



# the insider

What happens when an expert designs her own house?  
A stunning collision of colour and visual style

PRODUCED BY WENDY BANNISTER PHOTOGRAPHY SHANIA SHEGEDYN STORY JODIE THOMSON





Setting the world on fire: the storage cabinet was custom-built and painted in Fiery Glow, Quince Jelly, Full of Life, Eye of Newt and Carmen, all by Dulux. The dining table was custom-built by Mortice & Tenon. The chairs are from Freedom Furniture. The painting in the kitchen is Gareth Sansom's *Saskia's Video Game*.





**Martine Seccull doesn't** have a problem with pristine white interiors and neat, modern kitchens lined with stainless steel and chocolate brown and off-white laminate. Not a bit. It's just that everyone is doing it and, as an architect, she likes her houses to be, well, more exciting.

So, when she got the chance to renovate the dated '70s duplex she lives in, Martine really let her head go. At long last, she could experiment with the edgy storage ideas she'd seen in European magazines and splash about some blood-warming colours that her clients had always loved but could never bring themselves to use in their own homes.

In fact, Martine never intended to embark on a full-scale renovation. All she wanted to do was replace the old cream carpet with something more paw-friendly for her beloved golden retriever, Carla. But, once she'd started, the creative juices took hold and she decided to refurbish the entire ground floor of the two-storey duplex. The upstairs bedrooms and bathroom had been renovated a few years before, so they just needed a contemporary layer of charcoal carpet. But downstairs required stacks of designer TLC.

"The downstairs was like a giant shoebox, with low concrete ceilings and double-brick walls and an 'interesting' sort of quasi-colonial style," Martine grimaces. "It was difficult to alter the structure, because of all the brick and concrete, so all the changes were basically superficial, with the exception of opening up one doorway a little wider."

Unlike most renovations, Martine wasn't working with an old home with great bones and built-in character. >

**ABOVE** Reflected glory: the house was renovated with Carla the dog in mind. In what was once a dark, boxy room, a mirrored wall has been used as a design device to create an illusion of space and to draw in as much light as possible.



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Island paradise: the kitchen bench is topped with Corian in Everest and lined with solid planks of jarrah and a corrugated black Abet Laminati laminate. The tiled floor features a coloured glass mosaic detail. All tiles from Buckley Ceramics.



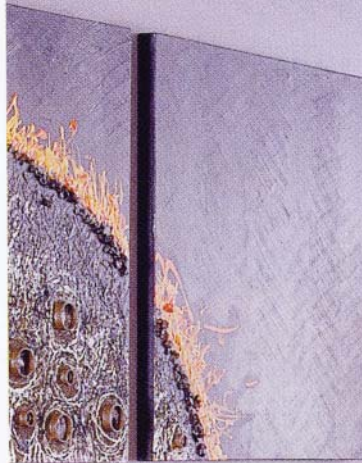


## things we love

### clever wall storage

It may look like an expensive piece of contemporary art, but this multicoloured masterpiece (left) is actually an efficient storage unit. Martine was inspired by similar units she'd seen that had been designed for people in tiny apartments with a big need for storage. A joiner custom-built the unit to her specifications, using MDF painted in colours from the Dulux range. The cupboards have different depths, ranging from

300mm to 600mm, so there's a spot to store tricky kitchen items. Each cupboard is lined on the bottom with easy-wipe black melamine. The doors on the top half of the cabinet open upwards, while those on the bottom half are side-hinged. Best of all, while it looks like it would cost a bomb, Martine says the cabinet cost about \$1000, including installation – a bit less than the price of a standard built-in wardrobe.



**CENTRE LEFT** Marble marvel: the cool tones of the bathroom are largely due to the Crema Marfil marble from Buckley Ceramics. Villeroy & Boch basin with cane accessory. Hansgröhe hand shower by Philippe Starck. **LEFT** The neutral main bedroom is enlivened by Gareth Sanson's *Portrait 02*. Japanese chest and paper lamp from Made In Japan. Bedlinen from Space Furniture.



while there is a big blast of fire-engine-bright colour, the charcoal-grey floor tiles were the anchor for the renovation



< She had the challenge of adding personality to a skinny, dark space. “The whole point of the exercise was to create the impression that the room isn’t just a long, square tunnel,” Martine says. “The idea was to try to increase the sense of space by making it more interesting.”

She’s done that with such architectural features as a curved wall and a colourfully quirky storage cabinet, pillars on either side of the walls, and a false ceiling and bulkheads to give different ceiling heights and allow her to install recessed lighting. And it’s all embellished with a blast of fire-engine-bright colour, of course.

Martine says that many of her design ideas for the house were inspired by overseas interiors magazines.

“The Europeans seem to just do what they like and have a lot more colour, and they’re more innovative with storage, because mostly they live in tiny flats,” Martine says.

In particular, the house was in dire need of extra storage.

“I lived with only one tiny linen cupboard, so I didn’t have enough storage for bits like those annoying platters and things you use only once a year,” she says.

Her solution was to design a spectacular, fire-toned wall cabinet, built onto a curved wall.

“If you get storage off the ground, you don’t lose floor space,” Martine says, “and I didn’t want the face of the cabinet to be made of frosted glass or off-white anything.”

The cool, charcoal-grey floor tiles were the anchor for Martine’s whole renovation. Like many of the design aspects in the house, they were a little too exciting for most of her clients but just the thing for trying out in her own home.

“A couple of clients said that the tiles would result in too much pattern and they wanted something plainer,” Martine says. “But I like the fact they won’t show paw marks!”

Martine fell in love with the vitrified ceramic tiles when she spotted them in a tile shop but assumed they’d be ridiculously expensive. Luckily for her, they were on special. Similarly, the room’s roasting colour scheme was inspired by some glass mosaics Martine discovered in the same tile shop.

“They remind me of lollies,” says Martine. “They had them in a deep cherry red, mandarin orange, reds and yellows.” She used the deep red tiles in a strip across the >

**LEFT** Burning passions: armchairs and sofa in siren colours of tangerine and red-pink make the perfect counterpoint to the sober floor of charcoal-grey tiles. The wall is painted in Shipwreck by Dulux. The triptych, *Edge of Reality*, is a Martine Seccull artwork.





< grey floor to add definition and interest and to echo the colours on the storage cabinet.

The zingy tangerine armchairs and red-pink sofa were another bargain buy, this time from Freedom Furniture.

“The guy in the store said he could give me a good deal on them because they were floor stock,” Martine says. Even better, Martine was left in no doubt that the CensoSuede-covered pieces would wear brilliantly.

“Apparently, about 25,000 people had gone through the store while the sofas were on display, so they’d been sat on a lot, but they were still in great condition,” Martine says.

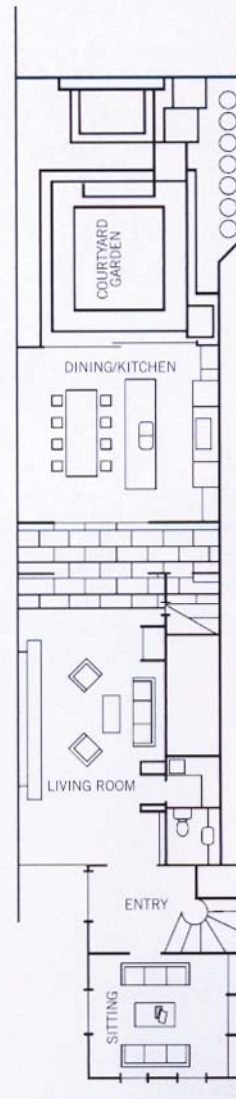
The built-in bench running along one wall of the lounge room replaced a fireplace Martine ripped out. The bench, made of chrome-plated aluminium with jarrah veneer and leather cushions, is a space-friendly way to add extra seating.

The kitchen needed only a partial update, as it had been renovated about eight years before. A keen cook, Martine swapped the old electric cooker for a sleek gas model and gave all the cabinetry a makeover.

The biggest change to the whole ground floor was ditching the colonial-style windows out the back and putting in concertina doors to open up the space. While Martine is not convinced they’re ideal for Melbourne’s mostly chilly climate, the doors do let in light and give brilliant views to a spectacular water feature she’s created in the courtyard.

Martine is thoroughly satisfied that her experiments are proving so lovely to live in. “It’s amazing what you can do with a simple space,” she smiles. **hb**

**ABOVE** Stacked in the box: the storage cabinet, set on a grid against a curved wall behind the dining table, sets the tone for the ground floor. Martine designed the house to suit her own relaxed approach to living.





## True confessions

### Who lives here?

Martine Seccull, 37, architect.

### What's your decorating style?

Adaptable. Livable. Not beige or boring white!

### Which part of the renovation do you love the most?

The tiled floors, because they hardly ever need to be cleaned and they hide all manner of sins. Plus, there's a lot of storage. And the sofas are really comfortable and not too precious, so I can remain very calm when my young godchildren smear Vegemite all over them.

### With a million dollars, would you have done anything differently?

I don't think so. Over the years I've come to the conclusion that the result is in no way related to the value of the materials you use. It's the design and structure. You can have all the money in the world and still come up with an ordinary outcome.

### Anything you'd change if you had your time again?

The concertina doors that open the back of the house right up are totally impractical in the Melbourne climate. Melbourne weather is either too wet and cold, or hot and windy, so I hardly use them.

### Any decorating mishaps along the way?

The cupboards in the storage unit were meant to have proper handles, but I went overseas for three weeks and when I came back it was built without the handles. But I decided I liked it.

### What's your best advice for other renovators?

Budget for landscaping at the start, because it's so important. I've probably spent 20 per cent of my budget on the courtyard, because that's what you look at from inside the house.

Hot stuff: the curved staircase is made of kiln-dried hardwood stained to look like jarrah. Armchair from Freedom Furniture. Japanese cabinet from Made In Japan. Artwork, *Morality* by Gareth Sansom.



# hbhomes



*april*

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