



Objects in the light- and air-filled home of Finnie and Bill Weich include a Peter Romano 'Dob' lamp from South Pacific Fabrics, a 'Satellite' brass sculpture from Flanston and a slab from Wendie Gregory OPPOSITE PAGE: in the formal sitting room, vying for attention with the expansive Stribny Harbour view are Misool 'Dobu' sofa from Dadoz, a 'Tudo' cocktail table from Holly Hunt Studio, and an 'Armonia/Conte Avella' white vase. The cushion fabrics are Elliott Clarke 'Branco', Kismet Couture 'Rosa Mera', also from Elliott Clarke, and Andrea Martin 'Marcelle' from Unique Fabrics. Details, hot pages.

California dreaming

By Chris Pearson Photographed by Anson Smart

Sydney's lower north shore is the site of an impressive four-level waterfront home whose crisp white palette and luxurious touches bring a little slice of Los Angeles to the harbour city.



Dress circle doesn't come better than this — a four-level home on Sydney's lower north shore with spectacular views of the Opera House and Harbour Bridge. But therein lay a challenge for its designer, Grog Natale: create a home that would not be upstaged by what was framed by its wall-to-wall glazing. The dramatic result not only shames top billing with that famous view, but also features some unforgettable star turns, thanks to a sprinkling of LA glamour.

Owners Vonnie and Bill Wavish purchased one half of this property in 2007 but, when the mirror-image house next door came on the market four years later, they seized the opportunity. It would not only offer generous room for them and their now-teenage daughter, Jordan, but would also be ideal for when their grandchildren came to stay. The original plan was to join the two houses on only one level, but the project just kept growing. Now the two houses fuse seamlessly, with structural pillars where the dividing wall used to be. In a project that lasted more than a year and saw more than 210 tonnes of concrete removed from the site, Natale proved two can go into one very neatly indeed.

The architectural brief, such as it was, evolved with the project. Apart from generous, flowing spaces, "we wanted floating stairs with a feature wall and a bar on the lower level," says Bill. "And the house had to be a gallery for the art we had collected over the years." Beyond that, it was quite fluid.

Right from the California-inspired front door, etched in shimmering bronze, you know you have arrived somewhere special. "We spend lots of time in LA," explains Vonnie. "They love their front doors and make them a major feature; we wanted that here." »

BELOW: Ned Kelly in Pink Dress by Sidney Nolan (c. 1980) adorns a wall near the formal dining area, featuring Casuarina benchtops, Minotti Pylon stools from Dulux; Fast Lighting London chandelier from Thomas Lewis; and joinery in lacquered American ash veneer from Precision Flooring. The checkerboard rug is from Designer Rugs. OPPOSITE PAGE: another view of the formal sitting room, with Minotti Dahlhoff sofa from Dulux complemented by rosewood Tudor cocktail tables and a Spectator table, all from Holly Hunt Studio. The Minotti Heliopsis outdoor cabinet, far right, is from Dulux. The Tibetan hand-dyed wool rug is from Designer Rugs.



“The house had to be a gallery for the art we had collected over the years”
— homeowner Bill Wavish





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: the cut-out bronze front door, by Greg Natale Design and made by Anadol, provides a grand California-style entrance to the open-plan casual sitting area, which features a Christian Lacroix 'Ocean' sofa and 'Gale' coffee table, both from Thomas Lerin. Resting on the 'Lagano' side table from Holly Hunt Studio is a Christopher Hill 'Nira' table lamp from Studio L&L. The custom checkerboard rug and Tibetan hand-knotted rug are both from Designer Rugs. Inside the entry, a Phoenix Don Quixote front lamp above a 'Joss Ho' 'Uls' table from Thomas Lerin. The floating staircase, which connects all four floors, is made from Classic Dorestone from Worldstone. The formal dining area boasts a direct view of the Sydney Opera House along with the custom-made 'King' dining table from Holly Hunt Studio and Christian Lacroix 'Soho' and 'Vila' dining chairs from Thomas Lerin. The 'Corvus' spherical Murano glass vases are by Armani/Casa; the chandelier is by Lindsey Adelman Studio. The floors are white lacquered American oak veneer.



“I wanted to keep things really simple because the view is what is important”
— designer Greg Natale



The hotel-inspired bar is furnished with Fritz Hansen 'Drop' dining chairs by Arne Jacobsen and a Fritz Hansen 'Austro' dining table by Jørgen Hansen, all from Cabi. The Bulter 'Kishin' bar stools are from Cate & Co; the 'Modo' pendant are from Roll & Hill. BELOW LEFT: in the main bedroom, an Andy Warhol Marilyn Monroe print from Sunday B Morning hangs near the bed. An Orlovio Suarez 'Slingo' table lamp from Thomas Lozano and a Kelly Hester 'Luna' stool embellish the Mosaic Harry 'Island' table from Dekori. The custom fabric is 'Winter White' from The Textile Company; the carpet is 'Bou' by Greg Natale for Designer Rug. BELOW RIGHT: the stairs and feature wall are in Classic Zirconium from Worldstone. OPPOSITE PAGE: in the master, the Karrell by Luster bath is from Roca and the 'Jax' tap is by Anna White. The custom mirror above the bedside table hales a T11 Artista, last pages.



« And what a head-turning entrance it makes. That entry on the steep, harbour-hugging site is on the third level, which houses the large open-plan formal sitting, formal dining and casual sitting areas, and a pure white 'cosmetic' kitchen with an all-bells-and-whistles commercial kitchen running parallel and tucked discreetly behind it, joining the levels is the floating staircase. Fringed by a soaring travertine feature wall and with suspended vertebrae-like treads, it forms the spine of the building. On the top level sit the two main ensuite bedrooms, a study and double garage. Beneath the open-plan area are three bedrooms and a gym; at the lowest level is an informal sitting and dining area.

This final level is also home to an instant conversation starter: the massive luminescent white-onyx bar, which the couple modelled on the glamorous backlit bar in LA's Beverly Wilshire Hotel. The challenge, Bill says, was lining up the lighting, and he claims his homegrown result is better than the original.

Vonnie drove the look of the interiors. "I wanted a white house with crisp, clean lines that suggested easy living," she says. And circular sofas straight out of *Austin Powers*, she adds with a grin. It also had to have a knockabout resilience. "I have grandchildren and I am not precious. They tumble all over these sofas. The fact they can be whisked off for cleaning helps."

While Natale concedes the home's California modern aesthetic is a departure from his recent work, he is no stranger to it. "I was trained in this style: clean, minimal and modern," he says. "I love this as much as the layered, decorative look I am better known for. The pattern, too, is subtler than what I normally do, but I wanted to keep things really simple because the view is what is important." The only departure from the white palette are splashes of purple on the main living level, inspired by a huge Sidney Nolan painting of Ned Kelly hanging near the front door.

Natale and Vonnie sourced much of the furniture in LA. "We were both there at the same time and went furniture shopping together. It's amazing what we achieved in just one day," she says. That's where they discovered the exquisite Lindsey Adelman chandelier, now suspended over the dining table; with its sinuous tendrils, it echoes the curves of the Opera House and brilliantly symbolises the California-Australia fusion that this breathtaking house is all about. *IT*

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