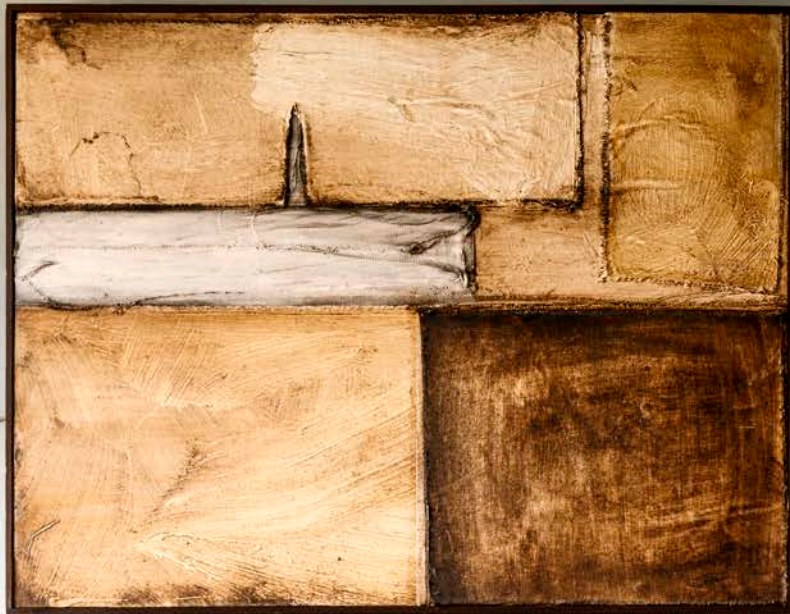


For author, design curator and *Belle* contributor Karen McCartney, her Elizabeth Bay pied-à-terre serves as a calm place to write, have conversations and explore creative ideas, as well as a showcase for the things she loves.



Photography MICHAEL WEE

# PLAYING *favourites*

This page An artwork by Stephen Butler hangs above a Hans Wegner 'Sawbuck' chair and a side table from Marlo Lyda's 'Remnant' collection. To the right is a collage from a 1990s London student show. The Tuareg rug is from Kulchi. Walls painted in Murobond 'Salt'.



**This page** An Elkhorn fern commands the living room, sprawling in front of a Cara Gordon painting and a limited-edition Martyn Thompson print, which is propped on the floor. In the middle sits a knotted chair by Marcel Wanders. Shelves house a host of ceramics and small artworks, while a pile of books on the ground provides a base for an 'Akari 1AG' light by Noguchi.



**W**HAT WERE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR YOUR SPACE, AND WHAT INITIALLY APPEALED ABOUT THE SITE? The apartment is in a sturdy 1930s block of architectural merit. We liked that it had high ceilings and quite an open floor plan, but the biggest plus was that it has only one party wall so is open to the filtered harbour views to the north and a generous spreading gum tree to the west. The block faces a little inner-city park filled with huge Moreton Bay fig trees and Sydney's lively Potts Point is only a short walk away. It feels both private and connected – the best of both worlds.

**WHAT DID THE ALTERATIONS ENTAIL?** The space was rather bland and neutral in a way that was designed to appeal to everyone, so it was something of a blank canvas in that there was nothing of value – other than the structure – to retain. We were keen to consider what we could on a limited budget, which entailed painting everywhere in dirty, complementary shades of Murobond paint, replacing mirrored cupboard doors with beautiful linen curtains, swapping timber with stone for the hallway cupboards and masking a lot of the living room floor with a huge Tuareg rug.

**WHAT WAS THE CONCEPT FOR THE SPACE?** The premise for the place came from the perspective of re-use and re-accommodate. We had sold a holiday house on an island (where we did leave a lot of the furniture pieces designed for the space), but we had art and lights, chairs and stools and ceramics... lots of ceramics. So planning where to put what was really key. We had two huge prints by photographer Martyn Thompson and miraculously there were two existing hooks in exactly the right position to hang them side by side. The other decisions came much less easily. How you use a space that isn't a full-time home throws up opportunities. We didn't need a TV on a wall so that freed up space immediately; we could use the second bedroom as a dining table and a working space; we wanted the living space to accommodate a number of people; and I love writing when sitting in bed, so that had to be a beautiful art-filled space as well.

**WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT WORKING HERE?** It is such a personal space filled with art and ceramics from friends such as Cara Gordon, Martyn Thompson, Evi-O, Bruce Rowe of Anchor Ceramics and pieces that I have been given over the years or that I have bought on travels with my husband David Harrison, a freelance design writer. I know it is a cliché to say that it is important to surround yourself with things you are connected to – past and present – that generate a memory, but it is true. I love that a Ukrainian terracotta vase can sit beside an Alana Wilson ceramic bowl and an Aboriginal basket woven with feathers and they look like they belong together.

**WHO ARE SOME OF YOUR ENDURING CREATIVE INFLUENCES?** When I researched and wrote the book, *The Alchemy of Things*, I was exposed to a wide range of creative thinking and a variety

Clockwise from top Works by Stephen Butler, Cara Gordon and a wall sculpture from Richard Blackwell complement the 1950s floor lamp and Hans Wegner 'Sawbuck' lounge chair. An artwork by Tracy Stubbs sits on a 'Démon' shelving unit by Mathieu Mategot for Gubi. A brass Florian Schulz pendant hangs above the dining table, designed by David Harrison. In the background is a Noguchi floor light next to an artwork by Jason Fitzgerald. A mix of dining chairs are arranged around the table, including a Norman Cherner side chair, 1911 Thonet via Geoffrey Hatty Applied Arts, and a Hans Wegner 'CH24'.



of approaches to interior design. So, the philosophy of people like collectors Geoffrey Hatty and Rodney de Soos (ex-Copeland & de Soos) has shaped how I think about furniture and objects in interiors. I am not as brave or as knowledgeable as them, but I enjoy their seemingly 'devil may care' approach to how things come together. I have always been drawn to abstract artists, particularly the work of Sean Scully and Agnes Martin, sculptor Barbara Hepworth, ceramicist Lucie Rie and the aforesaid Martyn Thompson, whose creative energy and dedication is boundless and continues to inspire.

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE COMPLETED SPACE AND HOW DOES IT REFLECT THE WORK THAT YOU DO?** I would describe the place as contained, personal and calm. It shows how objects and collections, art, vintage furniture and lighting and some bespoke pieces, such as the round dining table designed by David, all come together. And to that end it reflects what we do for our clients – finding this mix of pieces that all work together, coming from different sources, but all finding a pleasing commonality that speaks to creative layers and character. »



Clockwise from top Wardrobe doors were replaced with linen curtains and a Martyn Thompson Studio fabric is used as a throw. The Achille Castiglione pendant and Danish clamp base on the bedside table were both sourced from Etsy. A graphic sculpture in the style of Clement Meadmore and a Vivienne Foley vase add dimension to the hallway. An Eames fibreglass chair sits next to a photograph by Sharyn Cairns and a wall sculpture by Derek Wilson.



WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVOURITE PIECES? How long can the list be? I am limiting myself to five: the standing 'Akari UF4-L10' light by Isamu Noguchi in the dining room for its gentle sculptural quality; the Marcel Wanders 'Knotted' chair because it defies belief; the Tuarag rug because of its timeless craft; the Martyn Thompson Studio bedspread (used as a wall hanging); and two Jan van der Vaart faceted ceramics in a bronze glaze.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT WORKING IN THE SPACE? There are quirky touches, stacks of art, architecture and design books, and the lovely way the light moves around the space at different times of day. The location, with the trees and nearby water, creates a very liveable context with interesting shops and cafes on the doorstep.

DESCRIBE A TYPICAL WORK DAY? There really is no such thing and I find I have to be disciplined and that is why I am such a writer of endless lists – it helps motivate me. For the same reason I like to collaborate with other people; I like the shared ideas and the shared responsibility. My work has an element of spinning plates – I like everything to be moving along – to always be up to date and pride myself on never missing a deadline.

IS THERE A COMMON ELEMENT, AESTHETIC OR APPROACH THAT RUNS THROUGH YOUR WORK? I am drawn to people who have integrity and are straightforward to work with. I don't like to do things by halves and those people need to be worth the commitment and effort. In terms of aesthetic, we find a mix of pieces that bring character to a space, trying to spend the clients' money wisely with high/low buys, which regardless of cost, contribute to the overall visual richness and emotional attachment.

WHO OR WHAT IS INSPIRING YOU AT THE MOMENT? Going to both London and Milan Design Weeks is always an eye-opener. I admire people like Nina Yashar of Nilufar Gallery for her visionary approach and her support of the design community, and having visited the apartment of artist Vincenzo de Cotiis, I am in awe of his creative output. Closer to home I think the work of Adam Goodrum is putting Australia on the design map and young designers such as Marlo Lyda are tackling the big questions of sustainable design in a meaningful way.

TELL US ABOUT SOME RECENT PROJECTS THAT YOU ENJOYED WORKING ON? WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO? At present we are working with just three architects – Andrew Burges Architects (who we collaborated with on Bismarck House in Bondi), Anthony Gill Architects and Durbach Block Jagers – sourcing a mix of vintage and contemporary furnishings, light, art and objects. This is hugely enjoyable as each of the clients brings their own perspective, and I love how the relationship develops and with trust more interesting selections come to the fore. Apart from this slice of work, I still write about architecture, advise various brands and am curating a talk series. Everything intersects around design and architecture, but I enjoy the different facets I can explore. [designdaily.com.au](http://designdaily.com.au); @mccartneyk; @designdaily

