

INTERIORS

# House tour: inside a contemporary waterfront home on Sydney's northern beaches

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Interior designer Sarah Davison radically overhauled this house on Sydney's Northern Beaches and created a home to suit its location. By Alexandra Gordon. Photographed by Prue Ruscoe



When interior designer Sarah Davison first laid eyes on the coastal home that would become her next project, she was somewhat taken aback. “It was painted a cheesecake yellow,” she remembers, “and there was a remedial-looking ramp running up to the top level. Inside it had a shiny, semi-circular pink granite staircase that didn’t line up with the front door, and some really horrible finishes.” It was an ugly duckling in a spectacular waterside setting overlooking a marine sanctuary on Sydney’s Northern beaches — surrounded by breathtaking ocean views — and it was just oozing with potential.

Davison wasn't brought to the house to resolve those particular issues, however; at least, not at first. Known for her masterful blend of vintage and contemporary, functionality and eclecticism — and having worked her singular magic on exclusive properties throughout the Sydney area — she'd been hired to help the owners out with furnishing. “They're a young couple with two little girls and had moved from Hong Kong to Sydney,” she says. “They'd been renting previously, so they had no furniture. But they'd been struggling with the renovation planning and just couldn't get the layouts right.”



Davison made a few pertinent suggestions and before she knew it, she had the job. Fortunately the structure had “great bones” — it had originally been built in the 1930s as a block of three apartments and still retained such Art Deco features as nautical curved balconies.



With a brief to design a classic family home conducive to the clients’ sporty, casual lifestyle, Davison gutted the house, removing structural walls that were blocking the ocean views, and resolved what had been an awkward entry, installing a stately stairway in Spanish limestone that leads down from the street to a dramatic charred-timber front door flanked by curved glass panels.





“The courtyard was excavated until it was level with the ground floor,” says Davison. “It gives a serene entry and a sheltered outdoor space when the wind picks up from the northeast. With the huge palm and all that stone, it almost feels Middle Eastern.”

The kitchen, which Davison custom-designed, was opened up to include a living and dining space. A sculptural grand piano-shaped pod cleverly conceals a scullery and laundry. “We had to push the engineer to give us this span but it’s really worthwhile,” Davison says. The rooms upstairs were rejigged to allow a generous main suite complete with walk-in wardrobe and ensuite. “In each of the bedrooms the beds face the ocean and they all have views — a glimpse or a full-frontal — which is pretty good going,” Davison adds.

To accommodate the busy household, comprising two adults working from home, two children in primary school and a cavoodle, a curved extension of the courtyard includes an entrance hall, powder room and homework nook downstairs, and a study above. This curvilinear language is repeated throughout, from the girls’ shower to the extended deck by the pool at lower ground level. Davison created a home once known as the ‘rec room’ beside the garage, with a billiard table and lounge area. A conservatory of the main structure now houses a floating timber staircase connecting this new space to the rest of the house.

Davison chose natural materials to reinforce the home's earthy, beachy feel, including recycled Australian hardwood floorboards that run throughout. The walls are painted a crisp white, accented by textured Moroccan tadelakt on the pod, main stairwell and in the bathrooms. Raw brass, dotted everywhere from the base of the custom island bench to lighting fixtures, tapware and curtain rods, adds relaxed glamour. "The view has so much colour in it, so I've kept the interior palette quite simple and pared back," the designer notes. "The ocean is the star."

The eclectic mix of furnishings was largely the result of buying trips to New York, Palm Springs, Los Angeles and Brazil. "I find that clients who have lived overseas like more worldly things," Davison says, "so they were very happy to mix vintage with Brazilian and American pieces. It's quite eclectic."

This isn't the first coastal home in Davison's portfolio and there's a reason for that: she adores designing a beach house. "It's so Australian and breezy and low-key," she declares. "This is my favourite project from the last few years. Look at this spot — it's crazily beautiful. There are not that many places in the world like this."



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