

HOMING *Instinct*

By putting faith in her own talent – and her expert collaborators – interior consultant Keren Rockman brought light and life to a faded Federation home.

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For larger events, adults usually sit at the dining table while the kids eat at the island bench. There's more room out back, too, including an expanded terrace and a chef's garden. The table from Coco Republic is accompanied by replica Emeco Navy chairs.



As an interior consultant, Keren Rockman knows only too well the importance of careful planning. And yet, when renovating her own family home in Sydney, she showed the wisdom – and perhaps the courage – to also let serendipity and gut feeling play key roles in the creative process. The result is an organic success story filled with bright natural light and even brighter design ideas.

SHE WHO DARES...

Right from the beginning there was something providential about the project. When Keren and Ash attended the auction – only their second viewing of the home – they saw not so much a renovator’s dream as a potential nightmare. “It still had the fibro ’70s extension on the back, it was dated and in very poor condition with a terrible, terrible layout,” Keren remembers. “There were about six people at the auction and I could see they were going ‘Hmm, I don’t think I could do much with this.’” She, however, believed she could, and when Ash put in a speculative bid and the hammer came down, it was time to prove it!

TOP: To set off the mix of tones and textures, the floors are covered with engineered oak-finish floorboards with satin finish sealer.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Relaxing is easy among the earthy hues and natural textures of the “Blue Whale” and “Desert” oil paintings by Keren. The Riva Zinc lights are from Zaffero, the Tripod coffee table is from Globe West and the Bentwood-style wooden chair with leather seat was bought at auction.





Keren's first step was to call in friend, architect and long-time collaborator, Nadine Nakache, with whom she had enjoyed a successful working dynamic on her previous home. The plan was to remove the hodge-podge of previous renovations at the back of the house and create an open and airy kitchen, living and dining space with a parents' retreat above. Originally a landscape architect by profession, Keren also saw plenty of room for improvement in the backyard, where a rock garden was set scarcely a metre from the back door.

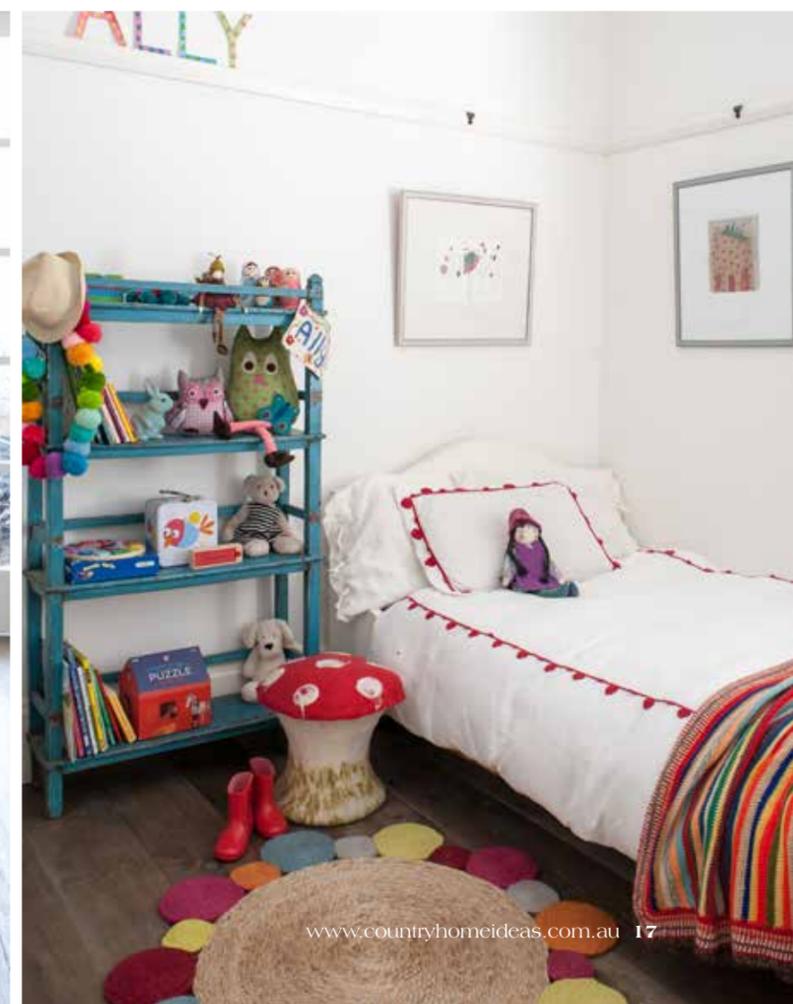
"My brief was lots of light and different spaces that a big family can go to without feeling that everyone's on top of each other," Keren explains. In this case the 'big' family includes three daughters: Amber, 14, Sophie, 11, and Ally, four. "Sophie often gets a towel and goes and lies on the grass and reads a book, and she can't be seen or heard – she's got her space. Even from the lounge room you don't feel like you're on top of her in the garden."

TOP: Expanding the backyard created a new outdoor room, ideal for entertaining. The tablecloth is from Tree of Life in Bondi Junction, paving is done in recycled bricks by Paving by Design.

LEFT: Keren admits to having a passion for big old butlers' sinks. This model from IKEA added a soupçon of country charm to the modern kitchen without blowing the budget.

OPPOSITE PAGE: This island bench, made to measure by Stone Pony, is the hub of the home. The clever and elegant tile runner (using Zaragoza cement tiles from Teranova) was built into the timber floor to better resist kitchen spills and visually define the area. The tractor stools are from Freedom while the Antwerp White pendant lights are by Zaffero.





Top Tip

Keren's design book contains a quote she refers to often:
*Follow your instincts and the rest will flow...
 don't be afraid to break the rules!*
 "If you like blue go with blue. If you like red, go with red," she says. "Generally it will feel right or wrong, so don't be persuaded that it's going to be amazing if it doesn't feel right. And be flexible with the process – there's no one way of doing it."

TOP: The parents' retreat also utilises calming, earthy colours. The oil painting is by Keren and is titled "Broken Bridge". The glass pendant lights are from ict et la and throw from Sally Campbell. The ochre armchair belonged to Keren's grandfather while the rug is from Armadillo's new outdoor range.

OPPOSITE PAGE

TOP: Amber chose Paris as the theme for her bedroom: a quirky old chair from grandma, an elegant dresser off eBay, a gilded mirror from an antique shop that Keren helped her clean up, a lantern from the Pottery Barn, an antique bed and an Eiffel Tower decal and voila – Parisian parlour. Rug by Armadillo.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Ally's colour-burst room features a blanket crocheted by her great grandmother, artworks by family friend and artist Lilly Blue, shelf by Stone Pony and rug by Armadillo.

ON THE JOB

Marco Cerqueira, from Cutting Edge Constructions was the project foreman and Keren acknowledges that he not only ensured quality results, but also contributed vital ideas for the design, such as the nook above the bath for storing toiletries, and the skylight in the lounge room. "Originally I'd had one light planned and we ended up with one on either side of the skylight," Keren says. "I think it was a great decision. On those darker days it's really nice."

Credit is due to Keren, too, for staying open to spontaneity in the high-pressure environment that is a large renovation. "I like that organic process, because I operate a bit instinctually," she reflects. "I find that if you make a lot of selections beforehand, you often see the space once you're standing in it and want to change it. Like your clothes, you might not be in the right outfit for the day!"

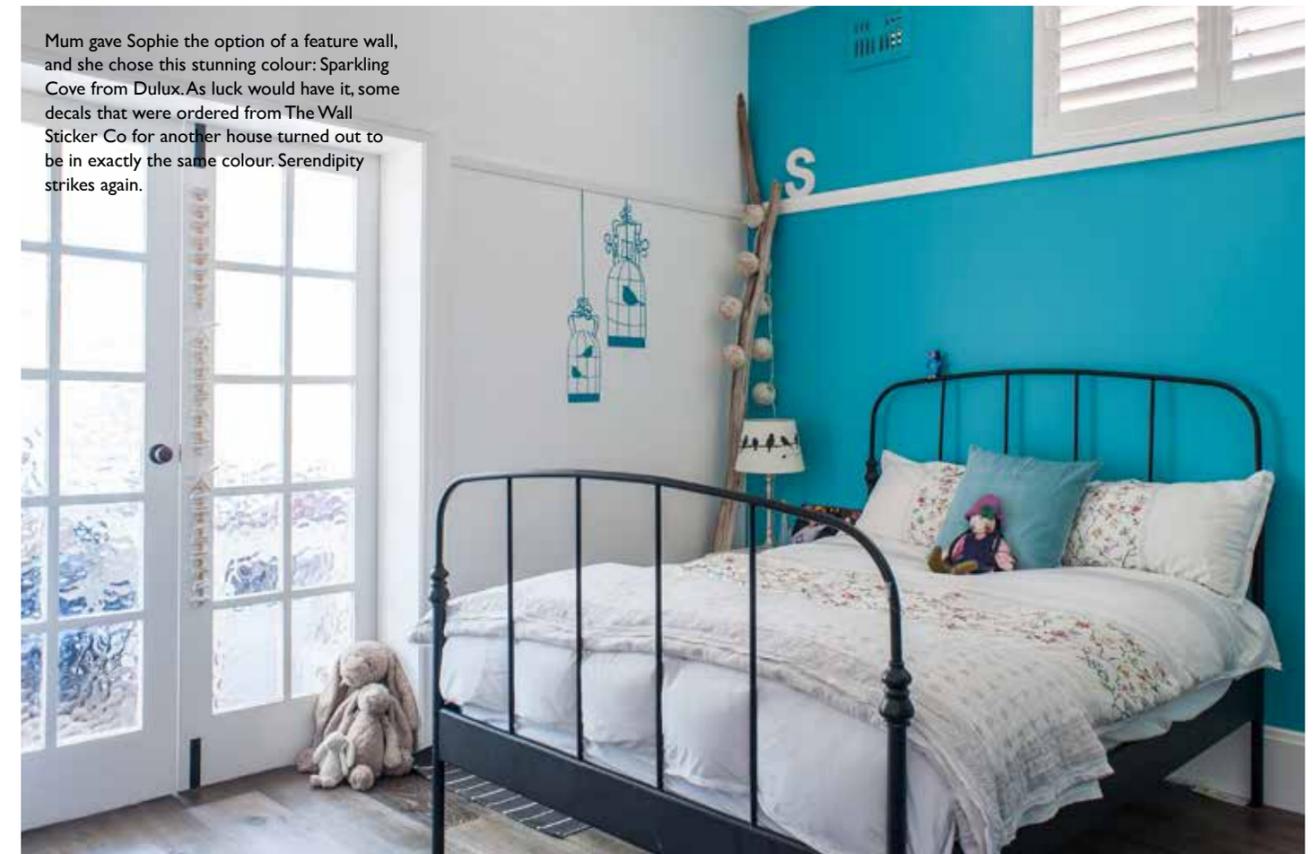
NATURAL BALANCE

In terms of the interior, Keren set earthy tones and natural textures against a backdrop of light-enhancing white walls and ceilings. "I start with a neutral palette and work up from there", she confirms. Accents are found mainly in the soft furnishings, and the many artworks that Keren painted herself.

"Celebrate the new without sacrificing the old" was one of the guiding principles in the renovation, and this ethos is reflected throughout, from the combination of Federation foundations and modern additions in the house itself, to the interior design and



Keren and Ash considered hanging a mirrored cabinet on the back wall of the master bathroom, but the cost was prohibitive – and they realised they had the room for a small piece of furniture. This cabinet from Stone Pony fits perfectly, and helps ensure the brand-new bathroom does not feel clinical.



Mum gave Sophie the option of a feature wall, and she chose this stunning colour: Sparkling Cove from Dulux. As luck would have it, some decals that were ordered from The Wall Sticker Co for another house turned out to be in exactly the same colour. Serendipity strikes again.

Project Team

Interior consultant: Keren Rockman,
Rock Interiors: www.rockinteriors.com.au

Architect: Nadine Nakache,
Nadine Nakache Design: nndesign.com.au

Project foreman: Marco Cerqueira,
Cutting Edge Constructions: 0412 616 157

decoration. Sharp modern lines run parallel to the rough edges and textures of unique and antique items – and the balance feels effortless.

In the kitchen, for example, contemporary cupboards and industrial hanging lights offer a contrast to the handmade tiles, the butlers' sink and the island bench and stools. Funky industrial design elements put the 'rust' into rustic, giving the home an urban edge without ever suppressing its warmth.

SEEKING AN AUTHENTIC STYLE

Just as importantly, there's been no attempt to put on antique airs. "If it's an old house originally and you've got that rustic old kitchen, then that's great, you know, it works – I wouldn't have cleaned it up," Keren states. "But I feel that trying to replicate that can look a bit tacky. And I do like the clean lines of a modern kitchen, just that blend between clean and functional and practical."

Rather than following a strict stylistic blueprint, Keren felt out the spaces and selected the items and styles accordingly. By being flexible and trusting her instincts, she has created a home that functions perfectly for her and her family. ■

TOP LEFT: Amber's bedroom oozes French charm with an Eiffel Tower decal and fleur-de-lis wall hooks.

TOP RIGHT: New floors with an oak finish and a satin finish sealer instantly evoke a beachside vibe. As they were pre-finished, they didn't need to acclimatise on site. Rug by Armadillo.