

BEAUTIFUL *Dreamer*

A gentle wash of nature-inspired colour adds a feeling of warmth to this weekend escape

STORY ANDREA JONES STYLING LOUISE OWENS PHOTOGRAPHY CRAIG WALL





With a generous patio {[opposite](#)} encircling an inviting swimming pool, this modern weekenders south of Sydney immediately seduced homeowners Sarah and Craig with visions of sunny days spent lounging with guests. "I could see it being a wonderful place for entertaining in summer," says Sarah. While the adults lazily admire the views over the rolling hills of Kangaroo Valley {[bottom right](#)}, the couple's three small children can roam freely around the 1.5-hectare block. "They can run around in such a safe environment," says Sarah. "We have cows next door that come up to the fence, which the kids love." Sarah and Craig's first task was to enlist friend and interior designer Brett Mickan to create a warm and welcoming interior to match the beautiful surrounds. "It was important that the interior was quiet so that the focus could remain on the spectacular vistas," says Brett. He achieved this deliberately understated look with a mixture of soft, dusky greys and greens, occasionally punctuated by cheeky splashes of acid yellow in textiles {[bottom left](#)} and accessories {[top left](#)}. >



Although they're the epitome of good taste to some, white walls are to others the antithesis of warmth. "I just find them so stark and uninviting," says homeowner Sarah, whose holiday house just south of Sydney wraps you in a warm embrace of subtle earth tones. "When we bought it, it was a bleak, industrial warehouse. Everything echoed, everything was white; there was white leather, gloss tables, and a big glass garage door. It felt like a car showroom."

Sarah's husband Craig had quite a different reaction. "The first time we saw it, Craig charged up the driveway and waited for me to catch up. He knew right away that it would be the house we would buy. And sure enough, we bought it two weeks later."

As luck would have it, Sarah and Craig's friend Brett Mickan, who had done the interior design work on their Sydney home, also happened to be in the Southern Highlands the weekend they saw their future home, and could instantly see the potential for transforming the modern glass box into a warm and welcoming getaway. "Brett had the vision," says Sarah. "The day we settled, he picked up the keys with paintbrushes in hand. He was so enthusiastic!"

Brett set to work, using seven different paint shades on the walls throughout the house – not that one really notices, as the hues are so subtle that the overall impression is one of softness rather than colour. "You can't really tell there are so many colours because the tones match," says Brett. "It still seems modern and light, but where it was stark before, it now feels cosy and warm." >



LIVING ROOM {top & opposite} Clever use of colour gives this room a mix of sophistication and energy, with bursts of turquoise and acid yellow against a palette of soft grey-green neutrals. 'Brutus' sofas from Lounge (www.lounge.net.au) and two vintage Danish armchairs from Glory Design in Sydney's Redfern are grouped in a sociable circle before the Jetmaster fireplace, above which hangs a striking wooden carving of a deer's head from Orson & Blake. "Because it's a country home, we wanted to bring in a rustic element," says Sarah.

DEN {bottom right} With a skilful layering of old and new, the treasure-filled den feels as if it's been decorated over a period of many years; a modern B&B Italia sofa from Space is matched with a '50s wing chair from Mitchell Road Antiques & Design Gallery and an antique filing cabinet from Doug Up On Bourke, complete with its original alphabetical labels. "The kids adore it; it hides all their toys," says Sarah. >





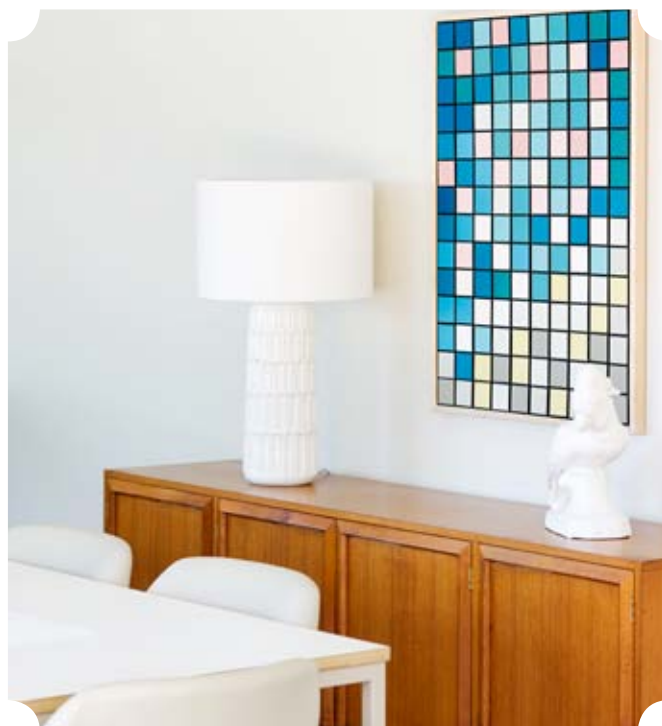


< Sarah and Craig are both fans of colour; the tones were almost too subdued for their taste, which in their city house runs to bold greens, reds and blues, but they realised it was important not to overwhelm the spectacular, panoramic views of rolling hills and distant ocean. Recognising the couple's willingness for a gutsy gesture, Brett used deeper tones from the same natural palette in the den and in a feature wall in the living room. For added zing, he introduced surprising pops of yellow and turquoise in small-scale accessories, which he's matched to the vibrant colours of a photograph on the living room wall.

For a house that was brand-spanking new when Sarah and Craig started holidaying here with their three small children, it feels surprisingly rich in character, as if generations of the same family had been coming here for decades. It's an effect Brett deliberately set out to achieve by sourcing many old photographs and vintage objects to mix in with the new. Best of all, he achieved it without great expense. "The biggest restriction we put on him was the budget," says Sarah.

As it happens, Brett worked their modest budget so cleverly that they even bought a luxury B&B Italia sofa (spotted on sale by Brett) without blowing it. "There are key pieces you shouldn't compromise on," advises Brett, "like sofas, dining chairs and mattresses. With the rest, you can get the look for less – I used a ton of inexpensive and vintage pieces."

The result is a holiday home that has become the hub of this family's social world. "We have almost stopped having people over at our city home," Sarah laughs. "This house works so well with friends. I love having people here. It's a place where you can really relax. It's magic."



DINING ROOM {opposite} The dining room is conveniently kid-proof, with smart 'Hobnob' chairs from Sebel upholstered in wipe-down vinyl and a durable commercial-grade rug from Webber's Carpet Warehouse under the Koskela dining table. "We have quite a few friends with young children and entertaining at home is easy for us," says Sarah. Accessories are simple and striking, including black metal antler candlesticks from HFOC, a colourful artwork by friend and interior designer Brett Mickan and a '60s ceramic lamp from Mao & More, which sits atop a handsome retro sideboard {bottom right} from Mitchell Road Antiques & Design Gallery.

KITCHEN {top} The streamlined galley kitchen is a dream workspace for a keen entertainer, with a long island bench facing out to the dining area and room for four stools – bought from Globe West – enabling guests to chat to the cook. The doorway leads to a vast pantry and cellar, in a space excavated underneath the bedrooms, which hides the fridge and supplies for impromptu weekend feasts. >



BEDROOM {above} To make the modest-sized master bedroom feel luxurious, designer Brett used a lavish array of tactile fabrics in subtle neutral tones, with pattern appearing in small feature cushions in Meridian 'Malachite' fabric from Mokum. An oversized headboard in hard-wearing B. Berger polyester from Ascraft adds a sense of grand scale to the room, as do the generous drapes, which also provide important sound absorption. "There was a lot of echo in the house so the curtains make it feel cosy and help with sound," explains Sarah. Another clever touch is the pair of wall-mounted accordion lamps from Mitchell Road Antiques & Design Gallery, which save space by not cluttering the delicate side tables.

BATHROOM {opposite} Adding a hidden touch of luxury, the bathrooms all have under-floor heating. Simple, fluffy towels in white can work in any bathroom; a wooden Chinese stool from Lightstyle offers a rustic contrast to the sophisticated charcoal-and-white palette.

GUEST ROOM {left} The guest bedroom is an excellent example of how to achieve stylish design on a budget. Brett sourced vintage bedside tables from Claphams Furniture & Antiques, an inexpensive ceramic lamp from Transco and a designer-look clock radio from Hotel Products Direct, leaving enough to splash out on cushions in Etamine fabric from Mokum (for details, see page 109). >

A modern bathroom with a white vanity unit featuring two sinks and chrome faucets. A large mirror is mounted above the vanity. To the right is a white bathtub with a red fish-shaped towel ring. A wooden stool is in the foreground. The floor is dark grey tile. The walls are white with horizontal blinds on the windows.

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Inside story

Who lives here? Sarah, 37, a stay-at-home mum; her husband Craig, 40, who works in advertising; and their three children (pictured below, left to right), twins Chloe and Emma, two, and Oscar, three.

How do you keep your home stylish yet kid-friendly? Sarah: "We have vinyl chairs at the dining table because I wanted something easy to clean and practical. All the sofa fabrics are commercial-grade, so they're hard-wearing. To keep things organised, I've got three big baskets for toys which come out when we arrive."

Favourite spot? "Sitting by the fire and having a glass of wine has got to be one of my favourite things in the world."

What's your advice for staying within a budget? "If you have a small budget like we did, you should consult a designer, because they can maximise every dollar – they know where to find things. If we'd done it on our own, we would probably only have had time to go to one store and the place wouldn't look nearly as good."

Biggest splurge? "Above the lounge is a limited-edition photo of flamingos taking off from a lake, *Flamingo Lake, Kenya* by Michael Poliza (page 102). We wanted a landscape there and we both loved this photo and the colours."

Your favourite feature? "One thing that makes me happy is knowing that this is a very 'green' house. There are low-energy light bulbs, solar heating, tank water and recycled greywater in the toilets. We feel good about that."



TERRACE Blue ceramic dogs from Mao & More welcome guests out onto the terrace, where they can lounge by the pool in teak outdoor chairs from Globe West.



EXTERIOR {right} With its soft grey exterior and terraced design, the house nestles unobtrusively into the hillside, making the most of the site's bush views.

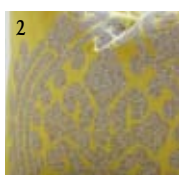
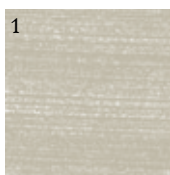
KIDS' ROOM {below} The children's room was intentionally designed to suit the children as they grow, so the key furnishings are neutral, with toddler touches restricted to inexpensive and easy to remove items, such as a framed poster from Ikea and toile-style cowboy cushions from House of France in Camden.



"I love having PEOPLE HERE. IT'S A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN REALLY RELAX. IT'S MAGIC"



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colour & materials

1 Living room paint Try Eggshell Acrylic paint in Sable, \$39/litre, Porter's Paints.

2 Cushion fabric Etamine 'Daphnis' fabric in Colour 785, from \$440/metre, Mokum.

3 Den paint Try Eggshell Acrylic paint in half-strength Promenade, \$37/litre, Porter's Paints. [Stockists, page 204](#)
Due to the printing process, actual colours may vary.

CONTACTS: Brett Mickan Interior Design, call (02) 9690 0053 or visit www.bmid.com.au.

we love

nature-inspired hues >

Designer Brett Mickan has used seven different paint shades on the walls, choosing gentle earth tones that blend seamlessly with the landscape outside and subtly change with the shifting sunlight and shadow throughout the day. He says the secret when mixing so many shades is to "make sure the colours all have the same intensity." He explains, "It's like a ghost gumtree; there are grey beiges, greeny beiges, grey blues and other bleached tones. By mixing so many different neutral tones, it works. Nature does it all the time."

