



GLOWING TRIBUTE

A life-sized wisteria wallpaper inspired a colour pairing that proved in keeping with the glamorous spirit of this grand home.

Photographs MAREE HOMER Words JANICE JONES



This page The De Gournay 'Wisteria' handpainted silk wallpaper wraps around the wall in the formal sitting room, framing the view through to the dining room. Vintage chinolserie stool. Oly Studio 'Tatum' chairs ring a vintage marble and chrome dining table. Vintage lucite banded pendant light. Opposite page The porte-cochère provides a grand entrance to the home. The garden was created by Richard Unsworth of Garden Life.



This page A mid-century Venetian chandelier from Showplace NYC sparkles in the entry. The stair runner was custom made by Whitecliffe Imports. ‘Circles and Squares’ rug from Cadrys. Opposite page, top A pair of arched French doors connect the dining room to the garden. Below The sofa in the formal sitting room was re-upholstered in Carlucci di Chivasso purple velvet. Scalloped-edge brass coffee table circa 1960. Mirrored 1970s artwork by Greg Copeland.

Applying a palette of punches of royal purple spiced with complementary pops of orange might seem a daring move, especially in such a grand old house as this on Sydney’s North Shore. But interior designer Brendan Wong, enlisted by the owners to restore and revamp the distinguished beauty, is known for his deft hand and his playful colour choices, and layers of decorative detail have resulted in a striking home of radical elegance.

“My clients had lived in the house for several years after purchasing it from the previous owner who had not made major improvements for 40 years,” says Brendan of the 1930s neo Georgian-style house with Spanish influences and art deco details that was once part of a larger family estate. “They loved the generous proportions of the house and surrounding gardens but wanted a more considered decorating approach and better connectivity in the casual living areas.”

The owners had a strong interest in design across a number of differing periods, including art deco, mid-century American, and 1960s and 70s glamour so Brendan developed a concept that responded appropriately. “My approach was to restore the classically handsome bones of the house, then outfit it with an elegant yet vivacious edge – so there are visual contrasts and tensions that are almost cinematic. It’s like an old movie script that has been brought to life by a carefully selected group of new actors.”

The two-storey home has four bedrooms, three bathrooms and various living, library and other rooms. Its large scale means there is a clear purpose for each room, be it relaxing, reading or recreation, and Brendan’s design responds to that. “When you move from one room to the next there is a consistent approach to the layering of detail and the bold use of vibrant colour. The colour of artwork in one room is a subtle link to furnishings in another. Much of the furniture is vintage and was sourced globally, now coming together to contribute even further to a house that already has so much history.”

The designer took the time to seek out skilled craftspeople to restore authentic elements of the grand house. He had some unusual challenges such as finding someone to restore the original internal bell system once used to summon the servants.

The original Solomonian columns and grand plasterwork were also restored and form a dramatic decorative arch at the start of the stairs in the entry hall, which serves to connect the ground floor rooms. To lead the eye up the timber staircase, Brendan conceived a rich purple runner featuring a fine gold pinstripe on one side as a nod to the unconventional and “to hint at unexpected interior elements within the traditional envelope”.

The designer was prompted by the owners to include “something handpainted” in the formal sitting room and selected the delicate De Gournay silk wallpaper for the walls. Its life-sized wisteria pattern cascades from above and meanders around the room, trailing up and over archways bringing a soft touch to the interiors and serving as a continuation of garden views.

“The purple and orange theme was inspired by the wisteria,” says Brendan, who was encouraged by the owners to be bold with colour. “The purple has a stateliness to it that befits the architecture – a grandeur as colour applied in a contemporary way. During the day, the room sings with hues of purple and orange and, although the arrangement of the furniture is somewhat formal, there is a genuine sense of comfort in the room. In the evening, the ceiling comes alive with reflections from the Murano glass chandelier, each leaf illuminating the next.”

The brief called for better connectivity in the casual living areas. “With the doors open and striped awnings lowered, there is a great



“... The room sings with hues of purple and orange ... In the evening, the ceiling comes alive with reflections from the Murano chandelier.”

These pages De Gournay 'Wisteria' handpainted silk wallpaper in the formal sitting room. On the velvet sofa are a pair of custom cushions in Kelly Wearstler 'Edo' fabric. Barovier&Toso 1960s 'Palmette' chandelier. 'Milo' upholstered armchairs from Jason Mowen. Kelly Wearstler 'Tribute' marble side table from Becker Minty. Pair of vintage 1970s stacked Murano glass table lamps from Marché Malassis, Paris. Custom silk rug by Brendan Wong Design.



sense of sheltered connection to the pool and garden.” From the dining room with its grand arched windows, double doors open into the library where another set connects to the garden, revamped by Richard Unsworth of Garden Life.

In the library, Brendan created crosshatched bookshelves in glossy lucite and mirror to give a sense of continued depth. “I really enjoyed the creation of the library – there’s so much focus on technology and television these days that it’s a pleasure to encourage people to pick up a book and take the time to read and relax. Books laid out on a generous coffee table and a comfortable sofa and footstool could be all the inspiration you need to spend an afternoon reading,” he says.

The 1930s full-sized billiard table still blazes a vibrant green in its original room under the French-polished timber beams but is now accompanied by a Catherine Martin geometric wallpaper, new velvet upholstery and handsome bronze light fittings.

Brendan also exercised his licence for colour in the main bedroom, pairing textural pink grasscloth with a custom patterned purple carpet, bold timber grains and strong accent colours. “My intention was for the bedroom to be visually uplifting, with a freshness that brings a smile to the face each morning,” he explains.

In the end not one square centimetre was left untouched as other aspects of the house started to materialise. “We went over it with a fine-toothed comb to bring out the glory that may have been masked,” says Brendan. “The owners were a joy to work with and were rapt with the result. Having put a lot of trust in the concepts, especially in regards to colour – much of them quite brave choices – they really enjoyed seeing the house finished and were delighted with its sense of vibrancy and how we breathed new life into their home.” 15

For more go to brendanwong.com



This page The 1930s billiard table is in mint condition. ‘Metropolis’ wallpaper by Catherine Martin. Opposite page, top An armchair upholstered in vintage Schumacher fabric in the library. Below French doors were added to flow through to the library with another set opening to the garden. Custom lucite and mirror bookshelves by Brendan Wong Design. Artwork by Dale Frank. Jonathan Adler ‘Rider’ benches with custom upholstery.

SPEED READ

» The owners of a grand 1930s neo-Georgian style house on Sydney's North Shore engaged designer Brendan Wong to completely transform the home's interiors. » A multitude of decorative elements of the home such as the Solomonic columns and the plasterwork were carefully restored to their original glory. » The casual living areas connect better and allow an easy flow through to the glamorous pool area and the garden created by Richard Unsworth. » The designer selected a handpainted silk wallpaper in a wisteria pattern that inspired the elements of rich royal purple and orange accents seen throughout the ground floor rooms.



This page Paul Evans 1970s console in pewter, copper, bronze and slate in the entry foyer. Artwork unknown. Opposite page, top Kelly Wearstler 'Souffle' ruched leather chair in the main bedroom with a 1980s artwork by Byron Gálvez hanging above. Below French doors were installed to open up the house to the revamped poolside entertaining area. Walter Knoll 'Bertoia' chairs and 'Petal' table sit under a striped awning by Simple Studio.



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