

The great southern lands

A Sydney family turn to their South African roots for design inspired by a surprisingly warm monochromatic palette

Words **Robyn Willis** Photography **Maree Homer**

We all have our own notions of what home means. For many of us, it's a source of sanctuary and relaxation, somewhere we can feel most ourselves. Inevitably, this involves being surrounded by objects that have meaning for us, that reflect our history and identity.

For the owners of this property in the upper north shore suburb of Belrose in Sydney, their South African heritage was the driving force behind the refit of their multi-storey home.

A joint project by design and construct service, Cadence & Co, interior designer Kate Nixon, and landscape designer Myles Baldwin, the house is on a steep site, falling away from the street to overlook a spectacular escarpment at the rear.

Principal designer at Cadence & Co, Michael Kilkeary, said the house did not need much in the way of structural work, but it did require greater cohesion in terms of design and circulation.

"We didn't touch the structure a great deal, although we reworked the fireplaces to tie in better with the interior design," he says. "The kitchen area was the main area we reconfigured, taking down walls.

"It was very closed off before. These houses tend to be a series of smaller, more enclosed rooms and they wanted more capacity."

The house is spread over three levels, with the main living areas on the mid floor at street level, bedrooms on the upper floor and a secondary living space on the lower ground floor, along with a cellar and laundry. Key to the success of the project was an easy connection to the garden, which was considered as part of the overall masterplan for this project.

"We have collaborated with Myles and his team on a number of projects and we bring them in early, whatever the nature of the project, so that we are working very much together," Kilkeary says. "Myles will develop his concept layouts in conjunction with our architectural layouts so we will be working >>





Cape Town rattan stools in the kitchen (top) tie in with the Cape Town chairs in the living area (left), both from Halvorsen Interiors. A generous wine cellar (above) on the lower ground floor is a popular spot when guests drop by.



<< in parallel to develop both schemes.”

Given the leafy locale, the view also informed the interior design.

Kate Nixon and her team were engaged after the project was already underway to create a sophisticated but comfortable home for the owners and their two adult children still living at home.

“The client reached out through Instagram and knew of us from work we had published and she asked if we could meet with her,” Nixon says.

The brief was to incorporate their various collections into the interiors and create spaces that would reflect their South African heritage.

The interiors have been finished in shades of white and soft grey in textured finishes such as Venetian plaster to add depth and warmth to an otherwise neutral palette. The all-white walls also serve to maximise the sense of space without competing with the views that were evident from almost every room in the house while providing the ideal backdrop for the couple’s collection of art and artefacts.

“The view is the hero in so many of the rooms but the owners also wanted things to be comfortable and relaxing because they are very casual, down-to-earth people,” Nixon says.

The restrained palette of charcoal, ecru and earthy shades of brown and green works in well with the family’s collection of tribal artefacts and floor rugs, supplemented by more recent acquisitions such as lighting from Kelly Wearstler and Montauk Lighting, as well as accessories from Nixon’s eponymous retail store.

“They had some amazing art and artefacts and pieces that were important to them to retain and work into the interior but they needed the soft layers of sofas, arm chairs and coffee tables, lighting, cushions and throws,” Nixon says.

Wherever possible Nixon worked with the owners’ existing furniture, such as a solid timber dining suite teamed with a buffet and open bookcase from Boucher & Co. A varied collection of oil on canvas artworks were also re-hung and loosely grouped together to create a sense of casual formality.

Given the almost monochromatic scheme, layering, texture and pattern have been played to maximum effect, from the zebra-striped ottoman in the living room to the Cape Town rattan counter stools from Halvorsen Interiors at

the kitchen island bench. Nixon says the interior scheme for this house is a riff on their former home, albeit with a pared back palette.

“Her former house and existing pieces informed us but this was all about texture,” she says.

“It’s a big part of what makes it feel like home. This is a bit more sophisticated in the palette because they’re at a different stage of life where you can afford to go that little bit further in your choice of materials.”


Nixon says her team worked with the couple for more than a year, from initial concept to the final layering of accessories to ensure they fully hit the brief.

“When someone says ‘brown’ we want to make sure it’s what we think is brown,” she says. “Then we source everything and we bring all the samples to the presentation so they can see the scale.”

In terms of an approach that meets both the aesthetics desired and the level of comfort required, it’s a complete success. Well, almost.

“They kept adding things,” Nixon says. “Even though the furnishings we’ve chosen are light colours they are very tactile and comfortable and they still have texture and tonality.”

“They are deep, comfortable sofas and ottomans. In fact, they asked for two more ottomans after they moved in — they were fighting over them.”

More: cadenceandco.com.au;
katenixon.com; mylesbaldwin.com 

The Moroccan Beni rug from Loom Rugs and a custom made ottoman designed by Kate Nixon in Schumacher fabric from Orient House brings depth to the living room (below).

