



PALM SPRINGS REGENCY

The latest residential project from Greg Natale Design is much more than a showstopper, as Sydney editor Gillian Serisier discovers.

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THERE IS NO MISTAKING GREG NATALE'S STYLE. Always different, always surprising and always glamorous, there's just that certain panache that indelibly identifies his work. His latest residential project in Balmain – the Tierney Watson house – is no exception, thanks to an amazing client who allowed Natale to work his magic without compromise. From architecture to lamp base, the results are quite simply spectacular.

For the most part, a Greg Natale Design project begins indoors, but with the Tierney Watson house, Natale started with the architecture. This is not the great leap some would imagine, but rather a return to Natale's training as an architect. Most importantly though for this project it has meant the solid integration of contemporary design considerations within a modernist sensibility of form.

The house essentially begins with the front door and the first of a series of etched concentric rings to be used throughout. The door motif is low and bold with a strikingly minimalist brass door knob at centre. There is something decidedly American in the scale of the design and, as the door opens to reveal wall-mounted brass sculptures, the theme is quickly concreted to 'Palm Springs Regency'. This style, though similar to Hollywood Regency in its pairing of ornate curves and bold lines, has the charming addition of exuberant colour and the structural rigour of 1950s architecture and sculpture. (Think Sinatra, the Viceroy and the Parker for classic Palm Springs panache.) As now exemplified by Natale, it engages a layer of opulence over the '90s minimalism much as Hollywood Regency allowed a flamboyant layer over '40s minimalism. It is a style with which Natale is very much at home, and is able to extend and elaborate with considerable finesse.

The study is gloriously golden, but simultaneously, and quite importantly, deep and sumptuous. The distinction is important, this is not a glitter box; rather it is a carefully considered and balanced ensemble of disparate elements that works beautifully. Natale's choice in wall finish is exemplary and for this room he has chosen the softly textured Ashby silk by Designers Guild.

01.
Shimmering brass of the C. Jeré raindrops sculpture, by Jonathan Adler.

02.
A feature wall of geometric bricks fragments light while adding texture and the wow factor to the room.

03.
Striped awning frames a perfect view, while adding Palm Springs Regency to the outdoors.

04.
Robustly contrived patterns over equally robust natural patterns create a visually solid grounding for the room's furnishings.

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The Magnifika carpet in Labrador is a much deeper shade and provides an excellent transition to the black diagonally shelved bookcase filling the near wall. At centre stage is a magnificently ornate Egyptian reproduction of a Louis style desk from the '80s complete with gold trim. 'Brilliant' doesn't even begin to get to grips with the claim this piece makes on the room, yet it is not out of place or overkill, since Natale balances the whole with a robustly vertical desk lamp (Adler) in gold and black, a strikingly framed round mirror (also Adler) and a light filled window framed in deep gold taffeta, which work together to propel the eye upwards and expand the open space above the desk. The Chippendale chair by Adler in black and gold brings the whole back to Palm Springs with its allusion to the cast bamboo, mock Orient furnishings of Californian resorts of the 1950s ilk. Indeed the majority of furniture, ornament and light fittings are by Adler, who is shaping up as the go-to man for this style. The occasional chair is a low-line, slightly ornate concoction of gold, teamed with a black and white cushion in an interwoven geometric pattern. This pattern plays an important role in Natale's design and features as various incarnations throughout the house. Balance is also intrinsically important to any project's success and Natale's incredible talent for detail is more than up to the task, teaming the occasional chair with a simple black and white table of slightly higher line that is further elongated by a statuette of a stylised cat. The pairing is extraordinary for being so wholly successful without for a moment being obvious.

The powder-room deserves its title, toying as it does with the suggestion of a 'glitter box' (albeit an excessively charming one). The walls, clad in Nixon wallpaper by Adler in reflective gold foil, present another example of the geometrics mentioned earlier. It is a good choice for the room as its reflective surface is, in fact, illusory and only vague shapes are thrown back at the visitor. Interestingly, it works in much the same way as a wholly reflective surface to baffle spatial limitations and so makes what is essentially a smallish room spacious. A beautiful Sunburst mirror (William Sonoma) provides





05.
Pattern and texture interact beautifully to create elaborate cocoon like worlds within the splendor of the whole.

06.
Light filled and golden, the study is grand opulence at its best.

07.
The Powder Room glitters and sparkles as a glorious shining tribute to fabulous wallpaper.

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further spatial augmentation, while a flooring of striated marble that becomes the lower half of the amenities wall does likewise as the stripe shifts from the horizontal to vertical. A long window, featuring a bordered blind in white and black, ties both the geometric and black and white motifs.

Below Adler rugs in yet another variation of the geometric, Striato Travertine (RMS Natural Stone and Ceramics) has been used throughout the house. Laid to accentuate the grain as long stripes of caramel tones, the combination of polish, colour and striation make for a richly complex foundation to Natale's choices. This is immediately evident in the main room's feature-wall of geometric concrete bricks (Majestic Screen Wall Besser Blocks) that fill the room with multidimensional light to further complicate the floor's opulence. It is a room filled with gorgeous moments: '70s light shades that are more sculpture than function, a prancing zebra (eBay) on the fireplace, and a swirling brass leaf stand supporting the glass top of a coffee table (Off The Wall Antiques). Structurally the room is magnificent. It faces Sydney Harbour with a full end window of glass and overlooks a lap pool that presents as a long thin band of aqua. A polite fringe of yellow and white awning frames a white furniture strewn deck of dark timber from above and even the grass has rallied to Natale's vision with a delicious shade of green thanks to landscape architect Myles Baldwin.

Black plays a large role in cabinetry, with repeats of the concentric circle motif of the front door throughout. Surprisingly, and despite the shade, there is no feeling of weight due to two factors. First, the surface nuance of the timber is sufficiently retained to create visual variety; second (and perhaps more importantly) the work has been raised to either float above the floor or hover mid wall. In the main room Natale has used this to good effect by focusing the diagonal corners while creating a visually continuous sensibility. Interestingly, he has achieved polar results, making the kitchen recede from the open plan of the near corner, while firmly bringing attention to the details of the far corner.



08. Perhaps the most subtle of the guest rooms, this lovely little parlor plays wonderful versions of bamboo crosshatching off one another.

09. The large circular motif of cabinetry resounds throughout the home from front door to the knockout nursery.

10. Signature pillows, horse-head lamps, a spectacular bed and a spectacular room.



The sheer ebullience of Natale's design is breathtaking. The house is quite clearly without compromise and the owners must be applauded for their trust.

On the upper level, two gorgeous guest rooms dabble with the boundaries of Natale's direction. The first verges on the baroque with an abundance of gold, while the second skirts the dance floor of Disco in silver. The main bedroom, however, is slightly beyond fabulous, featuring a horse head lamp base, a brilliant overhead light fitting of curved metal arms, baubles and globs of light (Anenome – Adler), an ornate Louis chair in black and blue, shimmering vases, a curving lamp and monogrammed pillows: eclectically brilliant! And of course the gorgeous pale blue taffeta curtains framing Sydney Harbour also are exquisite. The whole is centred by the bed's pale blue bed head that rests against a wall of black and white geometric paper (Nixon – Adler) and a magnificent, ornately framed mirror resprayed black (Dulux gloss polyurethane). The en suite is a rich corridor of black tiles crowned with a smaller version of the bedroom's overhead light fitting and bejewelled with a pair of ornately framed C Jere Raindrops mirrors of Palm Springs heritage via Adler. The marble floor is again displaced to form lower walls, in this case creating a low horizontal at the far end of the corridor and perfectly framing the bath, which sits below louvered windows and yet another spectacular view.

The sheer ebullience of Natale's design is breathtaking. The house is quite clearly without compromise and the owners must be applauded for their trust. (Interestingly, it seems that Natale was the one erring on the side of caution, with several of his lighting suggestions rejected as "too plain".) In effect, the house should come with a warning: kiddies don't try this at home. It is a design aesthetic that looks simple enough, but to pull off such vigorous decoration, the base must be sufficiently robust, serious and refined as to allow the layers of design integration to carry through. And while the result is far from pedestrian and may dip out of fashion or favour, Natale has laid an incredibly strong foundation for future stylistic endeavours. *(inside)*

