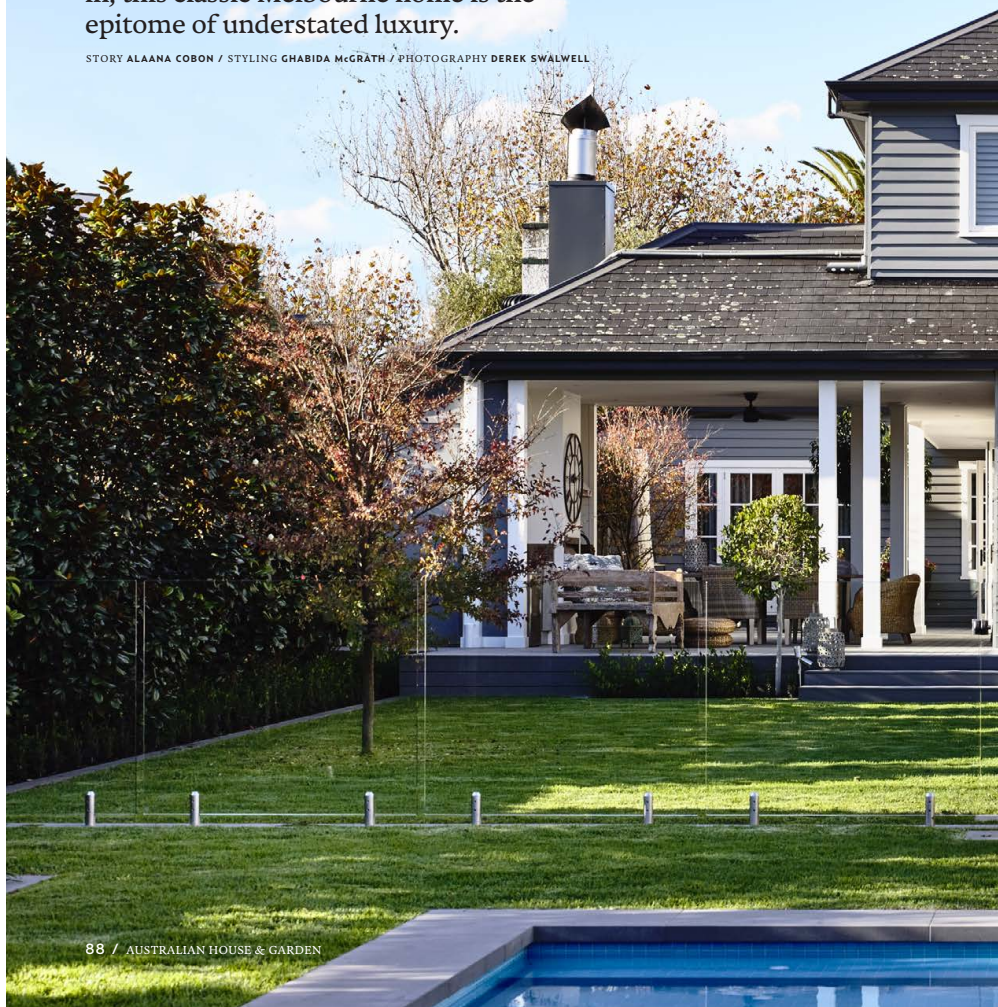


H&G HOUSES

SOUL DEEP

Earthy, cocooning and a dream to live in, this classic Melbourne home is the epitome of understated luxury.

STORY ALAANA COBON / STYLING GHABIDA McGRATH / PHOTOGRAPHY DEREK SWALWELL



EXTERIOR / The builders, Atkinson Pontifex, also did the landscaping. "They are passionate about gardens," says interior designer Fiona Austin. For similar adirondack chairs, try Adirondack Chairs Australia. FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 186.



FEATURE PLANTS

- Bay tree
- Lamb's ears
- English box
- Chinese elm
- Eureka Mikaya turf
- Gardenia
- Magnolia grandiflora
- Teddy Bear

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Ghabida McGrath says she and her husband Frank were very clear when briefing interior designer Fiona Austin of Austin Design Associates. “We needed a new bathroom, kitchen, living spaces, stairs, windows, as well as french doors, plus the garden redone and the pool moved,” says Ghabida. “The interior needed to be stylish but not pretty, with texture the true hero.” An extensive wish list, but Fiona instantly grasped the couple’s intent.

Ghabida and Frank – who live here with their children Théo, 16, and Tess, 13 – chanced upon this four-bedroom home in bayside Melbourne in late 2012. “We thought the house charming and loved its openness and generous outdoor areas, but it wasn’t finished to our taste,” says Ghabida. “It was beautifully presented but the joinery throughout was poorly designed and cheaply done,” says Fiona. “There was also an awkward staircase and the windows were quite mean in size.”

The home’s biggest flaw, however, was the floor plan. “The main living area looked inward and the best views of the garden were enjoyed from a secondary study and a ‘nothing’ space. And a void above the kitchen meant smells and noise travelled upstairs,” says Fiona. By rethinking the layout – filling in the void, rearranging some rooms and knocking down a couple of walls – Fiona was able to open the living area to the garden, create a nicely proportioned dining zone and squeeze in a butler’s pantry downstairs, plus add a huge teen retreat upstairs.

The swimming pool was relocated from a small courtyard at the side of the house to the rear of the house, where it is the centrepiece of the newly landscaped backyard. The original pool has been decked over to create an outdoor entertaining area.

Attention to detail is what really elevates this project. Every element – from location and layout to fixtures and finishes – has been carefully considered. “I needed my own workspace and Fiona had the great idea of ▶

KITCHEN / Fiona created plenty of display space, including floating shelves in the kitchen for Ghabida’s tribal sculptures. Madison pendant light, Dunlin. Calacatta marble splashback and island benchtop, CDK Stone. Stainless-steel benchtop, SJB Stainless Steel. Joinery, Mastercraft Cabinets (throughout). Hide stool, Charlie Mac. Oak flooring in French Grey, Royal Oak Floors (throughout). Vintage Moroccan lantern. **Designer buy:** Flambe kitchen mixer, \$1045, Abey. **FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 186.**



‘The mix of timber, marble and stacked stone is so attractive, so inviting.’
Ghabida McGrath

This is the life

Weekends at the McGraths typically begin with an early start for the children’s sport commitments. After that, the family takes their days at a more leisurely pace with a late lunch at home. “I really enjoy cooking simple French, Italian or North African food,” says Ghabida. After lunch, the family walks along nearby Brighton beach, reads in the outdoor room or enjoys time in the pool. “It’s family time, spent very simply,” says Ghabida.

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'It is such a peaceful, soothing home. The moody greys, beautiful textures and sense of robustness make us feel protected.' Ghabida

LIVING/DINING / above and opposite Removing walls to open up the living space necessitated the installation of a support beam. "People often balk at the idea of retrofitting beams, but this relatively small expense can often open up a house to create a far better layout – as it did here," says Fiona. Ghabida's study nook is separated from the dining zone by a nib wall, which is clad in the same oak as the flooring. Sleuth desk lamp, Amalfi. Dining table, Perfect Pieces. The dining chairs were existing pieces. Coffee tables bought in Singapore. Sisal rug, International Floorcoverings. Stacked stone (on chimneybreast), Eco Outdoor. Hide stool, Charlie Mac. Linen curtains, Inside Edge (throughout).

Designer buy: Tripod floor lamp, \$795, The New Cocoon.

BUTLER'S PANTRY / Rearranging the location of a powder room and the laundry allowed Fiona to create space for a butler's pantry. Door handles, Designer Doorware. Stove, Michael's Appliance Centre. **FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 186.**



Stylish details

This home delivers a more soulful, cocooning aesthetic than its neat weatherboard facade suggests. "I specifically wanted a palette of greys mixed with stronger notes of black and white," says Ghabida. "Grey is a timeless colour that suits both sunny and rainy days. It's also an ideal backdrop for our existing furniture and artworks. Everything feels more defined, modern and warm against grey."



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◀ locating it within the living room, separated by a feature wall," says Ghabida, who is a textile and surface designer by trade. "The workspace is arranged so that I have my computer on one side and space for drawing on the other. There's a full-length pinboard too, which comes in handy when I find something inspiring."

The better connected kitchen/dining/living room is now a favourite hangout for all the family. Four sets of french doors open directly from this area to the garden, a further two sets give access to the well-appointed outdoor room. At the height of summer, the french doors are opened up to allow cooling breezes to flow through the house; in winter, the family gravitates to the sofas by the open fireplace. "There's so much space to enjoy inside and out," says Ghabida.

With all new doors and windows, new joinery, and a new colour scheme inside and out, the house has been totally transformed. "It has regained the character it was lacking," says Ghabida.

"And Ghabida's finishing touches have made it a very individual, and stylish, family home," says Fiona. ▶

Austin Design Associates, Brighton, Victoria;
(03) 9592 6411 or www.austindesign.com.au.



LIVING / French doors lead from the living zone to the new outdoor room, complete with sitting area, dining table and barbecue facilities. The cast-iron radiator (behind the sofa) was custom-made in Italy. Cross cushions, Country Road. Tartan throw, Highland Store. Painting by unknown Indonesian artist. For similar sofas, try, Plush. FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 186.



THE PALETTE

**Dulux
Edinburgh
Evening**
main bedroom

**Dulux
Natural White**
kitchen/dining/living

**Dulux
Maraetai**
exterior
weatherboards

Paint colours are reproduced as accurately as printing processes allow.

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'The house has regained the character it was lacking.'
Ghabida

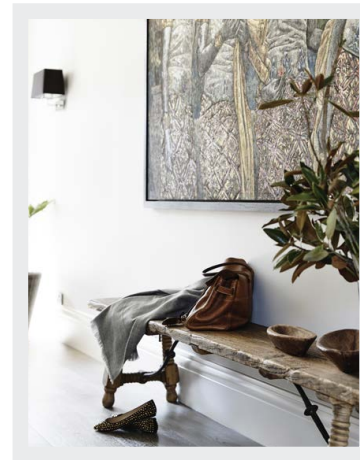
TESS' BATHROOM / The timber-look floor tiles are laid in a herringbone pattern to create the effect of a parquet floor. The handmade bowl is a souvenir from the Isle of Skye, UK. Wall light, Nu Lighting Australia. Calacatta marble benchtop. Kaldewei Vaio bath, Reece. Wall and floor tiles, Ital Ceramics.

HALLWAY / An antique French bench seat adds a tactile element to the entry hall. Painting by Mohammed Harahap. Wall light, Nu Lighting Australia.

MAIN BEDROOM / Texture is the star in the simply decorated main bedroom. Cushions, The New Cocoon. Bed bought in the UK. For similar chandelier, try Designer Chandelier. Shutters and curtains, Inside Edge. Faux-fur throw bought in New Zealand.

Smart buy: Astro Park Lane Grande LED wall light, \$549, Nu Lighting Australia. **FOR WHERE TO BUY,** SEE PAGE 186.

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THE LAYOUT

