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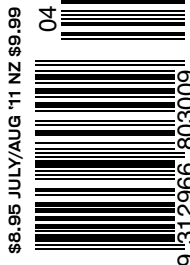
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THE FABRIC OF LIFE: CHRISSIE JEFFERY'S SYDNEY HOME, P174





THIS PAGE: MADE FROM FOAM, PLASTER AND CHROME WRAPPED IN CLOTH THIS DOG SCULPTURE IS PART OF A WORK TITLED TO DIG THE DUST ENCLOSED HERE BY OWNER AND ARTIST ADAM LAERKESEN. ABOVE IS A HANDMADE TASSEL BY MORRISON POLKINGHORNE OF PASSEMENTERIES AND ITEMS IN EBONY THAT BELONGED TO LAERKESEN'S GRANDFATHER. ON AN OLD ARMCHAIR RE-COVERED IN GANCEDO 'KILIM' FABRIC FROM ELLIOTT CLARKE IS A 'HARVEST IX' CUSHION BY OWNER STEPHANIE MARGARITIDIS' HOMEWARES RANGE, STEP & GAIA

OPPOSITE: ATOP A BENTWOOD MARBLE TABLE IS A THROW IN HIMALAYAN HEMP, GLAZED CERAMICS FROM MEIZAI, COLLECTED SHELLS, BOOKS AND A MANDREL. THE INDUSTRIAL TRIPOD LAMP WAS BOUGHT AT AUCTION. ON THE WALL ARE SELF-PORTRAITS BY MARGARITIDIS AND, TO THE LEFT, A SILK SCREEN BY LAERKESEN.

MEETING OF MINDS

AN ARTISTIC SYDNEY COUPLE TRANSFORMS A WORKER'S COTTAGE INTO A RICH CABINET OF CURIOSITIES AND MEMORIES.

PHOTOGRAPHER: JONNY VALIANT
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THIS PAGE, RIGHT: STEPHANIE MARGARITIDIS AND ADAM LAERKESEN WITH THEIR SON MATTEO, 19 MONTHS. PERIOD BENTWOOD CHAIRS SURROUND THEIR KITCHEN TABLE BOUGHT AT AUCTION. ON IT IS AN OLD BLUE ENAMEL VASE AND OLD PARISIAN CONDIMENT HOLDERS THAT BELONGED TO MARGARITIDIS' MOTHER. THE RUG IS A TREASURED PIECE FROM A TRIP TO SIWA OASIS IN EGYPT. HANGING BEHIND IS A CIRCA-19TH-CENTURY MIRROR MADE FROM LATE 18TH-CENTURY RELIEFS THAT WERE BURNT IN A HOUSE FIRE IN SYDNEY'S KINGS CROSS. THE TIN LETTERS ABOVE ARE FROM LE FORGE. **OPPOSITE:** IN THE BACK ROOM, LAERKESEN'S SEA BELL SITS ON A TRIBAL RUG BOUGHT AT AUCTION. THE 19TH-CENTURY CUPBOARD IS ALSO FROM AUCTION AND THE CURTAINS ARE STEPH & GAIA TICKING STRIPE WITH LINEN TRIMS. DETAILS, LAST PAGES.



HAVING MADE THE fortuitous decision to stay in town and house-hunt over the 2006 Christmas break, Sydney sculptor Adam Laerkesen and his partner, interior designer Stephanie Margaritidis, stumbled across their three-bedroom house almost immediately. While the changes that ensued post-purchase were mostly cosmetic, including painting throughout, sanding and re-staining floorboards, and reconfiguring and re-finishing the kitchen, the shift in style has been dramatic. "It wasn't my aesthetic," says Margaritidis. "It had a Balinese flavour with very bright pinks and fuschias." Three weeks later, when the building work was complete, the pair moved in with furniture from their old house and the real fun began.

Some architectural corbels, found at auction, inspired the couple to get rid of almost everything and start afresh. "It started when my friend Robert, with whom I share a studio, bought some. They were such sculptural and unique pieces that it just sparked our imagination," recalls Laerkesen, "so we started buying all these eclectic items at auction."

The couple began scouring for necessities, continuing right down to the decorative objects that now form a series of appealing still life compositions throughout the house. The aged objects they unearthed inspired a bowerbird approach to refurbishing the home they now share with their 19-month-old son, Matteo. "Some pieces we would put in the house, then take them back to the auctions because they didn't work with the way we want the house to look," says Laerkesen of the four-year process that followed.

For the most part, items found at auction were intentionally kept in their original condition. "Often, the pieces we discovered were quite damaged but I found that, even with their aged patinas, the chips and the rust, they too have a place because that's what history has given them. That, and the sense of re-use, really appeals to me," says Margaritidis. Re-use informs Laerkesen's sculptures, too, in which he cleverly pairs found elements with nature — such as a stag on an industrial stool in *They Once Cut My Heart The Way They Cut a Tree*, a recent commission for one of fashion label Sass & Bide's Sydney stores.

Similarly, Margaritidis's latest venture, a handmade and bespoke homewares line, Steph & Gaia, is made up of cushions, runners and drapes made from fabric offcuts. "For me, being creative is about the idea of re-use. That led to the development of Steph & Gaia," she says. Each of the pieces adds to the narrative of the house, and Laerkesen and Margaritidis relish in the history of their furniture and *objets* and how they came to be there.





OPPOSITE: THE SOFA, COVERED IN BELGIAN LINEN FROM WARWICK FABRICS, IS A CENTRAL PIECE IN THE LIVING ROOM. IT'S DECORATED WITH STEPH & GAIA CUSHIONS, FROM LEFT: 'HONEYED MORPHINE' IN BELGIAN LINEN FROM WARWICK FABRICS; 'BEATRIX' IN VINTAGE ITALIAN FABRIC FRONT AND HESSIAN BACK WITH LINEN CORD PIPING; 'OF WOOD AND STONE' CUSHIONS IN TAUPE LINEN. OTHER DECORATIVE ELEMENTS INCLUDE LATE 19TH-CENTURY TO EARLY 20TH-CENTURY DOORS FROM ALEXANDRIA IN EGYPT; A VINTAGE TIMBER CHAIR RECOVERED WITH A HAND-EMBROIDERED TAPESTRY SEAT; OLD HANDPAINTED RICE CONTAINERS FROM AN ANTIQUE STORE, NOW USED AS STOOLS; A BRASS CHANDELIER CIRCA 1930s, FROM VINTAGE GLAMOUR, WITH HANDMADE SHADES IN BLACK LINEN FROM LIZA FINE ART; A PINK AFRICAN HAT FROM ORIENT HOUSE; AND A COARSE SISAL RUG FROM THE NATURAL FLOOR COVERING CENTRE.

RIGHT: BEHIND THE BED, MADE UP WITH VINTAGE BED LINEN, ARE TWO PANELS COVERED WITH FLORENCE BROADHURST 'THE CRANES' WALLPAPER FROM SIGNATURE PRINTS. AN OLD MILLINER'S CABINET SITS TO ONE SIDE AND NEAR THE WINDOW IS A PERIOD FRENCH-INSPIRED GILT SOFA IN FABRIC FROM WARWICK FABRICS. DETAILS, LAST PAGES.



"I've tried to create a space that affects you on a sensory level and tells a story through its layers," says Margaritidis. A faux bamboo cupboard in the bedroom resembles one that Margaritidis loved as a teenager, when she collected other pieces including a Victorian dresser with ivory inlay and a milliner's cabinet. Then there is the pair of chairs found in worn peacock velvet with the original fringing, which have since been reupholstered. "I imagine them in an actor's suite and all the stories that would go with that," says Margaritidis. The de-silvered mirror in the kitchen is a favourite: "It's the way the mercury has melted the history behind that particular piece."

For Laerkesen and Margaritidis, the house has been a creative journey that continues to unfold, led by Margaritidis as an interior designer but with Laerkesen's essential creative input. Laerkesen has been an artist for more than 20 years; he's part of a national touring exhibition called *Dreamweavers* and has a solo show in September at Melbourne's Anita Traverso Gallery and another scheduled for late November at The Coolroom – a unique space in a private home in Sydney. Laerkesen's mystical art has evolved from organic abstract shapes made from flocked tree branches to animal motifs combined with sculptural elements – "I like to experiment with materials," he says – but despite his eye for design, Laerkesen is modest about his contribution to the home. "What I like best is what Steph's done to it," he offers. "There are so many layers in the house and so much to look at. To me, that's so invigorating and inspiring."

What's really wonderful about the series of spaces chocked full of all manner of special possessions is that the house doesn't feel overly styled or protected; Matteo is as at home in it as his parents. "This must feel like a wonderland to him," says Margaritidis. "It does to me as an adult – just playing around with all these objects like toys." **VZ**