HIGHER GROUND

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Concealed behind a quiet VICTORIAN façade, the chance to *reanimate* this stately three-storey dwelling has ushered in a *thrilling new chapter* for Sydney-founded studio ARENT&PYKE.

This page in the living room of this Melbourne home, custom curved **sofa** by Arent&Pyke; vintage handcarved Brutalist **sideboard** from Tamsin Johnson Showroom; handmade sculptural **side table** by Michael Gittings Studio; ceramic **vases** (next to lamp) and small **vase** (on coffee table) by Terunobu Hirata, tall **vase** by Ted Secombe, sculptural **vessel** by Claudia de Salvo and solitaire **board game** by Ashley Corbett-Smith, all from Craft Victoria; large ceramic **vase** (on coffee table) and ceramic **bowl** (on white side table) by Szilvassy; custom wool and silk **rug** by Behruz Studio; Ingo Maurer paper **lamp** from Lamp Twist; *Reminiscence* (2022) **artwork** (left) by Judith Wright from Sophie Gannon Gallery; *First painting* **artwork** by Morgan Stokes from Oigall Projects. ***Opposite page*** in the ground floor lobby, Nannai **chair** by Chiara Andreatti for Pretziada from Origine; **planter** from Kazari; Akari BB3-33S **floor lamp** from In Good Company, sisal **stair runner** from Natural Floor Covering Centre; **artworks** by Jahnne Pasco-White from Station Gallery. ***Previous pages*** in another view of the living room with a view of the kitchen and dining areas, de Padova **sofa** from Boffi upholstered in Lizzo fabric; Rio low **coffee table** by Charlotte Perriand for Cassina from Mobilia; yellow Diana B **side table** by Konstantin Grcic from Anibou; **bowl** by Terunobu Hirata from Craft Victoria; Cestita **table lamp** by Santa & Cole from Mobilia; **pendant light** by Reduxr. *Details, last pages*.

This page in the kitchen, **benchtop** and **splashback** in Calacatta Vagli marble from Fum; **splashback tiles** in Mosaic Biyusai from Artedomus; **joinery** in American white oak veneer in warm mid-brown from Briggs Veneers; walnut Moca **stools** by Studio Rig for Collector from Origine; white ceramic **bowl** by Emily Ellis from Pépite; ceramic **bowl** (on back benchtop) by Szilvassy; sculptural rust and blue **vessel** (on right benchtop) by Claudia de Salvo from Craft Victoria; **floor** in Balmoral Granite Tiger skin cobble tile from Surface Gallery. ***Opposite page*** in the dining and living areas, Tree **table** from Great Dane; Cab **chairs** by Mario Bellini for Cassina and Tekiò horizontal **pendant light** by Anthony Dickens for Santa & Cole from Mobilia; glass **bowl** from The Front Room Gallery; ceramic **vase** (on dinning table) by Szilvassy; Carré Blonde **rug** by Reuber Henning from Halcyon Lake; textured linen **curtains** from Simple Studio; in the living area beyond, custom timber **console** by Arent&Pyke; Shoreham **table lamp** by Vaughan Designs; Aurea rattan **floor lamp** from Heaps & Woods; **floor** in Venture Plank Amazon timber from Havwoods; **artwork** by Ray Crooke.

Melbourne or Sydney? Ask any gathering of said cities' designers who does it better and brace for the biffo. Yes, Sydney got the gorgeous looks and leans into spectacular harbour setting, but Melbourne got the brains and builds far braver outcomes. Or so the slanging match has long gone, until recently when a telling trans-border shuffle of Melbourne talent onto Sydney sites, and vice versa, has sucked the regionalism out of the ruckus.

Seems that commissioning clients are increasingly seeking the outsider's perspective or wanting to wrap in the familiarity of their hometown when moving to another, suggests Sarah-Jane Pyke, co-director of the Sydney headquartered Arent&Pyke, who set up a "sister" office in Melbourne's Collingwood in 2025 after answering to interest emanating from the city.

"We opened in Melbourne because we love the scene and want to be part of it," she says with nod to a creative culture that skews cerebral. "They are still making and manufacturing in Melbourne and there's a real sense of the design world supporting its own, which seems to encourage greater risk taking."

Pyke recalls the first toe-dip into the southern talent pool in 2017 with "touch up" to the grand Italianate dwelling (pictured), which was found hiding its three-level girth behind a four-room Victorian house in the garden suburb of Hawthorn. "From the street it was a pretty little cottage with a perfect rose garden," she says of the deceptive minnow amidst mansions of historical and architectural merit. "But walk in and it was boom, boom, boom — a building four times the size of the property's original cottage," exploding into a largesse of mock-historicist rooms festooned with chintzy swags and floored in timber and travertine.

"The new owners were curious to try something different," Pyke says of the client-couple's decision to cast the design net beyond a city that typically compensates for lack of topographical feature and tropical warmth by pulling interest inside and layering up. "We walked through, identifying all that had to be stripped back so that house and inhabitants could breathe.

"It was largely cosmetic," she adds of not touching the fabric of the building but leveraging "clever not tricky" concept to create lightness. And then Covid whipped the world into a frenzy of design improvement, as quarantine amplified the deficiencies of home, demanding more flex and hybrid facility. "By 2022 they were ready to go again" — updating the kitchen, reviving bathrooms, and planning for co-habitation with adult children who they "loved having around".

Arent&Pyke sectioned the structure's grand proportions into pods of intimacy for parents and apartment-like living for adult children, allocated a first-floor complex of bedroom suites, veranda living space, and a kitchenette-equipped lounge room. "Everyone wanted to comfortably live their own life," Pyke says of optioning for solitude and solidarity in spaces spoking off a feature stair, formerly fizzed with scrolled wrought-iron railing, snaking down to a cavernous, "under-utilised" sitting room. "So, we softened it with a wall featuring a subtle concave arc that complements the stair's curved base," Pyke explains. "It is pierced by two squashed arches inset with blocks of sandstone tracing their contours. These portals lead to a powder room and a meditation chamber that facilitates mindful morning resets, given it faces direct east." This cocooning reboot is a curtain-pull away from a wider 'wellness' multiplex of lounge, gymnasium, Pilates reformer and infrared sauna.

Such orienting regard for light, as it relates to tone, energy and visual load, ultimately recast the central "Baroque" stair in Bauhaus parsimony; Arent&Pyke carving out its underbelly and refining the balustrade into bands of oxidised bronze with an olive-green leather handrail. They further worked weightlessness with the enlargement of an upper-level skylight, fitted with painted timber blades to more emphatically stripe light down a stairwell stripped back to chalky bone. Or rather milk, corrects Pyke in reference to a presentation once made by design seer Li Edelkoort who showed "palettes mixed with milk" as indicator of culture's inexorable move towards nature and the need to do sensorially more with sustainably less. Pyke let the cream rise to the top in the lobby's Tissilent Shoji chandelier — a play of plain linen panels mapping air movement and animating light.

The lobby's rich opacity of white pours into adjacent living, dining and kitchen space — a 'whole milk' fill of paint, lining-board ceiling, 'honest' pendant lights and linen drapes pulling back from steel-framed doors that open inner living to outer loggia space. Colour accents pick from a kitchen garden in turmeric, plum, ripe olive and blue spice basil.

"Everything is very grounded," Pyke says of the mindful merge of colour and material into a garden replanted by Kate Seddon Landscape Design. Kitchen detail earths in sawn-granite cobblestone flooring and outer picturesque frames through Dulux Pesto painted steel doors.

A pool re-tiled in a game-board check of milk and pistachio reminds of Roman gelato and the overarching Italianate architecture. "There's a naturalness to it all because we had done a lot of things seven years earlier," Pyke notes of the slow cook that served their brand of 'sumptuous sparsity'; an oxymoronic opulence that makes itself apparent in the main ensuite mix of strict bands of green stone and bush hammered cabinet. "I think it could be my favourite bathroom," she says of working 'simple' hard. "Bit of a bow to Melburnians who don't wear black to fade away, but to say something strong." ■ *arentpyke.com*

This page in another view of the kitchen, custom **rangehood surround** in microcement; bronze **joinery handles** from Oko Olo; aluminium **kettle** from Pan After; ceramic **bowl** by Szilvassy; Apparatus Lantern 2 **pendant light** from Criteria; Cestita **table lamp** by Santa & Cole from Mobilia; Womb **chair** (in living area beyond) by Eero Saarinen for Knoll from Dedece; black **sculpture** from Fletcher Arts; **artwork** by Drew Connor Holland from Nasha Gallery.

This page in the main bedroom's ensuite bathroom, **vanity top** in Calacatta Viola marble from Artedomus; custom **joinery** in solid handcarved American white oak; custom **mirrors** by Arent&Pyke in solid American white oak and oak burl veneer; Contemporary **basin set** in satin brass by Perrin & Rowe from The English Tapware Company; Brodware Nanobar **towel rail** from Candana; **vase** from Fletcher Arts; Society Limonta **towel** from Ondene; Apparatus Circuit 1 **wall sconce** from Criteria; **wall** in Verde Guatemala marble from Euro Marble; Igloo Gloss **wall tiles** from the Surface Gallery; **wall**, **portal** and **floor** in Travertine Romano Classico from Baasar Stone. ***Opposite page*** in the meditation room, Pium **wall light** by Pinch from Winnings; **artwork** (in the room beyond) by Joshua Yeldham.

This page in the outdoor area, Gubi Atmosfera outdoor **dining table** from Cult; Loop **dining chairs** by Vincent Sheppard from Cotswold Furniture; Hurricane rattan **pendant light** from Dunlin. ***Opposite page*** in the main bedroom's walk-in wardrobe, **joinery** in American white oak; custom **mirror** by Arent&Pyke; **side table** from Fletcher Arts; vintage **vase** from 506070; ceramic **platter** by Rina Bernabei from Pépite. *Details, last pages.*