

# Winning spaces

By Stephen Todd.

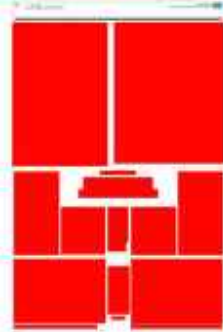
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### DESIGN INTERIORS

Looking for a home refresh? These women have the know-how, writes **Stephen Todd**.

**Decorators have been** given short shrift these past few decades, relegated to the realm of mere “cushion fluffers”. But a new generation of interior wizards is merrily adopting the mantle – and clients are queuing up to have their homes refreshed without all the hassle of rebuilding.

Amelda Wilde studied architecture but found herself “obsessed with the micro-moments” that make up a room.

“When I worked in architecture, everyone was all about skyscrapers and stadiums and so forth, and very dismissive of interior design, let alone decoration,” she says. “But I was getting very excited about door handles and tables and curtains.”

So two years ago, she launched her eponymous studio, which won the Residential Decoration category at the Australian Interior Design Awards in June for the Von Leach residence, her own 100-year-old home in Geelong, Victoria.

“I bought this little old cottage and it was just so full of Disney vibes, like a fairy tale, so I decided to exaggerate that a bit.”

That means walls covered in elaborately patterned William Morris wallpaper

and hung with rich oil paintings. And a bedroom draped in richly roused linen curtains that puddle lushly onto shag pile carpet. A hallway retains its original timber wainscoting (“I just love being able to read the traces of former life”), set off by an ornately turned tiny timber chair, placed to emphasise the fantasy aspect of the interiors.

In the living room, an enormous, low-slung 1970s French sofa has been re-covered in mustard velvet and fringed with silk cord. An iconic Mah Jong piece from the design-forward French furniture maker Roche Bobois, it was falling apart when Wilde found it.

“So, I created a new metal base to add a crispness then strategically chose tassels that were too long so they’d puddle on the floor and give it a more weathered feel.”

Her approach, she says, is about chasing opposites. “It’s always this sort of cat and mouse game I’m playing, to create interiors that are full of life.”

Former stylist turned interior decorator Simone Haag describes what she does this way: “If you turn your house upside down,

what falls out is what I offer.” By which she means her remit covers anything that’s not structural.

“Carpeting, wall and window treatments, sculptural lighting all form

part of my design vernacular, but I definitely don’t purport to be an interior designer. And I have no desire to start drawing up bathrooms, dealing with builders and all that kind of jazz.”

Instead, she teams up with architects early in the design process, like she did on a recently completed house in Melbourne’s South Yarra, a highly sculptural structure of concrete, steel, glass and stone by Pandolfini Architects.

“The house is hugely architectural, and my job was to soften it a little, to round out some of the edges while still honouring the architecture,” says Haag, who was shortlisted for an AIDA gong.

She did that by placing luxuriously felted furniture in the terrazzo-floored entryway and adding sumptuous textile hangings to metal walls. Rugs are conspicuously deep-piled, even waffled; seating is plushly upholstered, sometimes flamboyantly shaggy. Even the bar stools have ultra-plump leather cushions and padded backrests.

In the main bedroom, a handsome bed base and head are made of lavishly pleated suede.

“It’s all about layering the feminine over the masculine, about softening hard lines with voluminous fabrics while still keeping a strong sculptural aspect to the interior,” says Haag.

She applied a similar strategy to the interiors of Sydney’s Capella hotel – opened last year – softening its monumental baroque sandstone aspect with colourful and textured wall hangings, sculptural seating artfully arrayed and plush oriental carpets placed to delineate intimate spaces. Clusters of vases, sculptures and assorted objects keep the eye moving.

So successful has the design been, Capella Hotels and Resorts has asked Haag to weave her magic at its new Singapore establishment, due to open to guests later this year.

“When we walked through the space, it was still a construction site, so we had

to look at all the elevations and try to imagine what was going to go where, how the shelves might be and so forth. But we couldn’t specify pieces with any certainty. We just had to go with this sense of intuition that it would all work out.”

Once the shopping was done, “we unpacked everything in a massive function space and had to let it all fall together. It was like a giant game of Tetris,” Haag says.

For interior designer Yasmine Ghoniem of YSG Studio, decoration “adds the sweet-spot moments” in rooms by creating “layers of personality through texture, colour and pattern”.

YSG, which has been included in *Architectural Digest’s* AD100 list of top interior design studios, has begun offering what Ghoniem calls a curation service for people who want “a home refresh without the stress and inconvenience of building”.

“We’re all about encouraging people to express their personality, so what emerges is a signature sanctuary that blends cherished pieces with fresh decoration. Imagine turning your house upside down, shaking it up and re-filling it with sparks of magic.”

Vintage pieces, she points out, make “great conversational pieces”. And everything from decorative lighting through to thoughtful tableware and extra-special bed linen should be “all killer, no filler”.

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Above from left: Simone Haag and the terrazzo-floored entry of the South Yarra house; Amelda Wilde and her own residence in Geelong; Yasmine Ghoniem and a Sydney penthouse bedroom.

PHOTOS: LILLIE THOMPSON, CRICKET SALEH



The South Yarra house by architects Pandolfini, with interiors by Simone Haag.



A 1970s French sofa reupholstered in plush velvet by Amelda Wilde. PHOTO: CRICKET SALEH



Rich colours offset a neutral palette in the penthouse project by YSG Studio.

**It's all about softening hard lines with voluminous fabrics while still keeping a strong sculptural aspect to the interior.**

Simone Haag