



THE MIDDLE PATH

Creating a contemporary feel in this eastern suburbs house without compromising its mid-century features was a delicate balancing act.



Photography PRUE RUSCOE Words JUDY PASCOE

This page The mid-century house cuts a fine figure at the top of the driveway which is lined in lush foliage planted by William Dangar of Dangar Barin Smith. Opposite page The original curvaceous concrete awning makes a dramatic statement at the entry.

These pages The living room has a Minotti 'Freeman' sofa from De De Ce, Bonacina 'Eva' cane chairs in a lacquered finish, Christophe Delcourt 'Hug' sofa upholstered in Pierre Frey 'Candice' in Coquillage, a Cassina 'Rio' coffee table in oak with a marble inset and Nichetto 'Laurel' side table from Spence & Lyda, all on a custom oval cashmere rug from Cadrys. Lindsey Adelman 'Branching Bubble' chandelier. Isamu Noguchi 'UF4-L10' floor lamp. Artwork by Guan Wei from Martin Browne Contemporary.



When interior architect Romaine Alwill of Alwill Interiors was tasked by architect Luigi Rosselli to design the interiors of this Sydney eastern suburbs home, the brief was it should be of the ilk of Gio Ponti or Oscar Niemeyer. “No pressure!” says Romy. A further request from the architect was for something to “make his Milanese design pedigree proud”.

Romy certainly rose to the challenge. Well versed in creating individual looks for expansive, mid-century houses, she tackled the empty shell with verve. The owners were a family of five with teenaged children and a large dog, and they had lived in the house for around six years – updating it cosmetically – before embarking on this major renovation. Laid out with an arrangement of unconnected rooms leading to a kitchen at the back, the house nevertheless boasted a private aspect and an enviable location. Dark joinery, tiled and inlaid floors, and heavy curtains made it less appealing.

The original, classic modernist design by architect George Reeves included five bedrooms, six bathrooms and three living spaces set over two storeys, with a sprawling terrace, a pool and a tennis court. Appreciating the space and the history of the property, the owners wanted to give it the best renovation they could, paying respect to its heritage and unique architecture while creating a contemporary family home. Luigi, along with project architect Manuelle Schelp of Studio Schelp, used “the lightest touch to reinvigorate the existing design”.

As the house was already large there was no need to increase the footprint, but rather to reconfigure what was already there and improve the connection between indoors and out. Relocating the eat-in kitchen from the back of the house to connect with the formal living and dining as well as the outdoor entertaining area was key to a more contemporary feel. The use of Wolf and Sub-Zero appliances, finishes such as marble and Corian benchtops, and a walk-in coolroom gave it a luxurious element. The slatted finish on the joinery echoes original details found throughout.

Features such as the cantilevered switchback staircase were carefully retained, albeit with a raised glass and brass balustrade to comply with building codes. Complementing the staircase, which is a focal point and seems to float within the central void of the house, is a custom silk runner from Whitecliffe Imports and a pendant light by David Weeks Studio that sits precisely on the line between mid-century and modern. “There were no compromises on this renovation and we wanted to treat the house with respect,” explains Romy. “Everyone saw it as a jewel that we needed to be careful with.”

Angles and curves are the architectural language of the house. Dramatic original features, such as the curvaceous awning over the entry and the curved ceiling bulkheads were replicated in a similarly curving kitchen bench and the curling, sunken slat seat that surrounds the outdoor fire pit. New steel and glass doors and windows as well as skylights amplify the light and the connection with the garden.

While the clients requested high-end fittings and finishes they also wanted the house to be family friendly and not overly formal. “It needed a fresh, contemporary feel to straddle its strong mid-century style,” says Romy. That was the tricky part. Marrying the »

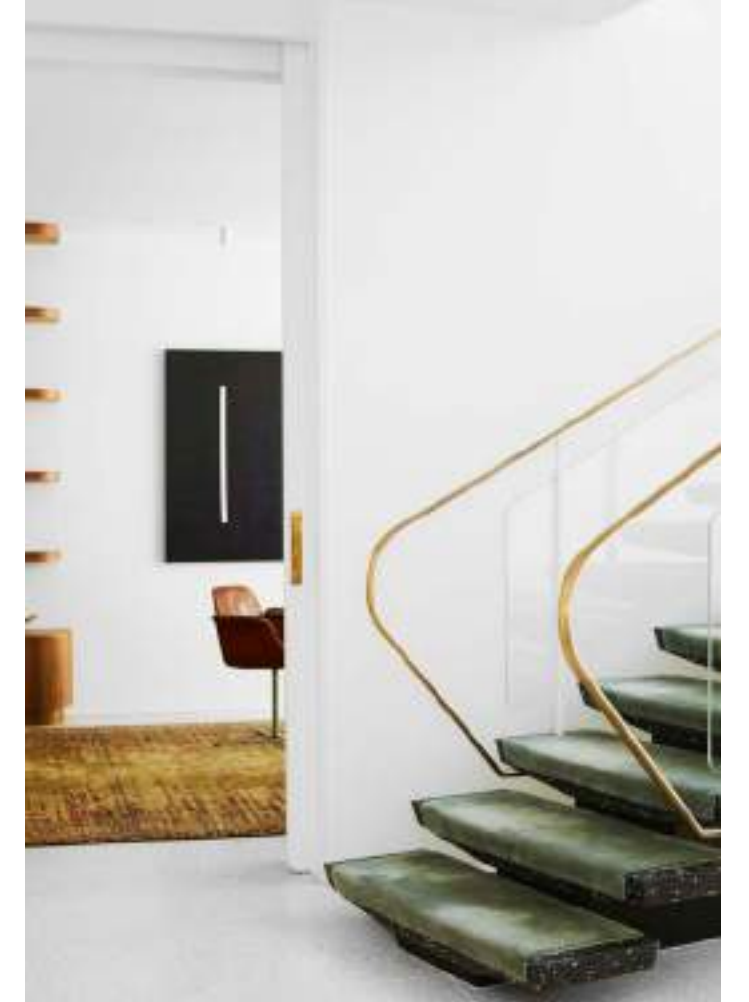


This page, clockwise from top The bright white kitchen sits under a curved, timber-lined bulkhead, which is echoed in the shape of the bench topped with Statuario marble from Euro Marble. Astra Walker 'Icon' tapware from Candana. Mater oak and leather bar stools from Cult. Thonet 'N811' oak and rattan dining chairs. The formal dining area has a Lowe Furniture 'Atticus' table from Hub and Cassina 'Cab' chairs in natural leather from Space. Artwork by Tim Maguire from Martin Browne Contemporary. Rug from Cadrys. Outdoor furniture from Robert Plumb. **Opposite page** William Dangar's exuberant plantings provide a lush backdrop. Lowe Furniture 'Atticus' table from Hub and Cassina 'Cab' chairs from Space on a Cadrys rug. Lindsey Adelman 'Branching Bubble' chandelier. Mater bar stools from Cult.



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This page, clockwise from top left Chair and planter from Robert Plumb. A view across the central void. The artwork beyond is by the owner's father. The cantilevered switchback staircase was retained but with a brass and glass balustrade and a carpet runner from Whitecliffe Imports added. Planters from Robert Plumb. The guest bathroom has American oak cabinetry by Briggs Veneers and brushed brass fittings from Candana. Opposite page The eat-in kitchen has a custom banquette clad in Verona leather, an MDF Italia 'Rock' dining table with a cement base and glass top, and Thonet 'N811' dining chairs. Le Corbusier 'Lampe de Marseille' wall light from Monduluce. Striped vessels and chair (seen through doorway), all from Studio ALM.





« two aesthetics called for a deft touch. “It’s easy with a house such as this to get caught up in over-stylising it and making it look like something out of a Slim Aarons book, but it needed to have its own DNA – something we worked really hard to achieve,” says Romy.

The focus was to make the house open and airy, light and refined. “In the back of my mind I always had the American Case Study Houses and mid-century Palm Springs homes,” says Romy. To that end she used lashings of white paint, so that any colour in the furnishings would pop. And, thanks to the great visual connection between indoors and out, there is an ever-present perception of greenery – courtesy of William Dangar’s tropical landscaping – which adds to the light and airy feel.

The clients had some art and furniture that they wished to keep which Romy integrated with complementary pieces including the sinuous Bonacina ‘Eva’ chairs in lacquered cane, Lindsey Adelman and Noguchi lighting, and Paola Lenti outdoor furniture. Other decorative flourishes are seen in the de Gournay wallpaper in the powder room, a custom bedhead in walnut and Verona leather, and the tactile timber-clad ceilings.

Romy loves the home’s openness and flow, and the connection with the outdoors, as well as its pleasing sense of timelessness. “A key part of the brief was that the house shouldn’t be trendy or of the moment but instead should be timeless and elegant in style and finishes to see it through many decades to come.” #

luigiorosselli.com; studioschelp.com; dangarbarinmsmith.com.au; alwill.com.au.

This page, from top The main bedroom is anchored by an ocean-blue carpet. Slatted walnut doors delineate the wardrobes and ensuite. Custom bedhead with built-in bedside tables in walnut and Verona leather. Lighting from VBO Australia. Artworks by Gabriele Corni from Studio ALM. The powder room was treated as “a jewel within a jewel” with marble flooring and de Gournay ‘Fishes’ wallpaper, brass fittings and a Florian Schulz pendant light. **Opposite page** The outdoor seating and entertaining area was shaped around the existing mature trees, including a pine tree wrapped in a fruit salad (*Monstera deliciosa*) plant.



SPEED READ

» Architect Luigi Rosselli and interior architect Romy Alwill of Alwill Interiors collaborated on the revamp of a significant mid-century house in Sydney’s eastern suburbs. » Referencing the work of iconic architects Oscar Niemeyer and Gio Ponti, the pair delivered a contemporary family home that still pays homage to its heritage features. » A sensitive reconfiguring of the layout brought the kitchen from the back of the house to a more central position, linking living and dining as well as outdoor entertaining areas. » New steel-framed doors, windows and skylights maximise the light and the feeling of openness in the house, and allow a seamless connection between indoors and out. » Angles and curves create an interesting design language, from the curvaceous concrete awning at the entrance to the curved ceiling bulkheads and kitchen bench, and the switchback staircase.