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Lofty ambitions

An inspired makeover has raised this Sydney penthouse

to new heights of comfort and sophistication.

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These pages Occupying nearly the entire 21st floor of an apartment building, this penthouse soaks up Sydney vistas in all directions.



This page A custom wenge plinth from the original apartment sits with a vintage Artifort 'Groovy' armchair by Pierre Paulin, which was re-covered to complement existing pieces that Shareen has cleverly incorporated in the revamped interiors. Timber plinth in foreground by Hugh McCarthy from .M Contemporary. Painting by Tom Polo. **Opposite page** The Cassina 'Cab' dining chairs, Italian antique dining chair and Spanish carved table are all inspired hand-me-downs from the apartment's previous iteration. 'Belgian Wild Rice' sisal from Natural Floorcovering Centres. The original joinery was stripped back and painted in Dulux 'Fair Bianca' half, the same colour as the walls.

This is one of the best views in Sydney," says the owner of this four-bedroom penthouse poised above the harbour. While that might be hyperbole in a city blessed with vistas, anyone sitting in her living room would readily agree. It soaks up 360-degree paraglider-like panoramas from the bridge to the ocean. "I can look at this seascape for hours," says the owner. "It's ever-changing – never the same from one minute to the next. You feel so uplifted." The only hints of routine are the ferries regularly plying the waters below.

But she felt less uplifted five years ago, when she inherited the apartment from an elderly relative who had lived there for more than 30 years. It seriously short-changed that multimillion-dollar spectacle. "Everything was heavy and brown, with dark-chocolate furnishings, English traditional with a hint

of safari. Quite masculine, it did not reflect its location," says the owner. Most notably, two clunky nubuck armchairs blocked sightlines to Sydney Heads.

So the Melbourne-based owner called in fellow southerner, architectural designer Shareen Joel of Shareen Joel Design, with whom she had worked in the past, to elevate the interiors to better reflect the spectacle beyond the walls of glass. Now the apartment is a prized pied-à-terre for the owner and her family.

In a V-shape, the apartment occupies nearly the entire 21st floor, with no neighbours to interrupt it, just gulls and the occasional, less-welcome, helicopter swooping past the windows. Open-plan living, including sitting and dining areas, a separate kitchen and two bedrooms occupy one wing, joined by a corridor to a second which accommodates the main bedroom suite, another bedroom and the laundry. >



This page The east-facing main bedroom is the perfect place to watch the sun come up. Cassina 'LC2' leather upholstered armchair designed by Le Corbusier and Herman Miller 'FSW-6' walnut screen by Ray and Charles Eames both from Fineworks. Swedese 'Lamino' armchair from Fred International. Vintage milking stool already owned. Painting by Tomislav Nikolic. **Opposite page** Kitchen-sink drama takes on a whole new meaning in this room with a view. 'Pauline' barstool from Fred International. Painting by Pam Tippett.



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These pages, from left In a smart case of recycling, the Cassina 'Cab' leather dining chairs, Italian antique dining chair and Spanish carved table have all been rebirthed from the apartment's previous iteration. The statuette and the horse's head on the shelves were from the original home. Painting by Pam Tippett. On the bottom shelf is a work by an unknown artist. Low slung and elegant, a pair of 'Groovy' armchairs and matching 'Mushroom' footstool, both by Pierre Paulin for Artifort, occupy the spot where the clunky nubuck leather armchairs used to commandeer the view. Shareen had the original oversized sofa re-covered in linen loose covers. Custom ottomans and armchair. Painting by Tomislav Nikolic.



« The brief to Shareen? Keep the airy apartment firmly rooted in its Sydney location – beachy and laid-back, nothing too tailored. “We wanted to lighten it up, make it more contemporary and youthful, with the lightest white, so you feel you’re at the beach all the time – fresh and modern but with a traditional feel,” she says. “The owners wanted something bright, positive and always uplifting, even when it’s raining.” And, to not forget its past – they asked Shareen to judiciously incorporate some original features, but spruced up for the future. “I just took that view and went with it,” she says. “I love both modern furniture and antiques. I wanted it to feel grounded, very much part of Sydney and its history.”

Shareen’s design muses include French designers Christian Liaigre and Catherine Memmi. “I love how they combine old and new. Everything is solid and grounded with real, natural materials such as oak, but fresh, too, with lots of white and sandy hues. French-look oak is combined with stained wenge for darkness and contrast. It’s lasting, rich and works so well in Australia.”

Retaining the original floor plan, Shareen repainted the walls and replaced tatty ceilings, while sisal replaced thick, “full-on” carpets. Much of the joinery was retained, but given a refresh – the study’s oak panelling was stripped and recoated in a matt finish for a more contemporary look. And, surprisingly, cork flooring in the kitchen, which Shareen loves for its retro air – “it takes me back to my childhood and looks so good with the sisal” – was stripped back to replace its yellowish tint with a cleaner look. Meanwhile, Carrara marble brings a classic look to the three bathrooms.

But Shareen’s preference for the “lightest white” walls did not work here. While she specifies Dulux ‘Natural White’ in her southern projects, she was horrified when she saw the result. “With all that natural light and glass, it was overwhelming, like being in a refrigerator. I had to repaint everything.” Instead she chose Dulux ‘Fair Bianca’, a creamy white with red undertones.

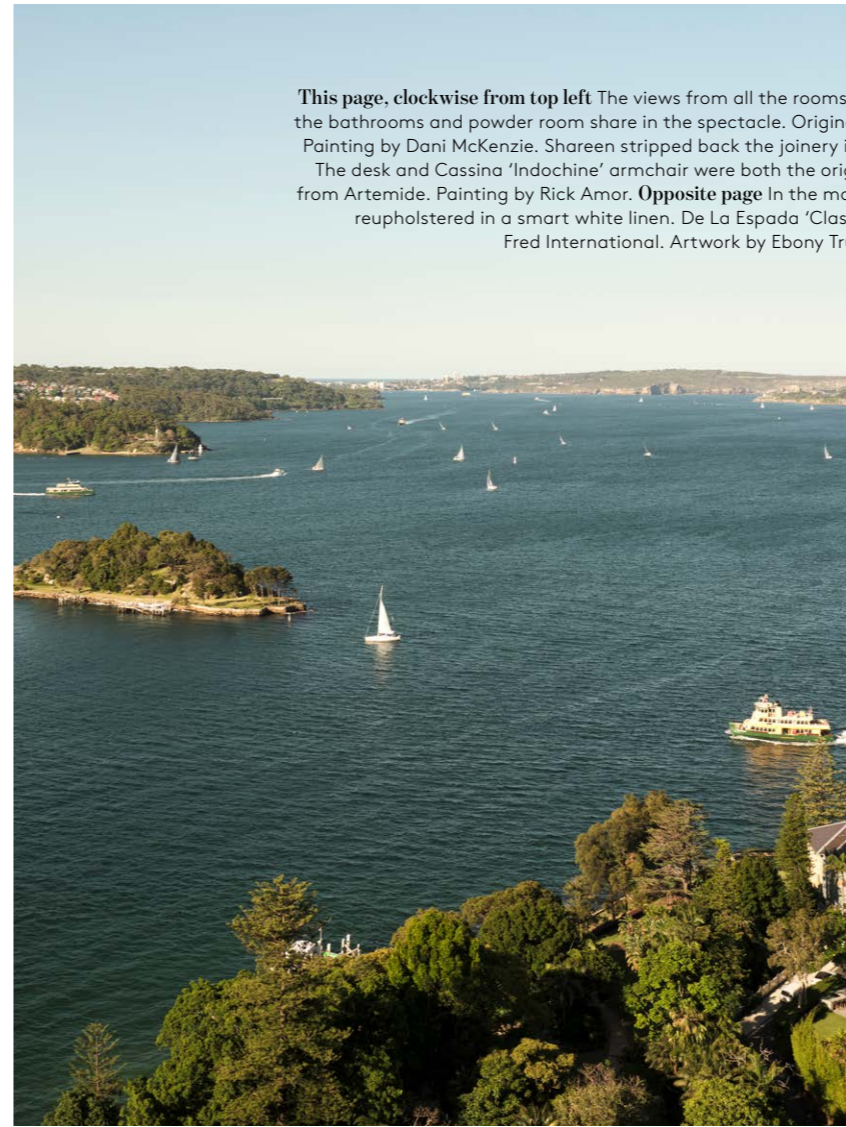
Recycling was part of the story, in other ways, too. A four-metre-long sofa stayed put – too big to fit in the lift, it raises the »



This page In the corridor between the two wings, a massive painting by Jasper Knight takes on almost mural-like proportions. Cassina 'Zig Zag' chair in oak by Gerrit Rietveld from the original apartment. **Opposite page** Just like that view, nothing is predictable here – vintage and modern pieces, some from the original apartment, others newly bought, mingle in the generous spaces. In the hallway, antique timber inlay console from the previous owner. Vitra 'Akari' rice-paper table lamp by Isamu Noguchi from Fineworks Paddington. Painting by Jasper Knight. Custom mirror.

SPEED READ

» The owner inherited a 21st-floor apartment overlooking Sydney Harbour from an elderly relative who had lived there for three decades. » The furniture and finishes were heavy and dark, with lots of brown, which did not reflect the sweeping spectacle beyond the wall-to-ceiling glass. » Briefed to lighten the ambience, interior designer Shareen Joel painted the walls in a fresh white, but with a warm, reddish undertone to counter the brilliant natural light that pours in through the glazing. » She retained much of the furniture and fittings, but gave them a refresh by stripping back some of the heavier timbers and adding a matt finish, and re-upholstering sofas in creamy linens and bouclés. Accessories, too, including sculpture and artworks, have been dusted off for a brighter future.



This page, clockwise from top left The views from all the rooms are simply breathtaking. Even the bathrooms and powder room share in the spectacle. Original benchtop in Carrara marble. Painting by Dani McKenzie. Shareen stripped back the joinery in the study to make it lighter. The desk and Cassina 'Indochine' armchair were both the original owner's. 'Shogun' lamp from Artemide. Painting by Rick Amor. **Opposite page** In the main bedroom, the bedhead was reupholstered in a smart white linen. De La Espada 'Classon' bedside chest from Fred International. Artwork by Ebony Truscott.



« question of how it got there in the first place. So Shareen had it revamped with loose covers in a crisp white linen “faithful to the original, but represented in a modern way”. The only furnishings shown the door were those two clunky leather chairs, while the rest received a refresh by being reupholstered and re-covered, or stripped and stained, accordingly. New additions include two Pierre Paulin chairs where the nubucks used to be, low-slung and flowing, much more attuned to the view than their predecessors. A wenge plinth, the desk in the study, chairs and tables were retained and revitalised where necessary. Old and modern mingle – for example, a carved Victorian turned-leg walnut table sits beside a Cassina ‘Zig Zag’ chair by Gerrit Rietveld. “We curated it and simply enhanced what was there,” says Shareen.

While bouclés and linens replaced the heavier fabrics of the past, timbers, including oak and wenge, are fresher and matt. The warm metal of choice which appears throughout, “brass is the jewellery”, says Shareen. Original accessories, too, have found a new generation of admirers, with sculptures, paintings and lashings of Lalique crystal featuring prominently. Lights are both new and borrowed from the home’s past iteration.

Now the owner finds even the most mundane activities uplifting, with view and decor in perfect harmony. Two of her favourite spaces – yes, from the kitchen sink and the powder room – are blessed with views that would make anyone look twice. Who would have thought washing up and daily grooming could be so glamorous. shareenjoel.com