



THIS PAGE A Bocci light installation from Hub cascades down the centre of the spiral staircase. OPPOSITE PAGE Architect Robert Mills says the staircase was inspired by the work of English architect David Chipperfield, along with I.M. Pei, “who taught me about the power of pure forms”. The living room features a Moroso sofa in charcoal and an Ivano Redaelli ‘Leon’ rug in Mongolian goat.

With a twist

Outside it may be square shaped, but inside this contemporary Melbourne home it’s all about sinuous lines that soften the angles.

PHOTOGRAPHS [JASON BUSCH/ROOMIMAGES.COM](http://JASONBUSCH/ROOMIMAGES.COM) STYLING + WORDS **MEGAN MORTON**






It could be argued that Melbourne’s fairly flat topography offers little challenge to architects – there are no steep sites or undulating land to negotiate. So the task is probably to create something different in the urban landscape. Locally based modernist architect Robert Mills faced this exact dilemma recently when designing a home for one of his long-term clients, businessman Jody Biddle. The client had requested a “luxurious, contemporary inner-city family home”. Robert’s design responds to the flat surrounds with a boxy street facade, but inside it reveals a curvaceous soul which gives the home unique character.

The core of the four-bedroom home is a ribbon-like 3.5-metre-wide suspended staircase that weaves the three levels together. Surrounding this commanding focal point are round- or square-shaped spaces, working on the reliable theory that round elements take the edge off square forms.

The home was a finalist in the best residential interior category of the *Belle Georg Jensen Design Awards* announced recently, and the interiors reflect the owner’s appreciation of design as well as Robert’s restraint. “We deliberately left the house monochromatic,” says Robert, “because it’s important to allow the clients to express themselves with the interior, and a monochromatic backdrop supports this self-expression.”

One of the most interesting aspects is the museum-quality collection of aboriginal art. Works by artists, such as Emily Kngwarreye, Boxer Milner Tjampitjin and George Tjungurrayi, have an amazing energy and, when they are arranged together in one room, are quite compelling. “The scale of the artwork really suits the internal capacity of the house. Instead of overcrowding, the art seems to recess into the space, but still gives off an incredible vibrancy,” says Robert.



"WE DELIBERATELY LEFT THE HOUSE MONOCHROMATIC BECAUSE IT'S IMPORTANT TO ALLOW THE CLIENTS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES WITH THE INTERIOR."

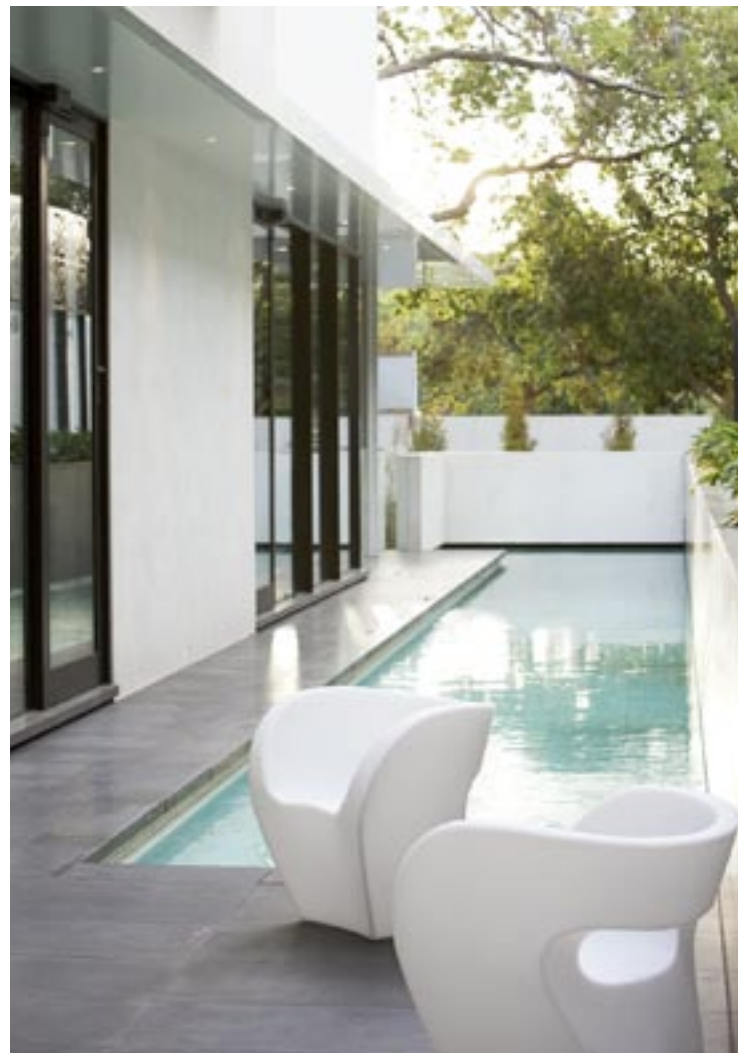
THESE PAGES The flooring is oak in a black/brown stain, complementing the carpet, Velieris alpaca in Negra, and a counterpoint to the white staircase and Moroso armchair. Black and white artwork is by Ningura Napurrula; red and white artwork (far left) is by Kathleen Padoon Napanangka. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP A pair of Patricia Urquiola 'Bloomy' chairs in mandarin and *Untitled* artworks by Boxer Milner Tjampitjin provide a punch of colour in the monochromatic space.

THIS PAGE Molteni&C 'Freestyle' sofa and Patricia Urquiola 'Bloomy' side table, topped with bowls by John Pawson, continue the monochromatic theme in the living area, with colourful *Sweetheart* painting by Todd Hunter. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The kitchen is well equipped with a scullery and larder, laundry and drying room; Anta floor lamp and *Untitled* painting by George Tjungurrayi. Dining table by Lowe Furniture with Patricia Urquiola for Molteni&C 'Glove' chairs. The study is furnished with a Moroso chair and Catellani & Smith 'PostKrisi' table lamp.

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For the same reason the furniture in the house needed to be quite impressive, too. Signature pieces grouped together create intimate spaces in the large living area and reflect the design aesthetics of both Robert and his client. Many of the pieces are Italian, from Moroso and Molteni&C, as well as hero pieces, such as a pair of Bloomy chairs by Patricia Urquiola for Moroso in a zingy mandarin colour.

Dining tables were made locally in Melbourne by wood specialists Lowe Furniture, with tableware by Ivano Redaelli, whose bed linen also features throughout the house.

The children's bedrooms have been kept deliberately small in an attempt to draw the family to the large communal spaces, which is, as Jody says, "a modern concept that is definitely worth pursuing".

Ultimately, though, it's the light and shade that dictate the way the spaces are used. Robert explains: "The open-plan living area is divided by the sculptural staircase so, during the day, the northern section is flooded with light and connected with the terrace and pool. Then, at night, the southern end feels insular and warm, perfect for quiet family evenings."

What the house does best though, is to create a seamless connection between indoors and out. The planting complements the architecture, and residents and visitors, as well as passers-by, can enjoy the wonderful vista of trees that surround the house. The most magnificent specimen is an 80-year-old pin oak tree in the front garden which served as an inspiration for the rest of the planting. On a garden-proud street this house is definitely one of the most verdant.

"I love that the house pushes these internal and external buttons," says Robert. "It's just as exciting to be in it as it is to come across it on the street." Which is, after all, surely one of the ultimate goals of good architecture. ■



SPEED READ

Robert Mills of Robert Mills Architects thought outside the box when designing this contemporary home in Melbourne. + While it presents a square, boxy facade to the street, the interior has a more curvaceous shape, with a 3.5-metre spiral staircase anchoring the three levels. + The garden, with its enviable collection of mature trees and lush plantings, is a perfect complement to the home.



THIS PAGE Built around an 80-year-old pin oak tree, most of the rooms have views of foliage. And the usual concerns of a tree hanging over a pool were alleviated by installing a retractable cover that slides over the pool at the touch of a button. Metal wall frieze decorates one side of the pool. Patricia Urquiola for Moroso 'Fjord' dining chairs. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A flower-patterned rug from Moroso adds warmth to the home theatre, which is furnished with leather armchairs from Moroso, an Eclipse lamp by Mauricio Klabin for Objekto and a Karboxx 'Half Moon' lamp. Ron Arad for Moroso 'Little Albert' chairs from Hub sit at one end of the lap pool. Natural light floods the house.

