


COMMUNITY VALUES

A PASSION FOR AUSTRALIAN ART AND COMMUNAL SPACES CREATES A GENEROUS SENSE OF SPIRIT IN THE MELBOURNE HOME OF ARCHITECT ROB MILLS

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A French table from Miguel Meinelles Antiques divides the large, open-plan living and dining areas in Rob Mills's Melbourne home. Coral from Parterre, Asian antiquities and a shell-shaped Tsé & Tsé 'Igloos de Nuit' votive holder make up the current table display. A pair of wooden mobiles hang near the painting *Carnival Collection* by Marnie Wark, from Scott Livesey Galleries. →



David Larwill's painting *City Menace* from Gould Galleries creates a striking presence behind a Normandy farmhouse table from Miguel Meirelles Antiques. **[Opposite page, right]** Rob sits in a Moroso 'Take A Line For A Walk' armchair; displayed nearby is Emily Kame Kngwarreye's *Yam Tracks II* from Delmore Gallery. Neutral-toned pieces complement the vivid blues of David Bromley's *Butterflies* from Scott Livesey Galleries **[opposite page, left]**.



En route to the kitchen is a mini-gallery of art. *Giraffes* by John Olsen (far left) and *Dancers* by Gerard Manion (third from left) are both from Maunsell Wickes at Barry Stern Galleries. The neighbouring artworks (second from left and far right) are from Dr Takata George Tjapaltjarri's *Fire Ceremony Body Paint* series, from Aboriginal Galleries of Australia. A print by Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti from the Tate Modern in London hangs above an Eames rocker.

Joshua Yeldham's *Jumping into Blue* from Scott Livesey Galleries adds a graphic touch to Rob's clean and airy bedroom (right), with its views of the light-filled outdoor terrace and trees beyond (below). "There's nothing better than waking up in the morning to the dappled sunlight from the plane tree leaves in the park," says Rob. "The trees make it really seasonal, giving you an innate sense of what's going on outside."



OWNER'S TIP When it comes to commissioning an architect, Rob advises choosing one who excites and challenges. Residential architecture and interiors can be far more complicated than any other type of project, so be sure they specialise in this area. From then on, it's the owner's responsibility to write a brief that matches their budget, and the architect's responsibility (via a quantity surveyor) to inform the owner about the costs and time frames.

Working with such a large area caught him by surprise. "This house has taught me so much about light and space – elements of scale that you really don't find in a conventional home," he says. It's also changed the way that Rob deals with architectural commissions, as well as the character he creates with his work. So the warehouse is his inspiration, home, gallery and family nest all in one.

"What I love about this house is the way it works," explains Rob. "During the day the kitchen is busy and filled with light, so the sitting room is where we do all our relaxing. Come dark, we're at the dinner table and then we retreat to the more formal lounge area to watch a movie or the television. There's a natural progression from front to back, from light to dark, throughout the day." Rob knows how lucky he is to have two living spaces and he makes sure he uses them equally. "That's the beauty of this place; you can use all its defined and separate parts while still being part of the whole."

Full of the unexpected (even the veneered nook harbours a painting that suits its setting perfectly), the vastness of the home ensures anything is possible. But eclecticism is not as easy as it looks. Rob reveals his secret is to keep a constant eye open. "I buy all genres of art," he says of his impressive collection. "I have Aboriginal and 'white' art hanging side by side, with the common thread being that most of it is Australian." The exceptions are a few works he bought at the Tate Modern in London, including a print by Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti.

Most new visitors to Rob's house are pretty quiet for the first half-hour. The space offers so much to look at, it's hard to absorb it all in the one sitting. From the minimalist Christmas tree hanging upside-down year-round in the living room to the outstanding pedigree of artwork, it's a visual feast. No wonder, then, that Rob has a hard time getting rid of guests after dinner parties when everyone is still sticky-beaking at the end of the night. "It's one of those great daytime spaces that is just as magical in the evening," says Rob. "It's a real all-rounder." ✦

For information on Robert Mills Architects, visit www.robmills.com.au.



DESIGN DETAILS

FOUR GREAT IDEAS FROM ROB MILLS'S HOUSE

1 ROOM FOR ALL The rear view of the warehouse reveals its impressive architecture. "It's a big house on a small plot," explains Rob, but the open-roof upstairs terrace enlarges the space and means the seasons are always on show, while the adjoining local park literally acts as the 'backyard'. "I really believe the housing market would support community spaces – where the space usually given to private houses is joined and shared within the community," he says.

2 SPACE POD The previous owner had Salter Architects devise an ingenious pod-like 'nook' in the centre of the warehouse to enclose the staircase to the upper bedroom level and hide the plumbing and utilities. It also provides a place for dropping off keys, bags and coats. "It's like a little 'foyer' in the centre of the room," explains Rob. "One of my favourite paintings hangs there and belongs there, in its own space." He adds that the nook "also serves as a natural break between the living and the kitchen areas".

3 HEART OF ART Rob, an avid art collector, is always looking for great Australian works by contemporary and indigenous artists. Here, a painting by Boxer Milner Tjampitjin from Joel Fine Art hangs above a pew from Safari Living and a rug from Loom Rugs. "This might stay for a year and then I'll change it all around," says Rob. "I love the way this kind of space can handle so many variations, and they always seem to have a natural 'fit' within the space." Rob's mantra for purchasing art? "Only buy what you love."

4 GREAT DIVIDE "My time with my daughters is precious, so I didn't want to box them into a traditional bedroom," says Rob. "A curtain separates their space from the other rooms on the top floor. It keeps them close – and they'll never slam their bedroom doors, as they don't have them!" A vintage poster from Letitia Morris separates the two beds in the girls' room and helps fill the wall space. *Turn to the Address Book on page 193 for contact details.* →