This page To maintain the handsome heritage facade Neil Architecture chose the muted tones of Dulux 'Fair Oaks' for the front door and Haymes 'Hazy Dawn' for the main house colour, while the custom pond by Eckersley Garden Architecture adds a contemporary note. Opposite page The sitting room wall colour of Haymes 'Black Olive' acts as a backdrop for the furnishings and lighting choices by interior decorator Simone Haag. 'Wave' sofa from Daniel Boddam and 'Pelican' armchair by Finn Juhl from Danish Red. 'Seline' large round coffee table and 'Ducale' rug both from Artemest, 'Umanoff' side tables from Designstuff. 'Abatjour' wall lamp and 'Serie' pendant light both by DimoreMilano from The Future Perfect.

Words **KAREN McCARTNEY** Photography **TOM BLACHFORD**

A tight collaboration between architect, clients

and interior decorator has produced a creatively

HIGH VOLTAGE

expansive project where old and new built

forms collide with a charge of eccentricity.

Brought on by David Neil of Melbourne practice Neil Architecture with a brief to work with their creatively adventurous clients, interior designer Simone Haag found an instant meeting of minds. She describes her role as sourcing the things that would fall out of a house if you turned it upside down and shook it. So while Neil Architecture took care of all the spatial decisions and built form in re-imagining this original 1907 Queen Anne house, by celebrated Federation-era architect Christopher Cowper, Simone became the curator of all things furniture, lighting, art and objects.

"We love Simone's enthusiasm and her ability to source the unconventional and those pieces that are hard to come by and give the house its offbeat personality," says director David Neil. "As a practice we embrace the opportunity to work with creatives who bring a distinctive energy to our clients and their projects." So while Simone was engaged early in the process it was Neil Architecture's envelope into which she worked as they had designed all the joinery and specified all wall finishes and the majority of the fixed lighting.

The house, which sits on a large block in Melbourne's Hawthorne, had been in the hands of the previous owner for an impressive 52 years and had over that time been subject to a number of warren-like additions in the 1960s and 70s. Stripping back in order to re-plan for underground parking and a cellar alongside »

These pages, from left With walls painted in Haymes 'Amazon' and custom joinery by Neil Architecture these two views of the study are defined by sculptural chair selections and artful ceramics and objects chosen by Simone and her client. The room's blue-green tones pick up on the coloured glass in the windows of the original house. The barrel-shaped 'Cooperage' chair by Fort Standard from Criteria sits on a rug from Cadrys. The Lyfa 'Governor' table lamp is from Fred International. A Tecno lounge chair by Osvaldo Borsani from Fundamente is positioned under a Wästberg 'W171' pendant light from Euroluce. Sette 'Feronia' sheer curtains made by Esenar.

This page, from top The view from the sitting room – with the 'Lennon' daybed by Christian Siriano from 1stdibs and 19th-century family portraits – through to the new extension with family living, kitchen and dining. The recessed area, showing the wall and ceiling in dressed solid American oak, has a custom credenza by Neil Architecture which is perfect for showcasing favourite objects and the owl artwork by Kate Elsey. **Opposite page, clockwise from top** A wall of Artedomus Inax tiles and the custom fireplace and log store by Neil Architecture create a warm ambience. B&B Italia 'Camaleonda' sofa from Space and 'Reeno' chair from Grazia&Co with Pierre Frey 'Ziggy' fabric in Marine from Milgate. The sleek custom kitchen was designed by Neil Architecture. Living Divani dining table from Space surrounded by Overgaard & Dyrman chairs from Hub. Le Klint 'Caché XL' pendant lights from Great Dane and Walter Knoll bar stools from Living Edge.

« a contemporary addition, to house family living and bedrooms for their two children and guests, while incorporating generous garden spaces, formed the essence of the brief to the architects.

"We retained the front rooms and designed a gabled structure that both separates and connects the two zones while allowing northerly light into the flat-roofed extension," says David. Existing rooms were painted in a range of moody tones such as Haymes 'Black Olive' in the lounge and Dulux's 'Wistow' in the hallway – favourites of the architect – and the Japanese-tiled wall in the new living room has echoes in the tones of the original fireplace tiles.

Simone's first impression was of the beautiful, arched windows and the detailing in the entry. "I knew immediately how I wanted to treat that space and what came to mind in that first flash, like a tapestry and a beautiful gallery bench, eventually came to pass," she says. There was also a touch of awe. "This was a majestic house in a beautiful pocket of Hawthorne and I knew that it was not a project to be taken lightly, as the house deserved a certain quality of response," she adds.

One of the joys of the project was starting fresh without the baggage of existing pieces (except for some sentimental artworks) alongside a quickly established sense of trust and shared aesthetic. "The clients had the ability to make really good – rather than just fast – decisions and encouraged choices to be different and unique. They had this appealing quirkiness about them," she says.

Simone explains her process and how at the concept stage "where we present our big-ticket ideas" she was delighted that the clients signed off 80 per cent of her first presentation. "I couldn't believe »
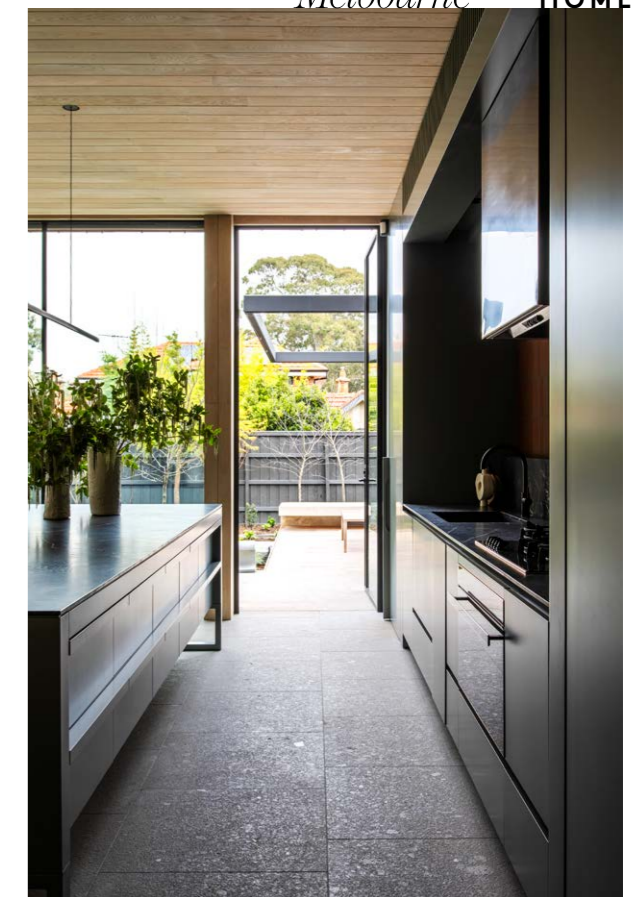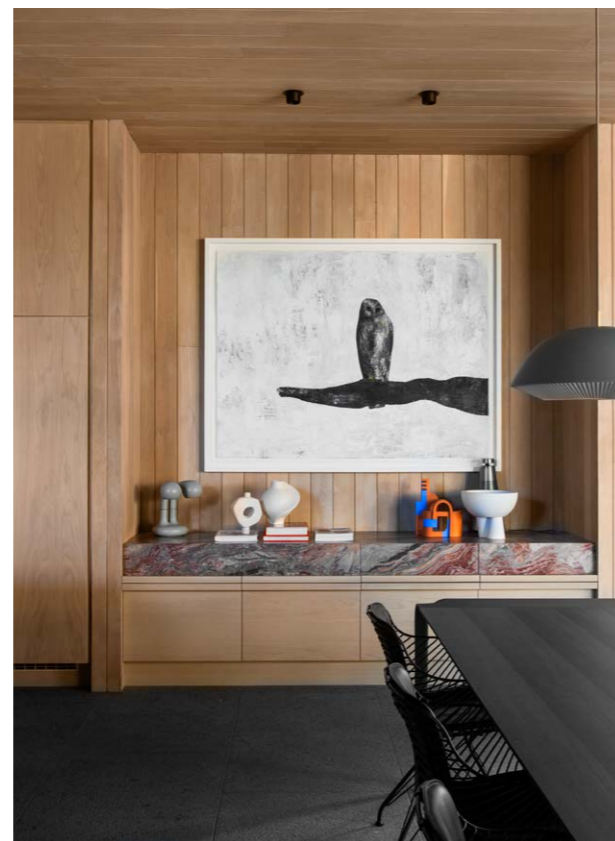
These pages, clockwise from below Dominating the master bedroom is the Edra 'Miraggio' mirror and, playing a supporting role, the 'Nepal' chair from Baxter, both from Space. 'Serpentine' lamp by Elio Martinelli for Martinelli Luce from Castorina & Co with an image of the original house offset by walls in Haymes 'Cavalier'. The study has a floor of Inax tiles from Artedomus and custom desk in American oak by Neil Architecture. 'Camilla' swivel chair from Artemest upholstered in 'Alumnus' fabric from Dedar. Tapestry from Galerie Kolkhoze and silk hand-tufted rug from Whitecliffe Imports. Custom-designed bench seat from Made Studio upholstered in Pierre Frey fabric and BZIPPY 'Triple Tier' side table from Criteria.

"THIS WAS A
MAJESTIC HOUSE
IN A BEAUTIFUL
POCKET OF
HAWTHORNE ...
IT WAS NOT
A PROJECT TO BE
TAKEN LIGHTLY."

« how quickly and positively they responded. 'Love it, do it', they said. There were a couple of 'hate its', but that's fine too," she says.

There are some areas – particularly in lighting – where Simone was keen to introduce pieces not previously seen in Australia, which did involve a leap of faith and an elasticity of budget. A spectacular sconce in the sitting room in dialogue with a six-armed chandelier, both by DimoreMilano, take the project to a next level of expression where art and lighting meet.

The other notable aspect in an interior layered with objects and art is the distinctive furniture. While the pieces are interesting and diverse in terms of their era, design and materiality, Simone knows that scale and a strong sensibility of appropriateness in the flow of the space is essential. So where forms are held in balance there are other aspects that dial up a sense of drama: an emerald-green hexagonal rug fills but doesn't dominate a room; a new design by Christian Siriano for 1stdibs, the 'Lennon' daybed, makes a graphic statement; while a B&B Italia 'Camaleonda' sofa, with its plump, pleasing curves, offsets its rectilinear context.

"How they look and feel as a collective is the main criteria," says Simone. "I put images of all the furniture on one page and, just as it feels good in this dimension, I know that as you transition through the actual spaces, they will feel good too." There is a certain confidence and bravery in what she does – pushing to the edge of what works while skirting the precipice of what doesn't has become her trademark. Long may she follow her intuition and find that line.
↳ *neilarchitecture.com.au; simonehaag.com.au; e-ga.com.au*

This page, from top Custom vanity by Neil Architecture in American oak and Selenis stone from Artedomus. The Ceramica Cielo oval box mirror is central to the vanity in the ensuite. Custom bed by Neil Architecture upholstered in Kravet Métaphores 'Levant' fabric in Terrazzo. Pair of 1990s hand-carved marble sculptures by Paul Jencik and framed etching from the 'Barcelona Memory' series by Robert Grieve circa 1980. Bedlinen from Sheet Society. The 'Fizi' wall sconce from Articolo sits against the powder room walls painted in Haymes 'Black Olive'. Opus Rosso stone from Artedomus. **Opposite page** With a dramatic Le Klint 'Pendant 5' hanging light from Great Dane and the B&B Italia 'Camaleonda' sofa from Space, the entry way is an inviting space that leads to the master bedroom.
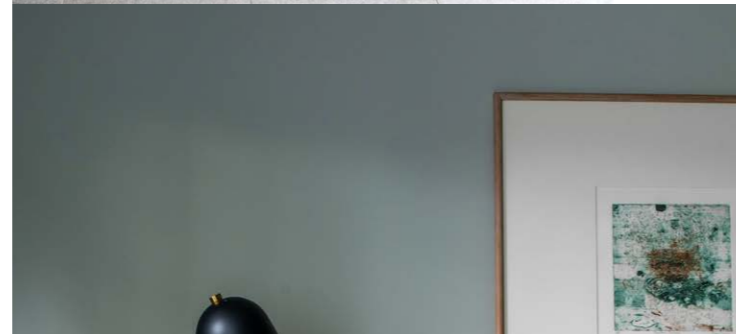
SPEED READ

» Set on a large block, this house had been in the hands of the former owner for over 50 years and it cried out for a refresh and update inside and out for contemporary family living. » David Neil of Neil Architecture co-opted interior decorator Simone Haag to work with the creatively adventurous new owners who encouraged choices to be different and unique. » She found an instant connection with the project, becoming the curator of all things furniture, lighting, art and objects. » Keen to introduce pieces not previously seen in Australia, Simone's selections in the sitting room included a spectacular wall sconce in dialogue with a six-armed chandelier, both by DimoreMilano, which take the project to the next level of expression where art and lighting meet. » The main criteria is how everything looks and feels together collectively, says Simone of the interiors layered with art, objects and distinctive furniture that speak to her confidence and bravery as a stylist and decorator.