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YOUR GUIDE TO MODERN-COUNTRY STYLE

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GRAND *Plans*

Take one faded late-Victorian gem, add a committed and creative owner, mix in a dedicated design team and you've got the perfect recipe for a stunning period transformation.

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Styling by Kirstin Randl-Katalinic

SONY
Yesterday's Children
GNOMES
The Most Beautiful Villages

Welcome to the house Rebecca rebuilt – a stately residence in Mosman on Sydney's lower north shore. From the outside, there's no hint this elegant home was once a neglected beauty in dire need of a sympathetic eye.

Luckily, Rebecca and her husband Rob had already renovated a period property nearby and could see past the sad facade to the potential underneath. "It was a little bit quirky and I loved its beautiful old bones," Rebecca recalls. "It's built on lovely sandstone blocks and had gorgeous high ceilings. We really love the character of old homes and the fact they have a bit of history."

A chequered past

Originally built in 1898, a series of poorly done higgledy-piggledy renovations and unsightly fibro additions had left the house bereft of style. Undeterred, Rebecca and Rob bought the home and immediately set to work, enlisting the aid of architectural firm Benn Design in North Sydney. They were determined to reinstate the traditional features, while also creating a fabulous, functional family home.

"At one stage we pulled up some carpet and found about five layers of flooring underneath," marvels Rebecca, "but we knew if we wanted to return the house to its former glory it would take a lot of work. We ended up losing all except three of the walls and we completely gutted the rest of the house."

The renovation took a year to complete but the results were well worth the wait. The revamped home features a first-floor addition with four bedrooms and bathrooms offering plenty of space for the couple's three teenage children. Excavation work under the house created extra rooms including a study, wine cellar and a rumpus – or party room as the kids like to call it.

Turning back time

Rebecca, a music teacher, had a hands-on role in the renovation, project-managing the work and undertaking all the interior decoration herself. It was crucial the home's original period detailing was matched carefully and she set about the task with gusto.

A keen bargain shopper, Rebecca trawled auction houses and restoration shops to find traditional pieces, and sourced leadlight windows from Artarmon Joinery to match the originals. "I found all the plaster ceilings, ornate cornices and skirtings, opting for materials that were in keeping with the era of the house," she says. "They look like they've always been there."

Rebecca and Rob hired a team of builders from James Hurt Building & Construction, and they really went above and beyond the call of duty. "They hand-cut the cedar shingles for the house," Rebecca says, "and did a lot of technical carpentry, restoring and reusing period materials from elsewhere."

A nearby house demolition offered rich pickings for this keen restorer. Rebecca retrieved mantelpieces and a front door and reinstated them in her home. "It's a matter of looking around and saying we've got this, what are we going to do with it," she explains. "I love reusing pieces."

RIGHT: Rebecca rescued two mirror doors from a built-in wardrobe and put them to good use in the family area. Hung on the wall as feature pieces, they elongate and open up the space.

Steel bar stools from Le Forge are an eye-catching piece in the otherwise modern kitchen. "I've always liked that mix of old and new," Rebecca says.

The formal dining room features striking walls painted in Resene's Pohutukawa, ornate cornices, an original leadlight window and a white mantelpiece salvaged from a nearby house demolition.

Rebecca installed rich hardwood flooring, contrasting it with Dulux Vivid White on the walls and trims. The rooms have been lovingly filled with pieces the family has collected over the years. "We have a lot of furniture in the house that was given to us by family members," she says, "so a lot of the pieces have stories behind them."

Family matters

Family is paramount for Rebecca and Rob, and this is reflected in the home's new design with its successful fusion of traditional elegance and contemporary family living. "It's a very practical house with a real family feel," Rebecca says. "You come in and immediately feel comfortable."

The sleek white kitchen has a streamlined look, with a stainless-steel Ilve cooker, concealed rangehood and handle-free cabinetry. "It's so easy to clean, which is important in a very active house like ours," Rebecca laughs. "With three teenagers it's all about food, sport, friends, sleepovers, more food ..."

Elegant pendant lights highlight the well-used four-metre-long island bench. "I wanted the bench to be huge," explains Rebecca. "We use it all the time for casual meals and it's so functional. If we have people over we can use the bench as a servery and put all the food down one end, or set out all the glasses as an open bar."

ABOVE LEFT: The kitchen features Vivid White cabinetry, CaesarStone benchtops in Snow and a glass splashback in a lovely shade of aquamarine to reflect the water in the pool outside.

A living area adjoins the kitchen and this is all about comfort, cosiness and family time. The modern lounge by King Furniture sits opposite a working gas fireplace and a flat-screen television – a must-have with teenagers in the house.

The formal dining room with its striking magenta walls, grand dimensions and traditional features is another family hub. "We call it the red room," Rebecca smiles. "We eat dinner in there together every night and joke that what's said in the red room stays in the red room!"

Master suite

Rebecca was determined to maintain the traditional lines of the house, so the master bedroom was carefully designed to fit in a gable which fronts the house. "It was really important to us that the look of the house still fit in with the rest of the streetscape," she explains.

The result is a fabulous parents' retreat with dramatic raked ceilings, a luxurious ensuite bathroom, an adjoining private balcony with sweeping views, and skylights above the bed. "You can lie in bed and look up at the stars – which is pretty amazing," says Rebecca.

Rebecca and her family are enjoying living in their rebuilt family-friendly home. "We're so happy with the renovation," she enthuses. "We love having people over and this house is perfect for that. It's a great location, it's wonderful for parties and it's a terrific family space."

ABOVE: Upstairs, the large master bedroom is painted in tranquil Dulux Hog Bristle and was designed to fit in a gable that fronts the house, creating magnificent raked ceilings.

The huge renovation hasn't dampened Rebecca's love of decorating, although if she embarks on another project, it might not be so close to home. "I'd love to renovate for someone else so I don't have to move again!" she laughs. ■

ABOVE LEFT: The majestic carved oak bed in Rebecca's daughter's room is a family heirloom, coming all the way from Mississippi in the US. Made in the 1830s, it has true sentimental value – Rebecca's great-great-grandmother was born in it!

ABOVE RIGHT: A French-look mirror sits alongside a traditional-style medicine cabinet from Recollections, adding an elegant air to the guest bathroom.

Rebecca's Tips

- Ask around for referrals for builders and architects to find someone you can trust. Rebecca credits the success of the renovation to the team she worked with. "They really listened to what we wanted," she says.
- Look for decorating inspiration in magazines and shops, or by walking around your neighbourhood to see what others have done with their homes.
- Be creative with paint colours. "The great thing about paint is you can always colour over it if you don't like it," Rebecca explains.

A covered balcony off the main bedroom features travertine floor tiles and a Le Forge steel bench, creating a secluded parents' retreat with sweeping views.