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This is the life

"The house works well for us, mainly because everyone has their own space," says Melissa. Well-considered storage – for shoes, schoolbags, football boots and everything else – makes the daily schedule run as smoothly as possible, while the comfortably appointed rooms ensure downtime ease. In winter, a choice of four functioning open fires makes the home cosier; in summer, the retiled pool is a major drawcard.



Sand castle

A grand 19th-century home honours the past while setting up a rosy future for this Sydney family.

STORY *Rosa Senese* | STYLING *Kayla Gex* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Marée Homer*

FEATURE TREES & PLANTS

Magnolia grandiflora
Camellia sasanqua
Crassula succulents
Box (*Buxus*) hedging
Clivia

TERRACE (from left) Miller, Will and Harrison play around the pool with cavoodle Luna; behind them is a tree-fringed view of Lane Cove River.

'Fred' table, Jordan; Outdoor chairs, Town & Country Style. **VERANDAH** Owner Melissa and Luna at the side entrance of the 1876 sandstone residence, shaded by a mature magnolia. Pitcher, Wheel & Barrow. **Smart buy:** For similar urn, try the 'Terrain' urn, \$160, Provincial Home Living. ▶



You might expect an age-hallowed landmark to inspire reverential, hushed tones beneath its lofty ceilings. Instead, Cleverton rings with the laughter of children and the delighted barks of their canine companion. This 19th-century property on Sydney's north shore is no museum piece; it's a living, functioning home, where owners Melissa and Darren have created an idyllic lifestyle for themselves and their children Laila, 12, Harrison, 11, Miller, nine, and Will, seven.

For the couple, this majestic house - an iconic example of 1870s Sydney sandstone architecture that's been used in a number of advertising campaigns - was an answered prayer when they first inspected it in 2013. "We were looking for a home with more room for our family to grow into, more space to be with friends, and personal space, too," says Melissa. "We also wanted to have our own 'grown-up area', somewhere that wasn't overrun with toys, and where Darren and I would be in charge of the sound system and noise level."

Although the house was unlivable at the time, with an overgrown garden and a pool in bad shape, the couple were seduced by its huge rooms, character, heritage features, green surrounds and lofty views over the Lane Cove River from the terraced rear garden. "It definitely ticked all our boxes as far as style, era, size and ►

CASUAL DINING "Melissa wanted a low-maintenance table that could accommodate drop-in guests, says designer Brett Mickan. "And the full-length banquette fits a pile of children." The banquette and vintage Paul Kafka chairs are upholstered in family-friendly vinyl. Pendant lights, HG Furniture. Artwork by Melissa Egan. **FAMILY ROOM** Comfy seating and a warm palette distinguish this informal space. 'Quadrant Soft' modular sofa, Kaskela. 'Oscar' armchairs and 'Dan' rug, Jordan. 'Phoenix' coffee table, Urban Couture Design+Homewares. Designer Boys whale print, Boyd Blue. **KITCHEN** Cabinetry updated with new paintwork in Dulux Charcoal Light. Antique bronze-finish handles from Chippendale Restorations. Original oak flooring.



Finishing touch

In the formal living room, items from different eras create an impression of organic evolution over time. "When the house was originally furnished, the main room would have held a collection of the owners' best pieces," says designer Brett Mickan. "My aim was to emulate that and create a collection of mismatched pieces to form a beautiful whole." It's now a favourite relaxation spot for Melissa and Darren.



FORMAL LIVING *this page and opposite top* "The impressive scale of this space, the ample light and water view allowed me to wash the walls in deep blue," says Brett. Vintage chairs from Our Space Interiors covered in textiles from South Pacific Fabrics and leather from Pelle Leathers. 'Tribute' coffee table, Zuster. Custom rug, Tappeti Fine Handcrafted Rugs+Carpets. Artworks over mantel by Michael Danner. Brett describes the dog portrait, which he found in an antiques centre, as "the perfect mix of tradition and humour". Floor lamp; Hub Furniture. **Design classic:** Eichholtz 'La Perla' curved sofa, \$6065, James Said. **STUDY** Traditional cabinetry and Louis XV-style chairs are juxtaposed with a modern smoked-glass desk and Missoni Home textiles. Lamp: HG Furniture.



location," says Melissa. The privacy of the parents' bedroom and retreat, with the children's rooms in a contemporary east-wing addition on the other side of the house, sealed the deal.

To make the house feel truly theirs, the owners turned to interior designer Brett Mickan, with whom they'd built up a trusting relationship on previous projects. Starting with practical matters - painting, refinishing floorboards, renovating the two ensuites and retiling the pool - he proceeded to refurbish and refresh the entire house. The interiors now complement the age and charm of the house, while addressing modern-day needs.

From the front door, a mud room and adjacent banks of storage (with thoughtful features such as a designated hook for each child's schoolbag) make for smooth comings and goings. "It goes a long way to controlling chaos if you design spaces that organise and store the trappings of family life," Brett advises.

The central hallway divides the ground floor into formal and casual zones. On one side are the original bay-windowed dining and living spaces; on the other, a family room, dining space and kitchen. A study, guestroom, laundry and bathroom make up the centre of the layout and, at the back, an inviting sunroom looks out to the pool and river view beyond. One set of stairs leads up to the parents' suite in the west wing, the other to the ►





children's bedrooms and living space, with an ensuite for Laila and a shared bathroom for the boys.

Brett's richly layered and elegantly eclectic decor mirrors this progression in mood and style from formal to fun, and from historic to contemporary. "The palette on the formal side is sophisticated, with dark walls and luxurious furniture and fabrics," he explains. On the other side, signalled by the change from herringbone parquet to broad oak floorboards, the mood is laidback and quirky. "It's a more casual vibe, with sandstone-coloured paint, modular furniture and banquette seating."

The result is a magnificent home that's all things to all ages. "With Brett's guidance, we have a beautiful home we're proud of," says Melissa. "It's the ideal mix of luxury and comfort - a home to be lived in and enjoyed." **H&G Brett Mickan Interior Design, Enmore, NSW; (02) 9550 2706 or bmid.com.au.**

MAIN BEDROOM Luxe textiles establish an air of deep calm in the west wing. Ligne Roset 'Ruche' armchair, Domo, Rug, Kulchi. Vintage lamp sourced in Palm Springs. **MAIN ENSUITE** "I took great pains to select a marble to work with the mantel in the main bedroom," says Brett. Cabinetry by Intercraft. Vanity surface in Rosso Daniel marble from Granite & Marble Works. Vintage stool, Retro on Regent. **LAILA'S ROOM** The loft hideaway is a childhood dream come true. 'Ned' sofa, Jordan, Rug, Ivy Lane. Wall in Dulux Basic Coral. **Local hero:** Feliz 'Sprinkle Sprinkle' quilt cover in Gold, from \$180, Lilly & Lolly. *For Where to Buy, see page 190.*

THE PALETTE

Roxo Daniel
marble
(ensuite)

Parquetry
flooring
(formal rooms)

Dulux Benang
(formal living)

THE LAYOUT

