

SAFE HAVEN

Rowena Robertson visits a Melbourne apartment where luxury and sustainability harmoniously co-exist.

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HIGH-QUALITY LUXURY LIVING AND DEVELOPMENTS often don't mix, but this contemporary apartment in Walsh Street, South Yarra shows that occasionally they can. The faultless result here can be attributed to both the vision of the project's architect and interior designer Robert Mills, and that of its developer and co-interior designer Kerry Clifford of Portsea Design Company. The former is known for his distinctive modernist style and the latter is a staunch devotee of minimalism.

The development is the result of a process that began around 20 years ago when Clifford's partner approached Mills about renovating the couple's home, which once stood on the site. It was ultimately decided that starting over would be the best route to take, so the old house was demolished and the new project set in train. Obtaining the relevant permits took five years and the design and build two.

Entry is via the lift from the basement or from the ground level. The apartment is flooded with natural light and is calming and ordered; its hallmarks are uninterrupted sightlines, right angles and a lack of adornment.

"We set out to produce an absolutely fresh, contemporary interior," says Mills. "One of the fundamental principles was to really pare things back as far as possible, so that your eye doesn't experience a 'staccato' effect. Achieving that is the bit that's really complicated. We've taken reference from all sorts of designers – Australian, European – who I think are really great at that task, and have learned from them and have brought our own language to it."

The 'pared back' ethos is perhaps best exemplified in the kitchen where one material, acrylic, dominates. It is used for the long bench tops and for

01. From the moment you cross the threshold, you enter a place of repose.

02. The apartment's open plan embraces a fluid transition between living spaces.

03. Pared back detail and clean strong lines define joinery and wood panelling throughout the project.

04. The strong geometry and disciplined materiality of the kitchen area.



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06



07

- 05.**
The bathroom is delicately lit and warmed by earthy tones.
- 06.**
A connecting corridor between living and sleeping is fitted with flush barely visible storage.
- 07.**
The luminous bathroom bursts with morning light.

the sink, which were custom-made by Benalli Kitchen Concepts. Drawers and cupboards are handle-free, there is a tucked-away pantry/preparation area, integrated refrigerator and dishwasher, and new generation Miele appliances, including a plumbed-in coffee machine and a second oven-cum-microwave. Tapware has been supplied by Mary Noall.

The main living space showcases the apartment's La Perla limestone floors. One wall is dominated by sliding blonde veneer panels by Adam Wells from Benalli Kitchen Concepts (Wells was responsible for all the joinery and wood panelling for the apartment). Behind the panels lie the apartment's wiring and a small office 'nook'.

The main hallway is characterised by beautiful lines: everything is flush and plaster has been eliminated, for the most part, in favour of matte MDF. As with the kitchen, acrylic is the material of choice in the bathrooms. For

these Benalli has made jointless wall panelling and vanities. The master en suite features a huge pivot window/door that allows the outside in. A tiny powder room off the hallway is the antithesis of the bathrooms: where they are spacious, stark and white, this is a dark, burrow-like space. John Bishop from Bishop Décor has used a black Marmorino polished plaster with a gold wax on the walls; his handiwork is perfectly highlighted by a Catellani and Smith suspension light.

There are three bedrooms that are the same apart from the wardrobe configuration. Huge doors close off the master bedroom for privacy; when open they sit perfectly flush against the wall. The apartment is smart wired: blinds and lights are automated, air-conditioning is zoned and there is a high-end video intercom, security alarm, coil floor heating and 'stealth' in-ceiling speakers with surround sound.



08.
A sense of formal composition extends to the residual space of the walk in robe.



09.
Second bedroom with ensuite. The apartment's refuge is punctured, from time to time, with carefully curated views to the outside world.

Rob Mills considers this project an important stepping stone in his company's development; however, to assume this means that he is simply pleased to have ticked some bigger and better luxury boxes than previously would be to misinterpret him. This project, like all Mills' work, is underpinned by a philosophical/intellectual position centred on ideas about what is required for achieving a sense of wellbeing within our environments and adherence to a particular notion of sustainability.

"We all have a responsibility as designers, I think, to produce results – projects, houses, apartments – that are truly valued," he says. "If we can do that, they'll be loved and nurtured and they will not be demolished in 20 years' time. That is being truly sustainable, and that is what we're all about. ... when you return home from a busy, stressed, work environment, or if you're an active mother participating in school, you need to go back to a place of refuge. How we think you best achieve that is by creating a very serene environment, and that's what this is. When you walk in there's a peace to this place, fresh air, which is essential to the well-being of a person in their home. There's lots of cross-ventilation and easy to open windows that are still secure. Now these all sound like mundane things, but it's all part of producing something that works. And if it works it will last, and if it lasts it will be sustainable." *(inside)*

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