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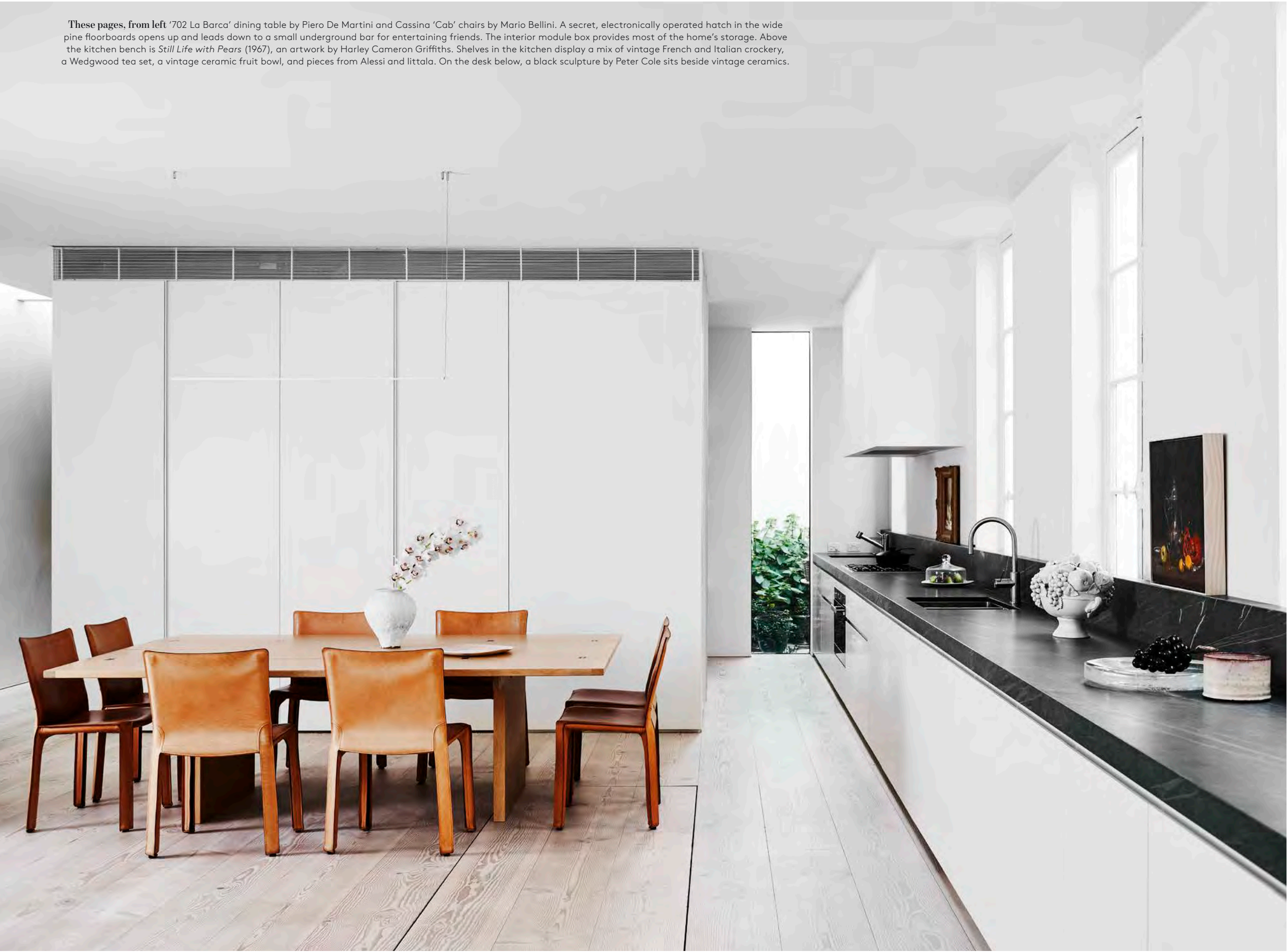
character role

A sleek modern addition has revived this 1800s villa, while *witty pieces, wonky elements* and a *vintage stash* add soul.



These pages, from left On the staircase landing there is a shelf to display books and artworks such as the *Blue Armchair* painting by Clara Adolphi, white ceramic vase from Puglia and *Changeling* sculpture by Mark Howson. In the open-plan living area, a pair of Cassina 'LC3' chairs by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand face the B&B Italia 'Diesis' coffee table and 'Charles' sofa, both by Antonio Citterio, and De La Espada 'Laurel' side table by Neri & Hu. An Edra 'Favela' chair by Fernando and Humberto Campana sits close to the doors. '702 La Barca' dining table by Piero De Martini and Cassina 'Cab' chairs by Mario Bellini.

These pages, from left ‘702 La Barca’ dining table by Piero De Martini and Cassina ‘Cab’ chairs by Mario Bellini. A secret, electronically operated hatch in the wide pine floorboards opens up and leads down to a small underground bar for entertaining friends. The interior module box provides most of the home’s storage. Above the kitchen bench is *Still Life with Pears* (1967), an artwork by Harley Cameron Griffiths. Shelves in the kitchen display a mix of vintage French and Italian crockery, a Wedgwood tea set, a vintage ceramic fruit bowl, and pieces from Alessi and Iittala. On the desk below, a black sculpture by Peter Cole sits beside vintage ceramics.



It was dark with no light and had nana carpets everywhere – just granny, granny, granny,” recalls architectural, industrial and interior designer Shareen Joel of her Melbourne home before she renovated it. So great is the transformation that this description seems an improbability, but the designer had complete conviction from the start. She stumbled across the open for inspection in passing so ducked in and saw the house’s potential right from the get-go. Her husband, Dean, did a drive-by but was entirely unconvinced. “He said it looked like a simple cottage and that I had rocks in my head! But I knew he would be pleasantly surprised so that night I sketched up a plan. I knew exactly what I wanted to do with it. We bid on the day and the first time he saw it was after the auction. He just trusted me.”

Peacefully planted on a green, leafy street, this classic 1800s Victorian-Italianate villa with a bay window also has a raised tiled verandah, detailed filigree facade and low-pitched roof hidden by a graphic parapet. The family had moved from a large art deco property nearby and, for this house, Shareen sought to channel a refined yet effortless European aesthetic. She left the chimney as pale pink, and dusted off the antique French windows and doors she had kept in storage for years. “Everyone told me to strip everything and replace the cornices because they were cracked, and to fix the wonky door because it was on an angle, but I refused,” says Shareen. “I decided to just be happy with the imperfections so kept them – and thank God I did. I didn’t want new and boring and soulless.”

The small, compact home had a lean-to kitchen and was disproportionate to the size of the landscaping, the latter a mess of ponds, rambling walkways and precarious rocks. However, the generous garden space provided the opportunity for a significant extension. The floor plan was basic, comprising a lounge, two bedrooms and a bathroom to the left of the central spine. »



"THIS HOUSE IS NOT REALLY ABOUT THE THINGS AND THE FINISHES. IT'S ABOUT THE LIGHT AND THE SPACES."

« Towards the back, dark and gloomy dining, kitchen, laundry and family rooms were ordered one after the other.

Shareen set about reorganising. One bedroom remained in position but with a renovated ensuite while the second became an office, which is hung salon-style with artwork. The original front lounge was converted into a bedroom for her teenage son with two stand-alone mirrored wardrobes. The separate wet areas were joined, pushed out and a European laundry with retractable doors installed. At the end of the existing hallway a cosy new family room has been created, tucked in between two sets of vintage panelled double doors. Behind, Shareen blew out a huge open-plan dining, living and sitting room built in double brick. Clever joinery and a central box-like module provides most of the storage, designed with specific compartments concealing everything from the refrigerator to dinnerware and shelves for luggage.

Renowned in her family for keeping everything in its original box, Shareen decided that now was the time to unpack the wedding gifts she had out of sight since getting married more than 20 years ago. Many are now on display, including Alessi classics which, she says, "have made me smile all over again with their distinct humour". In the kitchen, shelves are lined with a white-on-white showcase of ceramics. Adding subtle spunk to conservative pieces such as Italian dinnerware are witty, oversized country-style roosters and 3D ceramic fruit bowls overflowing with faux grapes.

Two massive, floor-to-ceiling panes of glass welcome floods of light, warming up the timber and calm neutrals in the rear, and highlighting the beautifully composed communal zone. A cellar (formerly below the patio) is now under the dining table and accessible via an electronic switch that raises the floorboards to reveal a secret hatch. Designed as a mini underground wine bar for friends, the space has been lined in red travertine tiles and outfitted in Boffi's 'Brompton' black shelving system with concealed LED lighting for atmosphere. The concrete walls, slab ceiling and staircase have been left raw and exposed.

At the juncture between the old building and the addition is a glossy, polished-plaster stairwell, its rustic surface enhanced by the new skylight. Upstairs, the couple's simple yet sophisticated bedroom and bathroom is minimalist, with detail and colour coming instead by way of nature through long rectangular picture windows encircling the room that slide open to reveal sweet flower boxes. With the refreshing breeze and panoramic frame, it's akin to feeling the bed is floating on a balcony. "This house is not really about the things and the finishes," says Shareen. "It's about the light and the spaces." ■ shareenjoel.com



This page Designed as Shareen's office, this room is being used as her son's study during his last year of school. Beneath a Gubi 'Semi' pendant light, Knoll 'Tulip' table by Eero Saarinen with Cassina 'Superleggera' chair by Gio Ponti and 'Cab' chair by Mario Bellini. Cappellini 'Fronzoni '64 Sedie' chair by A.G. Fronzoni. Artworks include *Origami #3* by Robert Owen from Arc One Gallery (bottom left), *Tranquilly Mist 1* by Alesandro Ljubicic from Scott Livesey Galleries (bottom right) and *Weird Fish* by Michael Muir from Sophie Gannon Gallery (top left). **Opposite page, from top** Of her love for the French doors in the hallway, Shareen says, "I have collected and kept them in storage for years. I was waiting for the perfect house to put them in. I built the house around these doors." B&B Italia 'Charles' sofa and De La Espada 'Laurel' side table. Cassina 'Cab' chairs and '702 La Barca' table. In the kitchen, Cassina 'LC9' stool by Charlotte Perriand and artwork by Harley Cameron Griffiths.



SPEED READ

» Designer Shareen Joel happened on an open house in a leafy Melbourne street.
» Spotting the potential of this classic 1800s Victorian-Italianate villa with tiled verandah and filigree features to be her own new home she snapped it up.
» The original villa was reorganised as bedrooms, bathrooms and a study, then an expansive open-plan living area and communal zone was built at the rear with floor-to-ceiling glazing that welcomes in light and warmth. » Shareen set about infusing the house with a “European aesthetic” using a palette of tranquil neutral tones and timber, dusting off and installing vintage French doors and windows she had saved for years, and unwrapping 20-year-old boxed wedding gifts that are now on display.



This page Formerly a rambling mess of ponds, rocks and uneven paths, the rear garden has been landscaped. Shareen does the planting and has learnt to become a green thumb. Vintage picnic chair. Opposite page, from top Beneath one of several new skylights installed throughout the house, the stairwell is lined in polished plaster. In the master bedroom, Zanotta '360 Servomuto' side table by Achille Castiglioni, Louis Poulsen 'AJ' floor lamp by Arne Jacobsen and white chair from Luke Furniture.