



EXTERIOR

A lot of time was spent landscaping the surrounds to enhance the whole mid-century modern feel of the house.

Block walls, Straight Level Bricklaying. **Breeze blocks**, Cubic Products

BACK TO THE FUTURE

A mid-century marvel in Melbourne's leafy suburbs mixes modern luxury with retro details

✦ **PHOTOGRAPHY** Tom Blachford/Living Agency
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LIVING ROOM

'The whole point of buying this house was being in this room and feeling the scale of the ceiling and windows,' says homeowner and designer Erica, 'so we wanted interesting furniture that didn't take away from that.'

Sofa, sourced locally; find similar at John Lewis & Partners. **Coffee table**, sourced locally; find similar from The Masie. **Rug**, The Rug Collection. **Twiggy floor lamp**, Foscarini. **Stone stool**, Kartell. **Wylie chair**, En Gold. **Space lounge chair**, Fritz Hansen. **Artwork** by Toby Raine





A second opinion, it turns out, can come in very handy when hunting for a dream home. When Erica George, a commercial office designer, first viewed this dilapidated modernist villa, built in the early 70s by industrial designer Graeme James Amos, in 2021, she dismissed it

as ‘too much work’. Her husband, the heavy metal bassist-turned-electrician Damon McKinnon, convinced her otherwise. ‘We were struck by its unique character and great bones, including its double-brick construction, split-level floor plan and classic flat roof,’ he says.

Although the Melbourne-based couple soon stripped the building back to its bricks, it was apparent to them, says Erica, that its architect Graeme James Amos’s ‘design intent and eye for detail was incredible – he was a real master’. The house had so many early 70s elements – including its sunken living area, soaring floor-to-ceiling timber windows and a 10-metre-long sunken hallway that, Damon adds, evokes the feeling of ‘entering an exclusive house party in a James Bond movie’ – that the era felt like a natural design direction to follow.

The couple spent months designing their own sympathetic version, but with added functionality and flow. ‘We wanted to extend what the architect had done,’ says Erica. She admits, however, that ‘retaining the mid-century charm while creating a feeling of modern luxury was a hard balance to strike’. So they used period-appropriate materials such as terrazzo and timber, but with a more contemporary palette ‘that purists wouldn’t like’, says Damon – for example, painting the wooden window frames black. They added grey terrazzo floor tiles throughout and lined the ceilings with warm-toned eucalyptus in the carport, hallway and living room. The pair also revitalised the outdoor entertaining area by leaning into the curves of the original 2.7m-deep swimming pool.

The house’s bushland setting was another important theme of the renovation. The interior space was designed to frame these external views, which were updated with ‘pops of cacti and succulents, rocks and pebble beds’, says Erica, inspired, she adds, by the sparse cactus gardens of mid-century houses in Palm Springs. Then they worked on ‘bringing the outdoors in’ by filling the house with light and views, with 12 new skylights and a

natural colour palette – a calacatta verde marble island in the kitchen and green mosaic tiles in the bathroom, for example. It’s a colour scheme that brings out the house’s quintessential 70s aesthetic, which they also referenced with shagpile rugs, chocolate hues and coloured stone.

When it came to furnishing the place, they wanted ‘standout pieces that were recognisable from the time, such as chairs by Eames and Fritz Hansen’, says Erica – but again, they strove for a balance with more contemporary design, like the black timber cabinetry and brass finishes. And for added colour, they included a few eclectic furniture pieces and artworks. ‘With mid-century design, you can really have some fun with colour,’ adds Damon.

After two years working full-time on the project, the house is now ‘almost like a private hotel’, says Erica. ‘It feels very grand in finish and feel, but it’s not too ostentatious.’ In fact, the reaction has been so positive, the couple are now busy working on their second mid-century project.

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THE DESIGNERS/OWNERS

Erica George and Damon McKinnon – in what was their first residential venture. The married couple both work in the construction industry – Erica as an office designer, Damon as an electrician. They renovated the house for their family, which includes Harry, five, and Frankie, three, and two chihuahuas, Harrydog and Albie.

THE PROPERTY

Built in 1971 by the industrial designer Graeme James Amos, this modernist villa comprises three adjoining levels set into a hill in the Melbourne suburbs. On the first level is the kitchen and gallery, plus four bedrooms and two bathrooms; on the second is the main living and dining area; and on the third is an en-suite bedroom.

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DINING AREA

'We built this planter, a nod to mid-century, and the seat below it, made out of terrazzo, to create a tiered height for the space,' says Erica.

Black oak Seb **dining table**, GlobeWest. Victoria Ghost **dining chairs**, Kartell. Custom **banquette seat** upholstered in Pelle leather and alpaca velvet, Inform Upholstery + Design. **Floor lamp**, Foscarini. Teak Root **console**, Klaylife. **Artwork** by Stanislas Piechaczek





KITCHEN

The island is a showstopper. 'We just saw this marble, and had this vision that it would be the centrepiece of the house,' says Erica. 'So much work and money went into creating the curves.'

Calacatta verde multi-form **marble**, Victoria Stone Gallery. Black metal **Transit bar stools**, M.A.D. Linear brass **pendant light**, Giffin Design. **Brass hardware**, Designer Doorware. **Tap**, ABI Interiors. **Wall panelling**, Screenwood

GALLERY

'We made this room a multifunctional space,' explains Erica. 'You could have it as a dining room or another living area. Looking over the pool, it's a nice place to sit and read.'

New Zealand wool **Flokati rug**; find similar from Rugs and Stuff. Faux suede **sofa**, GlobeWest. Glass **coffee table** by Isamu Noguchi, Vitra. Ceto floor **lamp**, Ross Gardam. **Artwork** by Zoe Grey







MAIN BEDROOM

'To create something different, we found a textured wall panelling,' says Erica. 'We painted it pink to create a flow to the en suite.'

Fluted Surround **wall panelling**, Laminex; painted in Clay Court, Dulux.

Bedside table, Frey. **Bed** with bouclé headboard, Interior Secrets. **Bed linen**, Hale Mercantile Co.

Brass mushroom **lamp**, sourced locally; find similar from The Lighting Vault.

Linen **curtains**, sourced locally; find similar from Closs & Hamblin

GREEN BATHROOM

'When I first proposed it, Damon was like, "I don't know that you want a full green bath,"' says Erica. 'It was a leap of faith.'

Green Plimepaplika Japanese **tiles**, Academy Tiles. White floor **tiles**, Artedomus. Custom concrete **bath**, Luxcrete Designer Concrete. **Brass tapware**, ABI Interiors



PINK BATHROOM

'Everybody said, "Absolutely don't do a pink bathroom - it will turn away potential buyers,"' says Erica. 'But I had this vision of something very soft - it was led by the stone.'

Splashback and vanity top in Calacatta Viola marble; the vanity with drawers in New Age Veneer Navurban was designed by Erica. Custom concrete **basin**, Luxcrete Designer Concrete. Pink Plimepaplika Japanese **tiles**, Academy Tiles. Brass **tapware**, ABI Interiors. Organic **mirror**, Middle of Nowhere. Sonn **wall lights**, Søktas