



# SAVING GRACE

Keen to care for the planet, a savvy designer revamped a Sydney home with a soothing palette and soft touch — no bulldozers required

WORDS JESSICA BELLEF PHOTOGRAPHY NIC GOSSAGE



**DINING AREA** Interior designer Josie Simpson suggested opening up the external wall with sliding doors to extend the room's livable space. The decking is also new. Dining table, Coco Republic. Gubi 'Beetle' chairs, Cult Design. Westbury Textiles' 'Helsinki' linen curtains in Slate, BQ Design.  
**FRONT DOOR** (opposite) Josie replaced the door and windows, which were made by Artkal. The slim dark frames echo some of the interior lights and details. Wall colour, Dulux Grey Pebble Half. Brass bell, pre-existing.

## cheat sheet

**Who lives here** A couple with their three sons, aged 13 to 22, and two Bichoodles.

**Style of home** A two-storey double-brick house that's been renovated for improved functionality and flow.

**Location** Sydney's lower north shore, traditional land of the Borogegal and Cammeraygal people.

**🕒** The family purchased the home in 2015 and their updates were complete by September 2021.







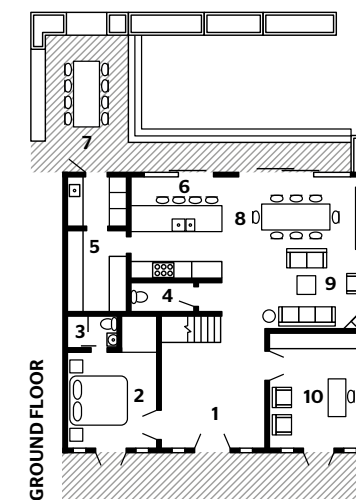
**A** home built on a wishlist is an exciting proposition, and taking the knock-down-rebuild path is often bolstered by talk of getting precisely what you want. However, when an architect suggested bulldozing this harbourside property in Sydney and starting again, the owner was more than a little miffed. “I thought it was such a waste to knock down a double-brick home,” says the doctor and mother of three boys, adding that her parents had raised her with an ethos of recycling and reuse.

She and her husband had bought the Mosman home in 2015, drawn to its solid build and the fact that ocean breezes could be felt out on the back patio. The exact age of the property is unknown, but telltale signs of 1990s renovations existed: swirly iron work, dark cherry-timber details and drab cream walls. Dated elements aside, glimmers of charm shone through, and the property’s footprint was a Cinderella fit for the couple and their three sons aged 13 to 22.

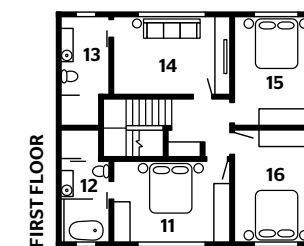
Rejecting any thoughts of calling in the ‘dozers, the busy professionals reached out to Josie Simpson of Altus Design Studio in 2019 after admiring the interior designer’s skilful work at a friend’s house. The designer was equally horrified at the

thought of flattening the two-storey dwelling. “The original home was in good condition, with a good basic floor plan and orientation. Why throw it out for no reason – the environment doesn’t need more of that,” asserts sustainably minded Josie, who was originally engaged to update the external window and doors, replacing the heavy, damaged timber styles with a streamlined look in black aluminium. “I measured and drew up the windows and doors and, as part of that, I suggested adding sliding doors to open up the dining space and kitchen to the backyard,” she explains. From this came a reimagining of the kitchen layout, the front entry and the main ensuite, and a casual yet chic scheme of furniture, lighting and artwork.

Delicate colour and graceful lines now harmonise with the preserved character details of the elegant trims, generous ceiling heights and charming fireplace in the living space. “We took design cues from the house and worked with those features rather than fight them,” Josie explains. The subtle but effective interventions are gleaned as soon as you step through the arched front doorway – a much-loved original feature. Believing the entry sets the tone for the rest of the home, Josie has revived this voluminous space with a smoky glass cluster pendant and



- 1 Entry
- 2 Bedroom
- 3 Ensuite
- 4 Powder room
- 5 Butler’s pantry/laundry
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Barbecue area
- 8 Dining area
- 9 Living area
- 10 Home office
- 11 Main bedroom
- 12 Main ensuite/dry sauna
- 13 Bathroom
- 14 TV room
- 15 Bedroom
- 16 Bedroom



**KITCHEN** (above and centre) Homestyle Kitchens built the cabinetry in a Dulux shade called Vanilla Quake. The benchtops are Calacatta Nuvo Caesarstone and the splashback is Zellij white tiles from Scheme. Taps, Brodware. Handles and pulls, Castella. Appliances, Winning Appliances. Coral linear-rod pendant light, Suktas. Spine wood stools, Cult Design. Artwork by Maria Kostareva. **ENTRY** (opposite) An Ollo cluster pendant by Suktas and other inclusions “make the place sing without going over the top”, says Josie.



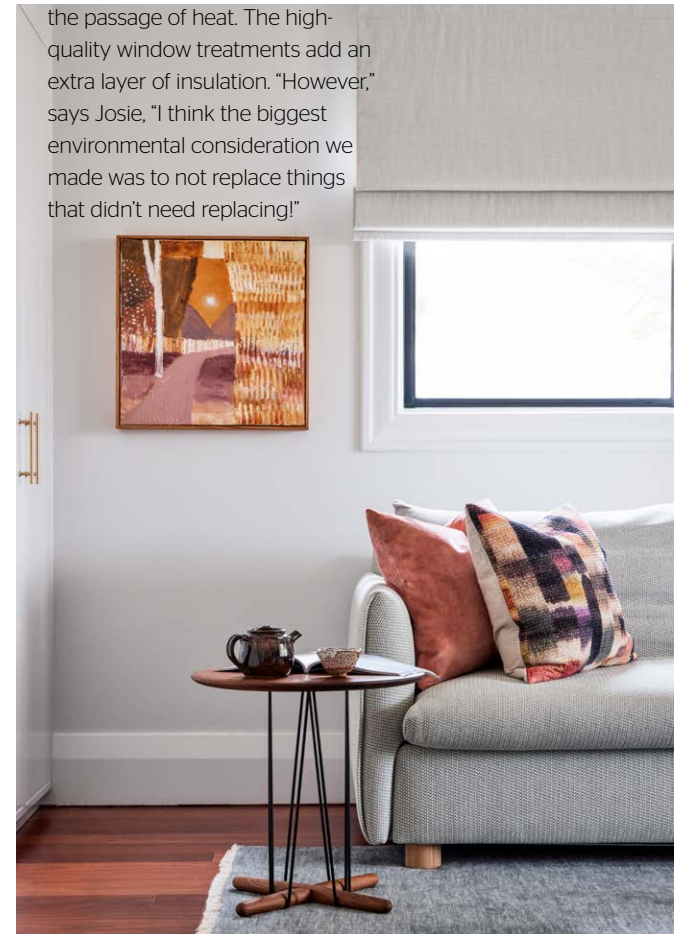


“There were smaller artworks in this area but they looked lost so I suggested larger ones”

JOSIE SIMPSON, INTERIOR DESIGNER

good news

All the new windows and doors are low-e glass, an energy-efficient coated glazing designed to control the passage of heat. The high-quality window treatments add an extra layer of insulation. “However,” says Josie, “I think the biggest environmental consideration we made was to not replace things that didn’t need replacing!”



a striking curved stairwell balustrade. “It all ties into how the kitchen and bathroom are designed; pared back and simple but with a little touch of elegance,” says Josie.

While the old kitchen was generous in size, it was closed off to the dining and outdoor entertaining areas and failed to offer enough storage and functionality. Downsizing the main kitchen was the surprising solution. “It was a brave decision of the client’s to go with a smaller kitchen,” says Josie. “So many people think that a bigger kitchen is better, but this home is testament to making a smaller, well-designed kitchen work.” Within the carved-up floor plan, the galley design now boasts bench seating and a good connection to the patio via sliding doors. Meanwhile, more space has been given to an adjacent walk-in pantry and laundry with backyard access. “The kitchen is not huge,” says the owner, “but it’s comfortable and flows much better. It works really well for us.”

When the healthcare professional gets a free moment, she retreats to the calm of the updated main ensuite with its dry sauna and Japanese soaking tub. Wellbeing is a priority, she says, adding that she also finds comfort in daily ocean swims. She reports that her husband and boys are happy and settled into the home and that they utilise every square inch – “there is no wasted space.” Tailored to perfection, this revitalised abode quietly but confidently delivers all that is required. Who says you must knock down and rebuild to get exactly what you want? *Altus Design Studio is at [altusdesignstudio.com.au](http://altusdesignstudio.com.au) and [@altusdesignstudio](https://www.instagram.com/altusdesignstudio)*

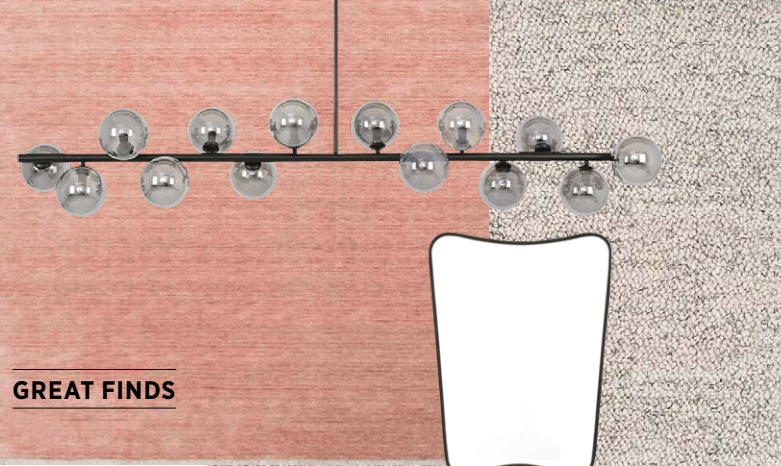


**TV ROOM** (top left) A Hugo sofa bed from Jardan comes in handy when guests stay over. Cushions, Weave Home. Embrace table, Cult Design. Artwork by Mim Fluhler. **HALLWAY** (above and top) The blackbutt timber flooring is original and the steelwork for the new balustrade is by Steady Steel. Sideboard from Coco Republic. Wall colour throughout, Dulux Casper White. Artwork by Pamela Honeyfield. **LIVING AREA** (opposite) Josie’s art curation adds to the thoughtfully tailored appeal of the home. “If you go to the effort of doing a beautiful renovation, you need to dress the walls in the same standard as the house,” she says. Designer and client connected over the art selections as they were both drawn to expressive depictions of the natural environment, such as this piece by Amy Wright. Sofa and armchair, H+J Furniture. Coffee table, King Living. Rug, The Rug Establishment.





**MAIN BEDROOM** (above) Serenity reigns in this space where soft colour and pattern merge. The bed by H+J Furniture is upholstered in Augustus Marshmallow, a rose-hued fabric from Warwick. Bedding, Cultiver. Printed cushion, Walter G. Side table, Fenton & Fenton. Cristalglob wall light, Mondoluce. **ENSUITE** (right and opposite) Josie addressed the room's layout issues and made space for a dry sauna, designed and installed by Nordic Sauna Company. "Daily saunas are meant to extend your life by quite a few years," says the owner. Japanese soaker tub, The Blue Space. Mini-chevron leaf tiles and Solo white floor tiles, Di Lorenzo. Crackle grey wall tiles, Teranova. Custom vanity with Calacatta Nuvo Caesarstone benchtop and V-groove cabinetry finished in Dulux Spanish Olive. Brass pulls, Savage Design.



**GREAT FINDS**



ADDITIONAL PRODUCT SOURCING: NONCI NYONI



**lessons learnt**

"Bigger is not always better"

HOMEOWNER

"Our house is comfortable but not excessively spacious. I know many people like huge houses, but I just dread the cleaning and the cost of heating and cooling it. That's inefficient, and I really don't like waste. We use every room."



**CLOCKWISE** (from top right) Diva rug in Rosetta, from \$1849, RJ Living. Orion 14 pendant light in Black/Smoke, \$1095, Beacon Lighting. Ollie rug in Grey/Ivory, from \$795, Miss Amara. Pierre mirror in Black, \$542, Granite Lane. Kensington mango-wood buffet, \$2699, Domayne. Mater High stool, from \$2090, Finnish Design Shop. Jasper occasional table, from \$1500, King Living. Verona three-seater sofa in Nickel Grey, \$1499, Castlery. Carissa cushion in Parissi Rosewater, \$119, Norsu Interiors. Cozy Weave cushion cover in White, \$59, West Elm. Masia tiles in Blanco, \$99.95 per sq m, National Tiles. Laminate surface in Oyster Grey, POA, Laminex. Plantino engineered-oak flooring in Elemental, from \$90.75 per sq m, Choices Flooring. Creo vase, from \$855, Coco Republic. Coral ceramic vase in Ivory, \$375, Pepperwhites by Tara Dennis. All I Ever Wanted No 6 artwork by Sara Winfield, \$2290 (framed), Greenhouse Interiors.