

# Sam Marshall + Liane Rossler A sense of optimism

The year 2000 was a milestone for the owners of this house in Queens Park, Sydney. Architect Sam Marshall had just received a Wilkinson Award from the Australian Institute of Architects (NSW Chapter) for his former home, a converted warehouse built with architect Drew Heath. It was also the year he married Liane Rossler, designer and a founding partner of Dinosaur Designs. And, at the end of 2000, their daughter Lana (now thirteen) was born. 'It was a big year for us,' says Rossler, whose family was joined a couple of years later by Scarlet (now ten).

Prior to their marriage, Marshall was living in a warehouse and Rossler was in an apartment. They both wanted to start a family and were keen to have a larger home with a garden. Rossler came across this brown brick Californian bungalow from the 1930s. The original front windows had been replaced by aluminum sliding windows and the interior had been given a faux Victorian fit-out, including arches and flocked wallpaper in the hallway. While these changes made little impression on them, it was the north-facing garden complete with swimming pool that caught their eye. They were particularly captivated by the large 1950s two-level addition to the rear of the home, with its distinctive wrought-iron balcony. 'Liane and I have always had a passion for the modern aesthetic of the 1950s. At that time, there was a sense of optimism with people wanting to build a new future,' says Marshall.

As well as a deep, north-facing rear garden, the home was close to Queens Park. The site is also flat (which would allow for further expansion) and there was rear access, which would accommodate off-street car parking. 'When Liane showed me the [marketing] brochure, I could see the potential without having seen it [the house],' says Marshall.

Opposite  
The home's façade has been reworked with concrete columns to create a 'forest of trees'.



Below  
The living area opens to a generous terrace and swimming pool via sliding glass doors.

Opposite  
The home's rear elevation has only been lightly touched.

Although there were few heritage controls in the municipality, with the local council encouraging diversity in housing styles, their preference was then for pitched roofs, rather than flat ones. To convince the council that a flat roof (the one the couple had in mind) wouldn't detract from the area, Marshall produced an aerial survey, showing the extent of flat roofs in the neighbourhood. 'They could appreciate our argument and consented,' says Marshall, who had plans to remove the pitched roof at the front of the house and make it flat, like the roof on the rear 1960s addition.

The interior of the Queens Park house was completely reworked. Walls were removed to open up spaces. The 1970s spiral staircase, occupying a northern corner of the former living room, was also removed and, instead, a new enclosed staircase was designed. And, while some walls were removed to increase light, other walls, previously with windows, were filled in to accommodate the couple's large collection of art and objects. 'I wanted to turn the house around to the rear garden, using skylights and light wells to increase the natural light,' says Marshall.

Previously, the house turned its back on the rear garden and pool. However, this formed the main attraction. So what were once disjointed kitchen and living areas are now one open-plan space, with the galley-style kitchen particularly nestled in one corner. 'We spend most of our time in this area, so it was critical that this space felt right,' says Marshall.

With the couple's great interest in gardens and outdoor spaces, both front and back gardens were redesigned. The front garden, previously an old-fashioned rose garden, was planted with eucalypts as in the neighbouring homes. Native grasses, as well as a new garden path, also set up a less direct line to the front door. And, in the rear garden, what was a lawn is now one large vegetable garden. However, as well as being a productive garden, with vegetables and a variety of citrus trees, there's also vibrant colour and fragrance from the frangipani trees bordering the swimming pool. 'In summer, the frangipanis provide shade,' says Rossler.

As well as planting out the garden with vegetables and citrus trees, Marshall designed a double garage with studio along the rear boundary. With cement-rendered walls and clad in cypress, this structure veils a neighbouring home. 'We're continually walking between the kitchen and garden at meal times, whether it's picking vegetables or getting herbs,' says Rossler, who also can reach out from the back door and pick herbs from a large concrete planter. And, rather than having a barbecue at the end of the garden, like the herb planter, there's a barbecue set in concrete immediately outside the kitchen door. 'I made all the concrete in the garden,' says Marshall, who also points out a concrete bench alongside the pool.





The kitchen is just as pragmatic. A 9 m (29½ ft) long laminate bench and cupboards extends the width of the combined kitchen and dining area. And, to ensure some privacy in the kitchen and screen any dishes, the kitchen is partially enclosed at one end. 'We can "plate up" in the dining area, yet still prepare meals without heads looking over shoulders,' says Rossler. However, unusual to this kitchen is also the glass window directly behind the stove, allowing a direct sight line into the adjoining living area, with its television set. 'This window was particularly useful when the girls were young and I wanted to keep an eye on them,' says Rossler. However, having the cooking and preparation area discreetly out of view also allows the cook to feel part of any dinner party.

One of the most striking features of the open-plan kitchen and dining space is the continuous shelf illuminated behind Perspex. The vases, ceramics and objects, including coral and dolls, are all in tones of white and cream. Many of these pieces were designed by Rossler over many years with Dinosaur Designs. A similar colour palette was achieved with the Mondrian-inspired cupboards in the dining area. The five different tones of laminate not only activate the wall, but also cleverly indicate the function behind each cupboard door. As well as a broom cupboard, with the appropriate dimensions, there is a cocktail cabinet. 'The idea was to make finding things that much easier. You can see quite easily that this cupboard contains a broom, just from the cupboard size,' says Marshall. And, while this wall of joinery is relatively neutral in tone, there are nooks of colourful objects and art, including work by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, as well as by artist Gemma Smith. Just as delightful is a sculptural work by artist 'Tip & Pop', a wondrous set in a glass dome. 'I'm attracted to artists

who have a unique way of looking at things. There's usually a certain "quirk", says Rossler. 'Each room tends to focus on a different collection,' she adds.

To accommodate the collection of art in the living area, Marshall removed windows and created continuous walls. All this seems at odds with the way many architects would operate. Marshall more than compensated by adding new glass and aluminium sliding doors to the patio. Further light was also introduced by a light well set behind a living room wall. And, rather than break up the art collection, the one continuous wall in the living room holds works by Rosalie Gascoigne, Brent Harris, Louise Weaver, Peter Atkins and photographer Bill Henson.

The art diminishes the presence of the television screen in the living room, which functions as a multi-purpose space. 'It's not a precious space. We move the lounge suites [designed by MAP] depending on the use. And if we're entertaining, the credenza acts as an extension of the dining table,' says Rossler.

While the objects and art displayed in the home are colourful, there is generally an absence of colour, with white walls predominating. However, one exception is the bathroom, adjacent to the living areas. Apart from the walls, everything else is new, including windows, tiles and wall-to-wall mirrors. Coral resin tiles, designed by Rossler, extend to the floors. 'They're not cold underfoot, like many stone floors. And the colour is brilliant,' says Rossler. And, while Rossler and Marshall aren't into 'glitz', they see a place for reflective surfaces in places such as bathrooms. 'Mirrors increase the size of a relatively small space, as well as reflecting light,' says Marshall, who included a continuous stainless steel rack to hold everything from towels to a toilet roll holder at one end.

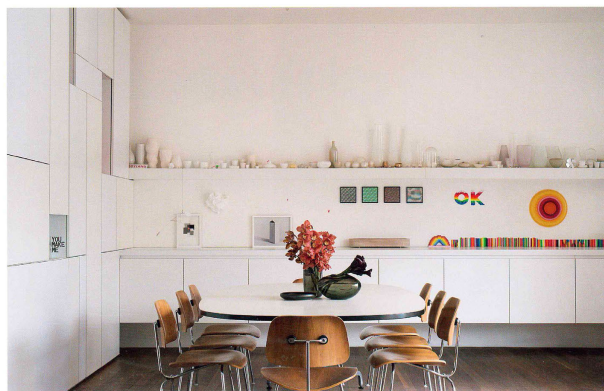


**Above Left**  
The gallery-style kitchen leads to the garden, with pots of herbs at the back door.

**Left**  
The alcove containing the hotplates includes a window to the garden.

**Opposite Above**  
The wall of the lounge is brimming with treasured paintings and drawings.

**Opposite Below**  
The shelves are filled with glassware and objects from Dinosaur Designs.





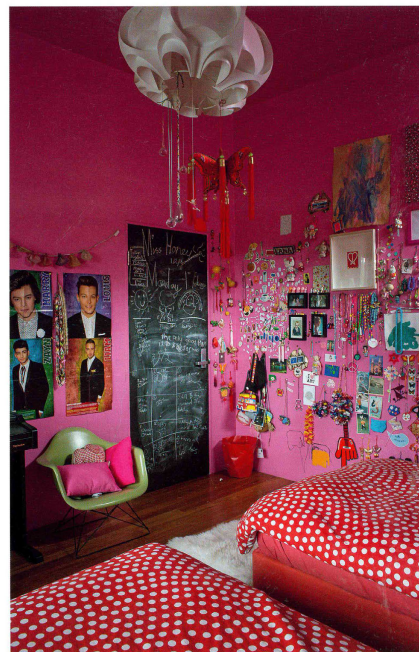
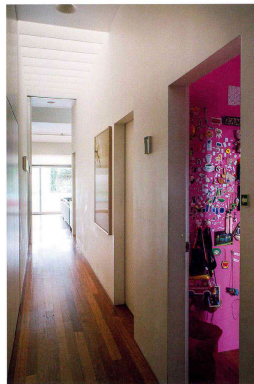
Above  
The family bathroom features orange resin tiles on both floor and walls.

Also exceptional to the lack of colour on walls is the girls' bedroom, which they share, leaving the adjacent bedroom as their walk-in wardrobes. The fuchsia pink walls are literally laden with objects, pictures, beads and keepsakes. And, to ensure almost anything can be attached, below the painted surface is a magnetic coating. 'It's like one giant notice board,' says Rossler, who assisted her daughters in the composition. As well as the inexpensive, there is art by John Coburn, Rosemary Laing and Melinda Harper. Striped painted shoeboxes, in the vein of Harper, fill in the few remaining gaps. Down the track, they may want separate rooms, but at present it seems to work,' says Rossler.

While the door to the girls' bedroom is usually left open, the door to the main bedroom on the other side of the hallway is concealed in a wall of joinery. 'The idea is that you don't notice there's a bedroom as you walk past to the living areas,' says Rossler.

One of the most significant changes made by Marshall was the façade and entrance to the home. As well as removing the pitched roof to allow for a recent addition on the first floor, Marshall created a 'veil' of concrete columns outside the front windows. This provides security as well as creating a more Brutalist 1960s style to the home. These columns also frame the front entrance, with the concrete blades creating a sense of arrival.

Marshall also provided a sense of arrival before the rooms leading to the studio, located on one side, was part of the 1960s addition. Once the spiral staircase leading to this space was removed, there was more room to display art, as well as providing a self-contained space. 'I have only made slight modifications to this space,' says Marshall, pointing out the timber screen on the terrace.



Above Left  
The central passage to the living areas borrows light from above.

Above Right  
The childrens' bedroom shows the artistic genes at work.



**Above Left**  
A collection of woven baskets creates a large art installation in the first-floor lounge.

**Above Right**  
The upstairs lounge also doubles as a creative space for both parents and children.

**Below**  
The living area on the first floor leads to a terrace, which overlooks the back garden.

**Opposite**  
Indigenous art and sculptures are beautifully displayed in the first-floor living area.



'I wanted privacy from neighbours as well as sun protection,' he adds. The studio/second living area is a creative retreat for both parents and children, with the large table often covered with models and paper. 'We call this the tribal room,' says Rossler, referring to the extensive artefacts from Australia, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

The most recent addition to the home has been the three office spaces located upstairs at the front. Recycled plywood-lined ceilings, with fireglass squares cut in, allow for continuous but filtered light and, at night, these apertures glow with artificial light. All three rooms contain built-in desks and day beds, with each offering views of the established gum trees in the front garden through large picture windows.

Among the most memorable features in the home is the built-in display case/wall, located in the children's playroom (part of the recent addition). Set behind glass walls and displayed on glass shelves are rows of dolls, with each shelf telling a different story. Borrowing light from a concealed skylight, these dolls, along with small precious objects, add a wonderful dimension to the space. 'The girls are artistic but, in this instance, Liane was actively involved,' says Marshall.

The three upstairs rooms, currently used as two home offices and a playroom/study area for the girls, could change down the track. 'They could be used as bedrooms or anything else that's missing in the future,' says Marshall.

This house is as much about the art, objects and artefacts as it is about the architecture. The lines between the two are finely intertwined, with the strong signatures of all living here clearly stamped on every surface. 'It's still a great place to live in. We're continually reminded of how we've grown into the house,' adds Marshall, pointing out the girls' pencil markers next to the back door showing their heights over the years. 'It's a home that will continually evolve,' he adds.



Left  
The main corridor is relatively pared back.



Above Left  
The timber staircase leads to a series of work areas, which are used by both parents and children.

Above Right  
Every wall has been touched with a creative hand.





left  
The children's work and play area on  
the first floor.

Opposite  
An ingenious wall system designed to  
display dolls, both exotic and cheeky.

