



DETAILS

— S O U T H E R N H I G H L A N D S

## ***LUX COUNTRY***

Greg Natale has taken his love of glamour and high design to the country. Sydney editor Gillian Serisier takes a road trip to the Southern Highlands for a peek of this SOHI gem.

—  
design Greg Natale  
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ONE OF HIS PARTICULAR SKILLS IS THE ABILITY TO CHANGE SPACE VISUALLY WITHOUT IMPOSING LIMITS TO THE ACTUAL PHYSICALITY.



Natale has delivered an exceedingly fine salute to mid-century Hollywood grandeur with this black and white interior. Ostensibly a country house reinvented, the property is both sprawling and lavish, but most decidedly a home. And, while the interior is signatored to Natale's style, there is also something principally in tune with the bones of the house, its location and utility that makes this rather glamorous solution work.

While the starting point is somewhat immaterial, a closed 1995 mock Federation/'80s dream home in shades of terracotta and Tuscan orange is worth mentioning; it was in fact a rather ugly house. Natale's cool eye for the environment has served him well with an external palette of Murowash tumbleweed, Porters limewash and bluestone paving melding the house with the misty tones of Sutton Forest. The addition of solid black garage doors, however, delivers it from the realm of country safe and places this home firmly in the modern.

The slight green grey of the tumbleweed is picked up on entry with a pair of antique French doors (Le Forge) in their original shade of eau-de-Nil green, which reappears throughout as shelving, full length silk drapes (Gastón y Daniela – Cosmo Silk Verde) and the slightly oriental upholstery of a Thomas Preston chair (6371). Colour is, in fact, used sparingly throughout the home. Where it is used, however, as singular

splashes that punctuate or as softening elements that blur and contain, the effect is inspired.

Natale is a designer with great respect for his influences. In this case, the nod to English designer, David Nightingale Hicks (1929-98), is far more than perfunctory, with wall-to-wall carpeting on the upper floor in a black and white geometric design with robust black borders (Stark Carpets US – Park Square). It is an incredible choice and works a treat, being both sufficiently busy to blur in its extremes, yet bold enough to hold its own in the foyer. The crux is found in the borders, which are wide and exceedingly strong, functioning not only to extend the dynamism of the long-wing hallways, but also to break each horizontal as the length is traversed by fully intruding into the corridor space.

The border and pattern also contain the large bedrooms in that the lack of physicality allows the rooms to remain functionally large without seeming overly so. The master bedroom, in particular, benefits from this with further visual augmentation delivered through the optical illusion of painted panel borders on all walls. For this room, the Natale-designed bed has been centrally placed, thereby reassigning the grand scale a more human set of proportions while balancing the room and creating greater interaction with the garden environment viewed through full-length French doors. It also allows the golden

[01] Antique French doors soften the path from entrance chamber to the intimate marble floored foyer and present the first experience of eau de nil used throughout.

[02] The dominance of a black foundation in the study is opened with swathes of white, light and pattern.

yellow shade of the bed's upholstered panels to be picked up with a lounge in the same shade and a pair of oriental prints.

Similarly, the boys' room is broken by the robust borders, which, in conjunction with the mid-wall horizontal stripe of red provided by a pair of oars on one wall and circular motif of an old-fashioned boat steering wheel on the other, create a large yet framed space. A pair of red rope knit poufs below the large picture window and red trimmed bed linens continues the nautical motif, while further diminishing visual scale. Concreting the whole with a combination of the round shape and bold black and white stripe is an oversized Pimlico Street lamp in nickel and black (Laura Kincade). There is something of the mid-century to this room's style of 'boys' own adventure' that suits the house well.

The use of an overall patterned floor treatment is an interesting departure for Natale, who, to accommodate this feature, has largely forgone his usual use of patterned wallpapers. The walls, however, have not been neglected and the existing panel work has been emulated throughout for both visual cohesion and textural variance. The circular plaster moulding used on the guest bathroom wall is particularly charming, as is the additional and abundant dado moulding. And, while much of this panel work is white on white, several sections have been covered in a finely textured grasscloth wallpaper (Designers

Guild – Glynde teal). This works well in the foyer, where an existing deep green marble floor is considerably softened by the sage tones. The psychological weight of the foyer is also lifted through a quartet of whimsical wheat sheaf wall lamps (Laura Kincade). In fact, the entire house enjoys these delightful surprise additions: pineapple-based lamps, faux tusk-legged tables, green crystal chandeliers, wicker bull heads... and the list goes on. The quirky moments are often intriguing, but more to the point is their ability to change moods from room to room within such a large house – without shifting the tone. Natale's custom-made credenzas are similarly used to differentiate rooms and the white-on-white version created for the deep grey media room, while far from obtrusive, gives the room sufficient weight. Interestingly, it is one of the most used rooms in the house and, despite its large size, is extremely cosy.

The rich, nuanced black of a slightly thicker grasscloth (Baresque – Pacific Breeze) has been used in the predominantly black suite of rooms comprising the study. Here, the carpeting has given way to black timber floors and patterned rugs that each demarcate a space of use. The pattern of the carpet, textured walls and black furnishings is simplified by the expanse of white introduced via large picture windows (framed by black curtains) and a pair of white chaise longues. Overhead, Natale's penchant for Americana is celebrated with a faux antler light

[03] The grand scale of the master bedroom is contained through an expanse of densely patterned carpet coupled with panels painted directly onto the walls. Touches of yellow puncture the black and white to soften the intimate environment.



[04]



[05]



[06]

[04] Natale has a fabulous eye for quirky extravagances, often as much playful folly as functional object. The faux antler lamp is a nice play on the masculine trope of an English study.

[05] The diamond pattern of existing windows has been mimicked in the cabinetry glass and tiling solution for the long lines of the kitchen — another tactful use of balance.

[06] The media room is vast. Large low-line furnishings, two oversized loungers and the vanishing point of a lightly curtained window bring the whole to a comfortable scale.



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fitting. In the same vein, a pair of darkly framed horse prints complements the furniture of solid black.

The lower floor is testament to Natale's quite successful transition to architecture. The whole has been exponentially expanded through the addition of doors and a grand arch leading to possibly the most invisible kitchen yet designed. Floored with wide boards of American oak, here the black and white elements have been cast as furnishings, cabinetry, walls and light fittings. The room is also, however, richly seamed with the soft sage shade of the doors through a geometric rug (Designer Rugs – Oxford), full-length silk drapes and a solid block of green colour by way of bookshelves. Interestingly, Natale has emphasised the symmetry of the room and demarcated space through the strategic placement of grand, custom-made chandeliers (Chandeliers to Die For) with one presiding over a cluster of large black lounges, while the other lights the dining table. Double doors leading to the patio further emphasise the distinct spaces, as do the entry stairs and black and white banisters. The grand dining table and chairs have been custom finished to a slightly distressed patina and sit comfortably within the whole.

Running parallel to the dining table is a large white marble topped kitchen island, with a solid base of black oak that visually melds with the wall of black cabinetry and tiling beyond. The cabinetry is far from ordinary, however, with black inte-

riors framed by glass doors featured by the same single large diamond-cut glass of the existing windows. The addition of glassware adds a refractive quality to the glass that seems to shimmer. The bench space below the cabinets is again black, with everything built in such a way as to be wholly invisible, including the wok-curved black stovetop (Smeg) and the custom powder coated handle of the black Miele oven. A splashback of black, white and grey diamond tiles (Di Lorenzo Tiles – Harlequin) ties back to the windows and cabinet doors, while a large black wall contains the space internally and floor-to-ceiling panelled glass doors magnify space externally. The overall effect is a continuation of the living space as living space rather than kitchen and is very nicely done.

The whole house is, effectively, very nicely done. Black and white can be problematic, but Natale has exhibited restraint and flamboyance in equal measure to create a country house that is at once modern and classic. One of his particular skills is the ability to change space visually without imposing limits to the actual physicality. Arguably, he has learned this skill in reverse by mastering the use of patterned wall finishes for small rooms. More importantly, however, is his growing skill with architectural elements, where the structure is in dialogue with the environment. *(inside)*

>[gregnatale.com](http://gregnatale.com)

[07] A ceiling rose has been transformed into a gold, yet elegant wall motif in the spacious bathroom.

[08] A zigzag of deep green and white marble continues Natale's exploration of floor pattern, while a bespoke credenza mixes bold geometrics with the frivolity of crystal handles in a nod to mid century glamour.