

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST



WALTER HERMAN

The Designer Opts for Moody Elegance in His Eclectic Sydney Apartment

Text by Steven M. L. Aronson | Photography by Erhard Pfeiffer

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Who can blame Walter Herman for wanting to be where the action Down Under is? When the designer forsook his long-adored home in Darling Point, a nicely quiescent Sydney neighborhood, it was for the newly cool district of clubs, pubs, cafés, restaurants and cutting-edge shops known as Potts Point—and to the very omphalos of it at that. “It’s all happening right on Macleay Street where I live,” he enthuses.

Residentially speaking, Macleay Street is an architectural love-in, chockablock with sandstone mansions, large terraced houses, and apartment complexes, and democratically embracing the Georgian, Neoclassical and Art Déco styles. But Herman, determined to leave most of the furniture and much of the baggage of his old life behind, opted for a bland new building whose face—or, rather, facelessness—smacked of brand-new beginnings.

There were some inevitable false starts—he went on to decorate his high-ceilinged,

two-bedroom apartment no less than three times in the five years he has occupied it. “I went through stages,” he admits. Stage One was silvery gray walls and furniture covered in white linen. Stage Two was everything white, furniture and walls. The problem with that was the windows faced west and it was eye-blindingly glary. “My friends, the second they walked in the door, would reach in unison for their sunglasses,” he explains, adding, “I was trying out minimalism, which was the trend here at the time, but it just wasn’t me—it wasn’t really how I like to decorate, and it certainly wasn’t how I wanted to live. So then I went dark, which suited my personality more.”

If that result was, and remains, a success—a testament to timeless masculine glamour—it’s because in this, his latest stage, as one of his colleagues put it, “Walter understood himself brilliantly.” What he did was soften the apartment’s edges with lavish fabrics, “brave painted finishes,” gilt frames for his fine collection of Australian paintings, and sofas and chairs of his own design. “The most important thing that I feel my rooms now have that they didn’t,” he says, “is a heartbeat.”

Palpitating like mad at any rate in the entrance hall is a near-life-size mid-19th-century French replica of the Borghese Gladiator of antiquity, his musculature exaggerated to the point of fantasy. This beautiful bronze, the antique French commode across from it, the amber of the walls (Herman had the entrance hall and the living and dining room faux-pine paneled) and the oak of the parquet floor collectively glow a rich honey color. The space as a consequence seems lit from within by its own luster, which is how the rest of the apartment comes to light also.

The sofa in the 30-foot-long living/dining room is upholstered in a silk velvet the very color of the walls. Behind it is a Regency rosewood table to which a pair of Napoleon III gilt wing-back chairs, coruscating with gold damask, and a passel of turn-of-the-last-century French chairs, sporting black leather, can be smartly pulled up for a meal. The rug is 1920s Chinese, beige and cream shot through with a blue that “ties it back” to the draped tablecloth in a corner.

In the bedroom (as in the adjoining small study), the walls and carpet are navy: a sea whose blue is broken only by the whitecaps of baseboard and ceiling. The carpet is wool from New Zealand, while the walls are of a felt that feels like a reprieve—always a good wavelength to be on. Indeed, when Walter Herman lies propped against his heavy-woven-white-linen headboard, he’s hard-pressed not to imagine his ship of a bed slipping out of Sydney Harbour through the Heads.

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