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FINAL CALL
OUR INTERIOR DESIGN AWARDS CLOSING SOON!

FRESH HORIZONS

The *beach* may be at the *doorstep* of this relaxed *Sydney* home, but big-city *sophistication* is never far away.

Photographs NICK WATT Words CHRIS PEARSON Styling STEVE CORDONY



This page The relaxed, yet urbane, aesthetic is apparent the minute you walk in the door – this dining area sits behind a steel screen right beside the entry. Garavani 'Gray 25' dining chairs and ClassCon 'Seiame' pendant lights from Anibou. Artwork by Chris Langlois. Opposite page The oceanside setting greatly influences the interiors, but the home's designers stress that this is not a beach house.



This page With its natural palette and abundant texture, the main living room draws its inspiration from the sea. ClassiCon 'Euvira' rocking chair from Anibou. B&B Italia 'Xilos' coffee table from Space. Gubi Bestlite 'BL3' floor lamp from Cult. Bowl from Planet. Spirit Woman sculpture on table by Tracey Deep. Opposite page A steel partition, by Skyrange, separates the dining area from the front door. Gervasoni 'Gray 23' dining chairs and ClassiCon 'Selene' pendants from Anibou.

Coastal cool meets city smart in this home on Sydney's North Shore – while it's relaxed and laidback, good style never puts its feet up. Nestled among gum trees and just a stone's throw from sand and sea water, this sanctuary still remains firmly connected to the city.

While renting nearby for a couple of years, the owners had fixed their sights on this winding street overlooking the harbour. A hidden enclave few Sydneysiders know about, "It's the only place I wanted to be," says the owner, who lives in this four-bedroom house with her husband and their two teenagers.

"You have access to the beach and it's an oasis, yet you are so close to city amenities." The family waited for 18 months until they found this property at the bottom of a steep hill. While the location ticked all the boxes, its ocean-hugging position was squandered by a three-level 1970s house with absurdly small windows that shunned the view.

In a year-long project, from June 2013, they called on interior designer Justine Hugh-Jones of Justine Hugh-Jones Design and architect Ben Vitale of Vitale Design to realise their vision for a "home for a family of four, a sophisticated seaside home, but not a beach house," says Ben emphatically.

The duo razed the top two levels while retaining the lower level. Justine and Ben worked in tandem on each step of the process, with Justine's choices informing Ben's and vice versa. "The exterior is inspired by the interior, so it's designed inside out," says Ben. "A house has to take on so many different uses for its inhabitants. It has to work for all of them, so that approach makes perfect sense."

Throughout, too, there's a constant dialogue between sea and city. "We chose materials that worked with the site, that would fit in with the harbourside aesthetic and the Australian landscape with its gum trees, but not look like a holiday home," says Justine. "Materials had to withstand the elements, be casual, yet also premium."

Hence the schmick zinc roof, left to weather naturally, and the shingle cladding on the top storey. "Weatherboards would have been too beach house," says Ben. "The shingles give a softer touch." Those exterior cues echo the interiors, which boast a "pared-back aesthetic, with raw materials, clean lines and a muted, neutral palette. We wanted an appealing home with softer materials and classic tones," says Justine.

Influences inside and out include the US east coast Cape Cod look, combined with modern Belgium, says Justine. Layered onto that is the earthy, yet urbane, style of Dutch designer Piet Boon. Justine showed the owner a book on his work, which gave clues to the direction she wanted to go. "His style is organic, with lots of timber and natural products, but we also wanted something a bit more cosy," says the owner.

Inside, think limewashed American oak floors, natural stone, V-joints with wide boards, grasscloth wallpapers, white subway tiles, leather drawer pulls, brass and copper hardware. The result is sophisticated, yet relaxed and warm, too. And the furniture consists of classics with sculptural, flowing profiles, often with a crafted feel.

You enter on the living levels, with a dining area to the right and a rear sitting room beyond that ("it's our cosy room," says the owner). To the left, are the living area, the kitchen, informal dining with built-in banquette and study space. Up the stairs are three bedrooms, while the

"I LIKE THE WAY ALL THE SPACES CONNECT, BUT ALSO HOW THEY ARE DISTINCT ZONES."

This page A banquette, designed by Justine, creates a cosy family nook at one side of the kitchen and open-plan living area. Hay 'About A Stool (AAS 32)' stools from Cult. Jo Bertini artwork from Olsen Irwin. *Night Sky* wall sculpture by Tracey Deep Floral Sculptures. Brass bowl from Planet Furniture.



lower level comprises guest room, home gym and garage. "I like the way all the spaces connect, but also how they are distinct zones. It all flows so well," says Justine. Sight lines extend from one end of the house to the other and up into the upper bedroom level, creating an airiness and spaciousness throughout. Banks of windows on the northern and eastern facades reinforce the indoor-outdoor connection, as does the palette of earthy natural colours and the abundant texture.

"It's a very relaxed palette that draws the eye outside, towards the gum trees and the water, rather than being focused inside," says Ben.

The exception is in the second living area at the rear (the "cosy room"), overlooking the garden. "We wanted it more layered and intimate," says Justine. "It has a richer, deeper palette, with more pattern."

As well as that nature-meets-urban aesthetic throughout, pops of colour and a dash of the unexpected are introduced through large-scale artworks – but always in harmony. "You can do something quirky and unexpected, but it also has to be easy to live with," says Justine.

Easy good style is what this home is all about. "It's comfortable and contemporary, but also classic and elegant."

"It's a city home, but you don't feel you need to wear shoes," adds Ben. For more go to justinebughones.com; vitaldesign.com.au.



This page Busnelli 'Arpège' armchairs from FY2K in a small sitting area in the open plan. Oly Studio 'Pipa' coffee table from Coco Republic. Beni Ourain rug from Kulchi. Copper planter from Garden Life. Opposite page, clockwise from top The main bedroom is a favourite spot. Seagrass wallpaper from Ascrafit. Kelly Wearstler vase from Becker Minty. Rug from Kulchi. Painting by Guy Maestri from Olsen Irwin. In the main ensuite, joinery by Justine. Painting by Gria Shead. Bath from ACS Designer Bathrooms. Wall lights from 1stdibs.



SPEED READ

» When the owners bought this site on Sydney's North Shore, it was occupied by a 1970s house with a poor connection to its location. » They asked interior designer Justine Hugh-Jones and architect Ben Vitale to design them a house which better used the site. » They demolished the top two storeys and built this home, which pays homage to both its seaside location and its city setting. » Classic and contemporary, it draws inspiration from Cape Cod style and Belgian and Dutch modern in its warm, natural palette and use of texture, together with premium materials and clean lines.