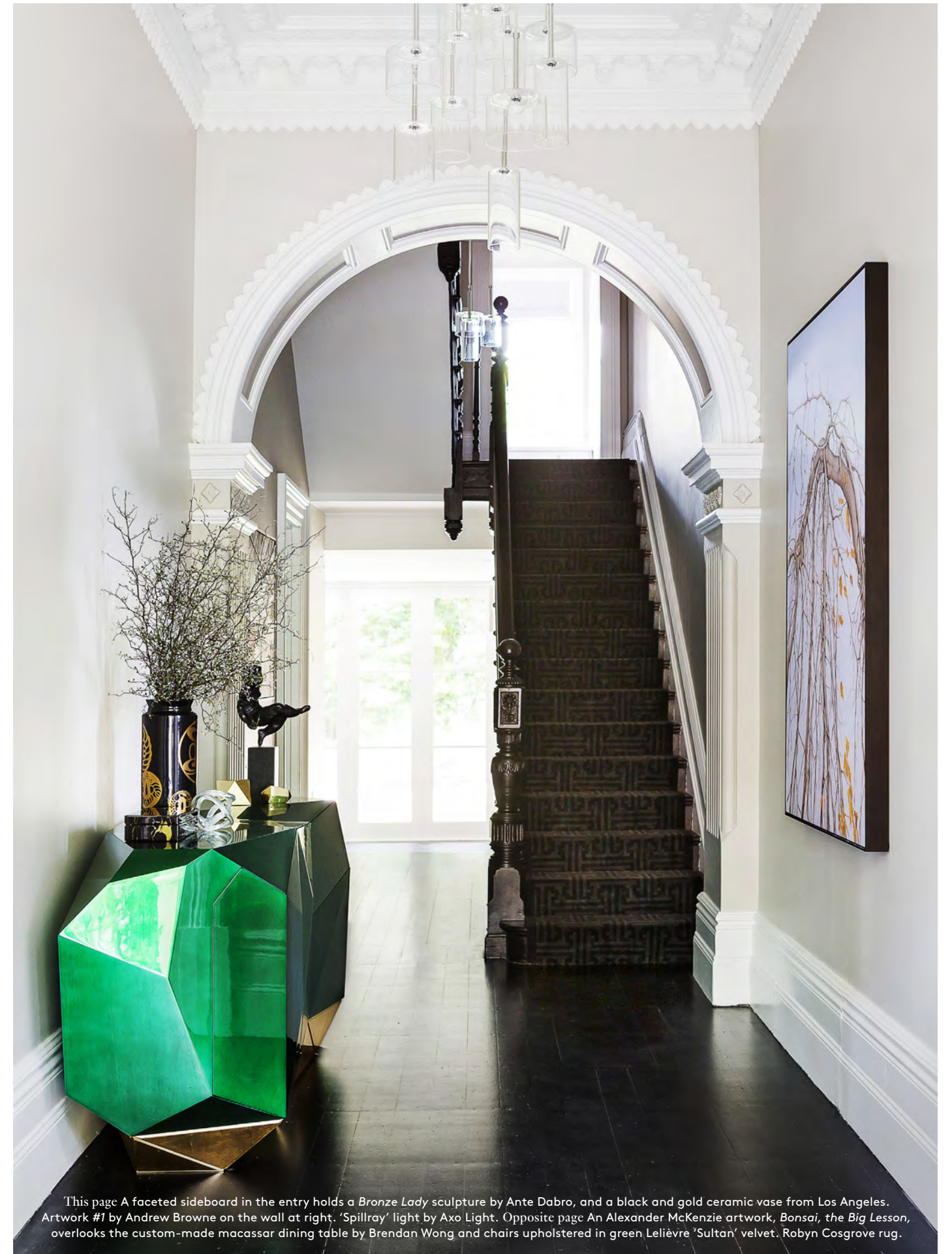


Fine points

The devil is in the detail for interior designer *Brendan Wong* who finessed this 1890s home into a modern gem.

Photographs MAREE HOMER Words JEAN WRIGHT



This page A faceted sideboard in the entry holds a *Bronze Lady* sculpture by Ante Dabro, and a black and gold ceramic vase from Los Angeles. Artwork #1 by Andrew Browne on the wall at right. 'Spillray' light by Axo Light. Opposite page An Alexander McKenzie artwork, *Bonsai, the Big Lesson*, overlooks the custom-made macassar dining table by Brendan Wong and chairs upholstered in green Lelièvre 'Sultan' velvet. Robyn Cosgrove rug.



First impressions are often the most significant. When Sydney-based interior designer Brendan Wong first saw the grand Victorian house his clients had bought, it was the mix of strong proportions with a certain delicateness that resonated with him – and influenced his approach to the design of the interior.

Built around 1891 – on the cusp of high- and late-Victorian styles – the handsome exterior features were essentially intact: fine cast-iron lacework to verandahs, intricate eaves supports, central arched entrance, and a tower that would once have led to a widow’s walk. Like many grand houses of that period – and partly the reason they still exist – it had had a mixed history as a private hospital and later a 22-room boarding house with separate entrances and kitchenettes, before being restored. Fortunately the ornate plaster ceilings had only been sheeted over so were still intact.

The owners’ brief to the designer was to maintain the grandeur of the house but to create something that suited their growing family of five. “They wanted modern elegance with warmth, but not too uptight,” says Brendan. “The intention was to create a strong first impression. Then, they wanted the finer details, new textures and finishes to be revealed gradually, rather than be completely obvious.”

A statement-making emerald green lacquered and bronze sideboard in the wide entrance hallway does just that. Chosen by the designer and owners together, its sculptural, faceted

These pages Qly San Francisco ‘Layla’ chairs are upholstered in toffee-coloured mohair. Cushions are in Groundworks ‘Knossos’. Shagreen coffee table sits on a rug from Hali. Custom ‘X’-leg stool is upholstered in Romo Black Edition ‘Jackson’ velvet in Fenugreek. Macassar bookshelves were custom designed by Brendan Wong. In the dining area, Oluce ‘Atollo’ lamps sit on lacquer and brass credenzas. Custom-made contemporary mirrors hang over the original marble mantelpieces. Opposite page Black Japan floors in the hallway. Axo Light ‘Spillray’ lightfitting.



This page A Lucite desk with a custom glass top by Brendan Wong is positioned to give a view over the formal sitting area. Vintage chair from L.A. Opposite page, clockwise from top left Oluce 'Atollo' lamp sits on a lacquer and brass credenza. Pino Morning Breeze painting hangs above a vintage bar cart holding accessories by Jasper Conran. Macassar bookshelves were custom designed by Brendan. In the informal sitting area is a sofa upholstered in Schumacher 'Gainsborough' velvet. Jonathan Adler coffee table. Rug by Robyn Cosgrove. Nemo 'Crown Major' lightfitting. Photograph is By Feel by Tamara Dean.



shape defies convention, and the mirror-like reflective finish against the black Japan floorboards, original cedar staircase and traditional semi-circular archway is a bold surprise and sets the tone for the connecting rooms.

There is a wonderful dialogue between the old and new, traditional and contemporary throughout. The formal living room with its three-and-a-half-metre-high ceilings, cast plaster roses and cornices functions as a true multi-purpose salon. The piano is a much-loved family heirloom and is contrasted with a modern Lucite desk custom designed by Brendan. The bookshelves in macassar are set against ‘X’-leg stools upholstered in a youthful, patterned velvet, and a classic deep-buttoned sofa and a pair of Oly San Francisco armchairs complete the scene.

Silk rugs – by Hali in the sitting room and by Robyn Cosgrove in the dining room – are a classic element, while velvet upholstery and a shagreen coffee table provide a luxury touch. Custom-made contemporary mirrors over the original mantelpieces are intentionally edgy and, like a piece of art, they lift and lighten the mood.

The home is not overly furnished. “You need to know when to stop,” says Brendan.

Accent colours in this space, such as the chairs upholstered in a green Lelièvre ‘Sultan’ fabric, echo the Alexander McKenzie artwork on the wall of the dining area, the position of the painting giving the impression of looking through a window. The dining table is a custom design by Brendan in macassar, walnut and ebonised oak. A pair of side cabinets in lacquer with brass highlights sit under the windows, while a vintage bar cart is the only other piece of furniture in the dining room. The home is not overly furnished. “You need to know when to stop,” says Brendan.

Light fixtures throughout the home are simple and restrained, such as the ‘Spillray’ by Axo Light glass and nickel fixtures in the sitting and dining room, which neither dominate nor compete with the original architectural elements.

In the informal living room that doubles as a TV room, a masculine three-seater sofa is juxtaposed with a light and feminine settee upholstered in gold velvet from Schumacher and soft linen curtains. A Jonathan Adler coffee table with chrome legs is a modern punctuation point in an otherwise classic room, sitting on a midnight sky rug from Robyn Cosgrove and overlooked by a large Tamara Dean photographic work, *By Feel*.

Upstairs, a sizable master bedroom has a quiet relaxing outlook over trees. It is furnished for comfort with a classic sensibility. The graduated drapery is ‘Hockney’ from Elliott Clarke, complemented by wallpaper with micro dots that creates a stippled effect. The focus of the room is an over-scaled headboard designed by Brendan as articulated panels wrapped in ochre leather. A chaise, also custom designed by Brendan, provides the perfect spot for the owners to sit and enjoy the wonderful light that floods the room. 15

For more go to brendanwong.com.

SPEED READ

» Interior designer Brendan Wong was called on to update this grand Victorian house into a modern, elegant home for a family of five. » Once a private hospital, then a boarding house, the building had a chequered history but many of its original features, such as the iron lacework on the verandahs, the ornate ceilings, arched entrance and a tower that would have led to a widow’s walk, were still intact or just covered over. » Brendan was able to maintain the grandeur of the house while introducing contemporary furnishings and details, allowing a wonderful interplay between old and new. » Sumptuous velvet upholstery, lacquer and brass furniture and silk rugs add a note of opulence to the decor while modern lightfittings and angular mirrors provide contrast against the original patterned ceilings and marble fireplaces.

This page The main bedroom enjoys beautiful light and a restful outlook over the trees. The bedhead was designed by Brendan as articulated panels wrapped in ochre leather. Custom-made chaise by Brendan, with cushions in Groundworks ‘Louvered Maze’. Alabaster lamp by Laura Kincade. Forged iron and leather stools sit in front of the windows. Curtains are in Elliott Clarke ‘Hockney’ fabric.