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Going grey

Interior designer Greg Natale gave a stark white apartment a glamorous makeover after finally finding his "perfect" grey, writes **Claire Bingham**. Photos **John Fotiadis**.



Who would have thought grey could be so sexy? With more than a taste for the modern baroque, this glamour pad in Darlinghurst is home to interior designer Greg Natale, who has tastefully transformed the dull two-storey unit he bought five years ago into a polished suite. Part of a turn-of-the-century apartment block given an architectural overhaul by the Sydney-based practice Burley Katon Halliday (BKH), the only reminder of the original structure is the white-arched facade of the balcony.

"BKH redesigned the whole block," says Greg. "I respect their work, so I knew all the lines of the interior would be straight. Structurally, I didn't need to do a thing."

Non-structurally, the redecoration required rather more work. Greg chose the apartment as a blank canvas on which to put his stamp.

"I knew I didn't want it all white, but I didn't want to live in a black box either. I thought grey would be the next best thing," says Greg.

After applying near to 30 shades of grey on the walls, the quest for the "perfect" grey became something of a fixation.

"I finally settled on a grey and painted the entire interior, but once dry, it turned out to be too purple," he says. "One of my influences was the fashion designer, Halston, who lived in this huge loft in New York. I was flicking through the Tom Ford book [published by the iconic fashion designer in 2004] one day and he described Halston's home as being in the perfect shade of grey, so I took this as my lead."

The renovation of the 5m-high mezzanine space was deliberately slow; Greg spent a year working out what he wanted. "It was a step-by-step thing," he says. "When you work for clients, time is a major factor – you don't have the same privilege as when it's your own."

A mix of the three different styles, which Greg defines as "kitsch baroque, '70s and modern contemporary", the '70s factor is perhaps the most significant, with the inky black glass coffee table the starting point beyond the colour scheme – and Greg's main object of desire.

"This was the first thing I bought for the apartment and everything else grew around it," he explains. "I did work experience with an architect called Dino Burratini, who was behind the State Building in the city, and these were from his place, which I bought at auction."

Following this, Greg laid a new stone floor to replace a white terrazzo predecessor, which, to Greg, was more befitting the stairwell of a fire escape than a gorgeous new home. →26





A The carved wooden bedhead is by Lara Kincaid
B The Murano chandelier floats about the inky black glass coffee table, the first thing Greg bought for the apartment and the starting point for his colour scheme
C The ebony-veneered wall cabinet is a feature of the living room
D Greg Natale at home in Darlinghurst.



C



“ I knew I didn’t want it all white, but I didn’t want to live in a black box either. I thought grey would be the next best thing ”

D

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Next came the Minotti sofa and the brocade velvet-upholstered chair – a hand-me-down from Greg's parents, and the baroque element of the flat. This Italian-style baroque extends from the chair to the Murano glass chandelier, which Greg sourced on-line and is much like the one his mum used to own.

"My parents are from Calabria in southern Italy, so there's a definite influence. As a kid, I wasn't a fan of this over-the-top style, but I'm embracing it more. Although as a nation Australians are probably more Americanised than European, I can identify with the southern Italian vibe. It is, after all, my heritage."

High-class retro

Mixing old and new with a retro style, the apartment is arranged around a configuration of two parts, with the streamlined kitchen, dining and living area open-plan on one level, and the bedroom and bathroom on the mezzanine above. Taffeta curtains span the 5m height and link the two spaces, along with the use of luxurious materials, such as the fur bedspread and the rug in the living room.

"I'm a big fan of fur. It's probably from watching too much *Dynasty* in the '80s. The dark colours are intimate and I like that anyone who comes over feels relaxed immediately."

Other decadent features include the carved wooden bedhead made by Lara Kincaid in Glebe, and various custom-made cabinets that Greg designed. He's big on horizontal lines – the creamy gloss sideboard in the bedroom serves as a dividing wall on the edge of the mezzanine,



and the rich ebony-veneered wall unit is a feature of the living room.

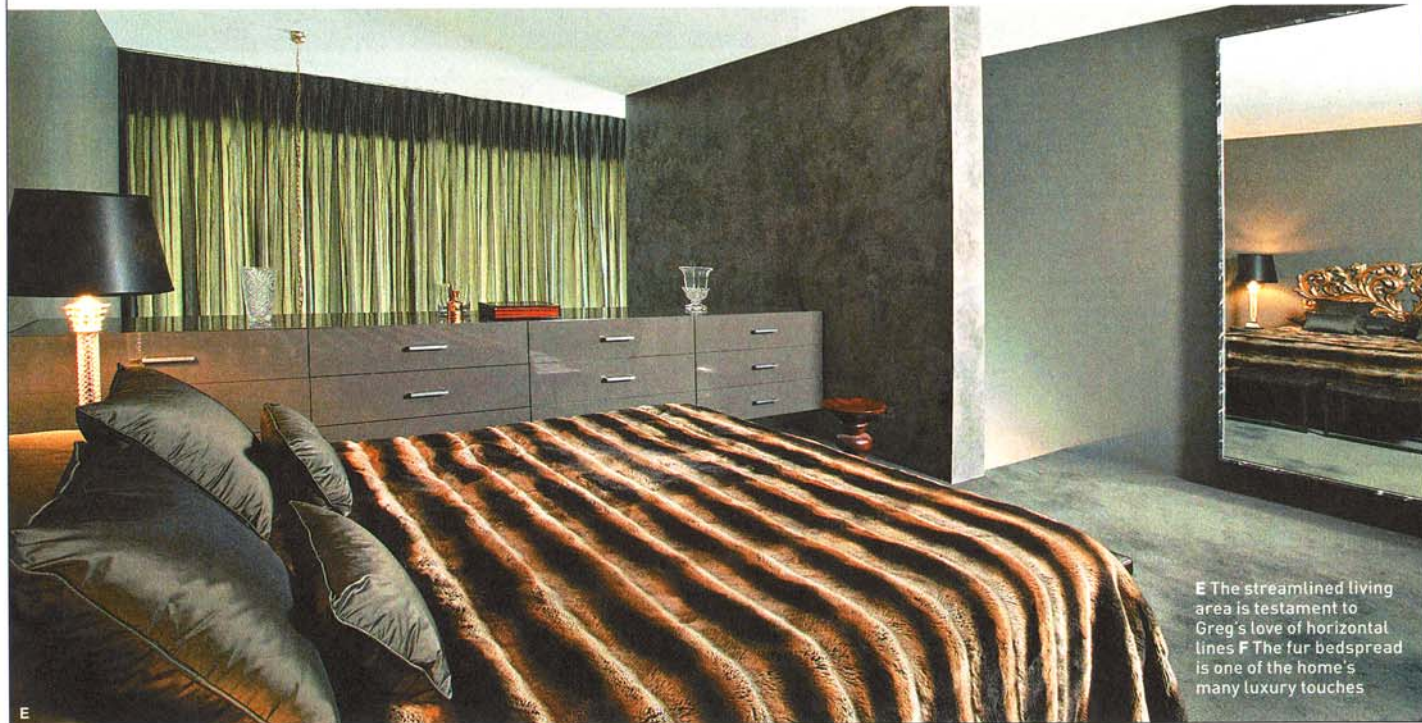
To open up the space, Greg uses devices such as the mirror-fronted cabinets of the kitchen and the stucco polished wall to reflect light back into the apartment.

"Interior design has moved towards a more decorative approach, which is a backlash to what happened in the '90s, where everything became homogenous," he says. "If it was one chair, it had to be an Eames chair, so the whole thing was more like decorating by numbers."

"As a designer, I have to create originality to get noticed. This apartment is a subjective, personal project and, in this sense, only I could have created it – only I have the experience of my mother's Murano chandelier and only I have the experience of the armchair." ■

MORE INFORMATION

■ Greg Natale Interior Design Surry Hills, 9361 6594; www.gregnataleid.com.au



E The streamlined living area is testament to Greg's love of horizontal lines **F** The fur bedspread is one of the home's many luxury touches