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Putting on the ritz

Everything old is new again with a makeover of an architectural classic, writes **Robyn Willis**

A less experienced interior designer might be daunted at the prospect of working on an apartment in one of Sydney's most treasured buildings, but not Greg Natale. Opened in 1923, The Astor in Macquarie St in Sydney's CBD was, for many years, the tallest building in the city, with an astonishing 13 stories.

Designed by architects Espin and Mould, it was inspired by the skyscrapers of New York, which were marvels of concrete and steel. Although its height was surpassed long ago, it has become one of Sydney's most loved residential buildings.

New leaf

Greg says working on an apartment in The Astor was always on his to-do list. So when former clients told him they were moving to the Art Deco building, he was quick to say he was interested in working for them.

Indeed, given his love of American interior design, both traditional and contemporary, he was an obvious choice for the owners.

The decision to go for an Upper East

Side, New York feel was easy, but both Greg and the owners wanted some quirky elements to be included.

Although the bones of the apartment were still there, the 1980s renovation had removed most of the architectural details synonymous with buildings of its era.

Back to the future

Greg says the first task was restoring picture rails, dado rails, cornices and architraves that gave the apartment its distinct character.

The U-shaped kitchen was stripped and replaced with timber cabinetry with moulded detailing that were then handpainted in a moss green. Marble bench tops, splashbacks and floors provided the link to the past.

Shades of grey including Dulux Spanish Olive and Dulux Lexicon were chosen for the living spaces to provide a cohesive look to the apartment.

Greg says he likes to use grey for interiors and likes to refer to the palette used in the apartment as "Dior grey".

"It's my favourite shade but it's a hard colour to get right," he says. "If you get the wrong shade, it just looks terrible."

American style

Some of the furniture the owners brought with them from their previous home was re-covered to work with the apartment, with Greg specifying fabrics from US interior designer Kelly Wearstler's range.

Other pieces of furniture were sourced from US design companies Dorothy Draper and Kinzel Furniture.

Greg also designed some pieces, including the geometric black and white rug from his designer rug range.

Gold and silver have been used judiciously, simultaneously adding polish as well as the edge that Greg and the owners were aiming for.

Cool and quiet

The only real structural work was the transformation of one bedroom into a dressing room, laundry and an air-conditioning service area.



"It's my favourite shade but it's a hard colour to get right"

Designer Greg Natale (pictured) decided to use Kelly Wearstler fabric for the chairs, dining chairs and Dulux Spanish Olive for the walls. Marble tiles lend a sense of luxury to the bathroom and kitchen, while shades of green and pink bring life to the neutral palette in the bedrooms of this apartment.



Greg says they installed acoustic insulation in the room to protect neighbours from airconditioning noise. "The client wanted a good airconditioner but we had to hide it because of the company like conditions," Greg says. "So the apartment went from three bedrooms to two bedrooms with a built-in laundry and dressing room. The third bedroom was smaller anyway." Although refurbishing apartments is always logistically demanding, Greg says his company has had plenty of experience. "Most of our work is on family homes but we have been doing a lot more apartments in recent years," he says. The final budget for the refurbishment was \$200,000 for the refurbishment plus another \$80,000 for the furniture. No small change, but for a grand old dame of a building, a beautiful result. writter@dailytelegraph.com.au



MORE INFORMATION
Greg Natale Design gregnatale.com