire living/dining extension. This was changed immediately to provide spaces to furnish

our home with important decorative pieces. As I've helped customers decorate their homes for many years, all too often, I've seen that most extension walls are glass. That's a big no-no when you want to have your home properly dressed.

The dining section of the rear open-plan area has clean lines, with appropriate wall space. Below the rear window and looking out to the pool is a 19th-century French walnut jardiniere. When guests visit, we fill the jardiniere with champagne or wine, which makes it wonderful for entertaining and it's always a talking point.

To the left is one of the first prototype Windsor armchairs ever made, in Wales 1697. It is very special and will never be sold. To the right is a rare 18th-century tilt-top wing table from the Isle of Man. Its stunning legs and boots are on the national flag. Beside the rear wall sits a 14-foot-long French oak buffet that stores a complete bar of spirits, liquor and port, while the top is for mixing drinks.

Towards the centre is a 19th-century





French oak farmhouse table with three drawers to one side, which perfectly suits an Edwardian home with no storage. A harlequin set of eight 18th-century English country Chippendale dining chairs surrounds it. The fabric is a little outdated now; however, this set of chairs has seated many friends and family over the past decade and looks fantastic. On the other rear wall is an unusual early-20th-century Australian fiddleback blackwood four-tier plant stand with stunning lines.

The informal living room adjacent houses a large early-19th-century French elm dough-bin coffee table. This is truly a superb coffee table as it stores red wine, white wine and champagne in three deep compartments. Many feet have danced upon this table over the years, so it was in desperate need of a good clean and wax and recently returned from our workshop. This table will never be sold, but we have converted and sold about six others thanks to this one being seen.

More than a decade ago, we designed matching sofas and used faux suede as it was perfect for our then babies and toddlers. The rug is by Behruz Studio, a company that visits your home and designs rugs to suit.

Against the rear wall is an attractive 17th-century English oak coffer, which houses all spare linen and towels. It boasts all original 17th-century carvings, although many have Victorian decorations. To the left is a comfortable

George II-style mahogany wing chair. We made this more than 20 years ago and it's still perfect.

The furnishings and art have changed rapidly over the years as we have sold many English oak dressers, French farmhouse tables and paintings from this space.

The pressed-metal ceilings in the entrance and the two larger bedrooms are exceptional. Waking in the morning and gazing up gives much pleasure. The upholstered bedhead in the main bedroom





was made by us and is not too high or covered in diamond buttoning or studs — it's simple and perfect.

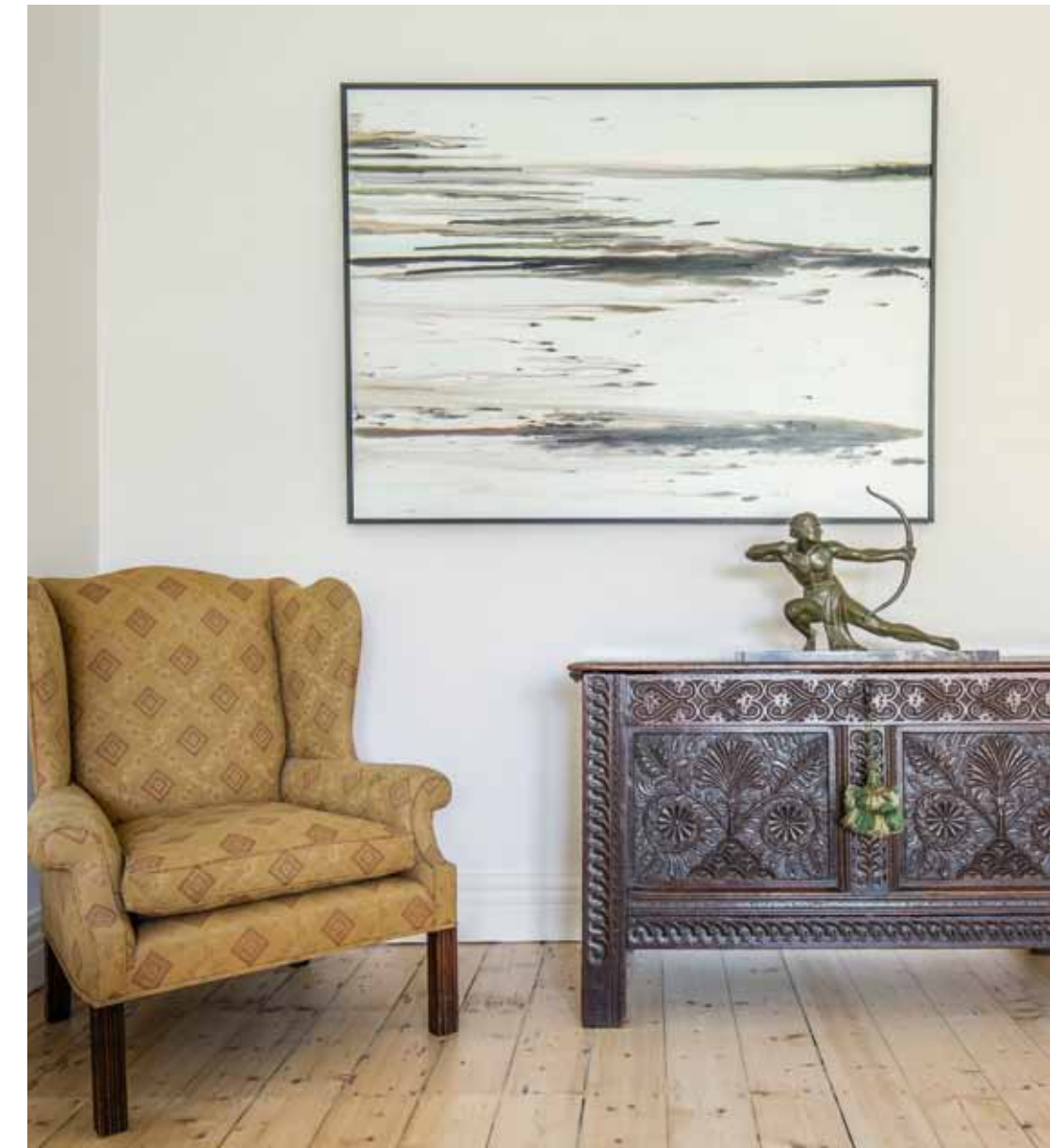
Above the bed are five early-19th-century Redouté paintings. They have been framed in the same way for the past 20 years — no mounts or bright gilt frames, just plain and clean. This way of framing shows off the art and doesn't compete with it. It's also very affordable.

The side wall houses a delightful late-18th-century French chestnut armoire,

with its shelving removed. Two long rails hold all everyday clothing with bags and shoes below.

Each side of the fireplace has an 18th-century English country oak chest of drawers. It is not only decorative, but is also storage for more clothing.

The bedside tables are still too small. I made them to match my chest of drawers more than 20 years ago when I lived above my shop. It's a shame they haven't been updated, as they will look fantastic.





Unusual Australian art and 17th-century Draakesteins adorn the walls.

Lastly, the front living room is mainly used by our two youngest sons. There's a main computer desk, a beautiful 18th-century George III mahogany Chippendale-period standing corner cupboard and two built-in bookcases, made as narrow and functional as possible and filled with books, CDs, games and DVDs. It's a very pleasant room to rest in, looking over to Elsternwick Golf Course on a nice sunny afternoon, when the boys aren't playing *Grand Theft Auto Five*.

You'll notice the exceptional features inside our home that we made stand out. We removed all aluminium cladding to reveal stunning decorative weatherboards; moved the power box from the front porch to the side; replaced all metal fences and side gates; shortened every fireplace; re-silvered every interior door handle, plates and locks; and in both the boys' rooms, we placed built-in robes to the side of chimneys — but not the oversized bulky style you tend to see elsewhere.

Simple and as low as possible, so as



not to hide the pressed-metal ceilings, all aluminium windows were removed and period windows sourced. The leadlight was replaced by David Glyn Davies and completes the home. The interior walls are by my son Luke's godfather, French painter extraordinaire Daniel Petit-Con Dadian. We met when we were both renovating "Invergarie" at Hawthorn 25 years ago.

We just had our floors refinished for the third time in 14 years. The pine boards turn orange so this time we chose to white oxide the polish. This was a great decision, as they have never looked better.

I hope you have enjoyed seeing some of our home. We love living here, as do our boys, Charlie and Luke, and the cutest dog in the world, Jack. 🐾

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