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Little by little

Over the course of five years, this Melbourne residence has turned the dial for elegant extravagance right up with no detail overlooked in the tailored and glamorous result.

By Annemarie Kiely Photographed by Anson Smart



OPPOSITE PAGE in the entrance hall of this palatial Melbourne home, French 19th-century Louis XV-style **chandelier** sourced in the US; marble **flooring** from Parthenon Marble; *Wisdom bust* by Emre Yusufi from Ransom Art Gallery; resin **sculpture** of face (circa 1970) (on floor) from Blend Interiors. *Details, last pages.*



THESE PAGES in the formal living room, Baxter Chester Moon sofa from Criteria; cushions by Emma Shipley; Man's Wing cognac and cigars bar (left) by Egli Design; Sori armchairs by Nina Seirafi from Ralph Pucci; Baxter Tebe side table from Criteria; Callia bronze draped chair by Kelly Wearstler; Smile chair by Studio Giancarlo Valle; Body coffee table by Chris Wolston from The Future Perfect; Curve sofa by Patrick Naggar from Ralph Pucci; side table by Vincenzo de Cotiis; Steinway & Sons piano; fireplace by Richard Ellis Design; curtains in Liberty London Faria Flowers fabric in Blackberry from South Pacific Fabrics; rug by Kelly Wearstler for The Rug Company.

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Asked to recount the when and where of this Melbourne mansion dropping into his design lap, architect Travis Walton thinks back to 2014 and one of those storied New York bars where fabulous creatures hold court and Old Fashioneds flow. He remembers a Midtown meeting with former clients and an introduction to their friends, Areti and Panagiotis, “two bons vivants in beautiful dress” who lit up the room and registered an interest in his work.

Walton recalls the first mutterings of a design commission being made with considerable understatement. “I’ve got a little project for you,” he whispers in imitation of Panagiotis’s broach to build a new house. “Yeah, we do little projects,” the architect adds in repeat of his own nonplussed presumption that it must be a minor enterprise.

The absurd undersell of said “little project” is now amplified by Walton’s dwarfed presence in the palatial foyer of its finished outcome — 2000 square metres built by Davies Henderson, premised on the BC classicism of Greek temples and the AD (Always Decorative) flamboyance of Gucci.

“This is five years of my life,” says the architect who has run the design equivalent of a marathon then been told to go again. “I just had to find the people who could realise my clients’ vision; travel all around the world looking for masters and their makings — Los Angeles, New York, all over Europe. It is literally one of the hardest things that I have ever done, but I’m coming out the other side.”

Declaring zero margin for error in details and materials that are no longer viable in residential architecture, Walton breaks down the 25 components concealed in the archways that stream passage from the ‘power’ entry into a field-size formal living room to the left, and a study styled with all the empirical grunt of Napoleon’s war room to the right.

Classicism is visibly probed through every peak period of the ‘ism’, from a façade defined by the giant Doric order to a foyer fizzing with floral-scroll mouldings in French Renaissance style, to an outer garden given all the manicured precision of Petit Trianon by landscape architect Jack Merlo.

The continuum of restrained historicism is overlaid with reflections of the current Zeitgeist. Imagine director Wes Anderson doing a remake of *Clash of the Titans* and you have its quirky dynamism; one that distils in the foyer-sited bust of Sophocles, whose blindfolding gives weight to his words: “Every man can see things far off but is blind to what is near.”

And what is near to Walton, as he gazes up to a stained-glass dome deserving of Tiffany Studios, through a supernova of crystals said to be the chandelier sourced from the sale of Hollywood producer Aaron Spelling’s home, is a standard of craftsmanship lost to a bygone world.

“That took six months to finesse on site,” says Walton of the flax-tinted glass dome with hand-painted roses that supposedly glow like Burmese rubies at night. “Little project, indeed.”

He notes the over-scale of brass casement windows and the curving sweep of a stair fit for the Élysée Palace in Paris and refutes all notion that little is subjective. This is ‘grand’ writ large with interlinking Gs across a mansion made for modern-day Greek gods. On cue, Aphrodite, who announces her mortal self as “Areti”, alights from her first-floor stratosphere to welcome all to her minor Mount Olympus.

Between plying food prepped by a chef who slips between a concealed service kitchen and its on-show counterpart — a monumental altar of stone and brass — Areti effuses about her four children and a love of fashion, “particularly Gucci”.

That love expresses with largesse in a first-floor boudoir that is off-the-charts big, fitted with banks of Gucci-filled cabinets and furnished with one-of-a-kind art and objects commissioned by the Italian fashion house in esteem of her patronage. Love? This is the sort of commitment to style that sustains couture, the dazzling emerald sequined manifestation of which drapes a dummy in the dressing-room corner.

Declaring it a love-at-first-sight dress, Areti imparts the story of its haute making, starting with Nicole Kidman’s red-carpet reveal of its counterpart at the 2017 Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards and ending with Gucci’s iridescent re-imagining of it for Areti to wear to her daughter’s wedding.

No, she will never be the poster girl for Normcore, but this woman’s intuitive grasp of the culture and the contradictions of ‘right now’ is bang on and built into every room by Walton who has materialised her wild vision into such goddess-worthy relic as a bath hewn from single-slab black stone.

Her home stands in holistic validation of the credo that fashion is more than just a good dress, as was declared by Gucci’s deified creative director Alessandro Michele in recent conversation with *Vogue*’s Hamish Bowles. “It’s a bigger reflection of history and social change and very powerful things,” he said. “If you want to produce something new, especially now, you need more languages.”

And those multi tongues talk with maximal fluency across the 20-metre-long landscape of a formal living room in which a “favourite” work by Russian arts collective AES+F, *The Feast of Trimalchio, Arrival of the Golden Boat* (2010), encodes the house-wide conviction that beauty no longer has limits or rules. This digitally collaged tableau, telling of the gluttonous trappings of wealth within a classical framework, informs all the colour, period clash and wry commentary that Walton and his design team have worked into wider furnishing and fine art. The polarity play of old and new, classical and digital, established and emerging, high-end and humorous speaks entirely to the couple’s provenance and personalities, which Areti rounds off as “fearless and fun”.

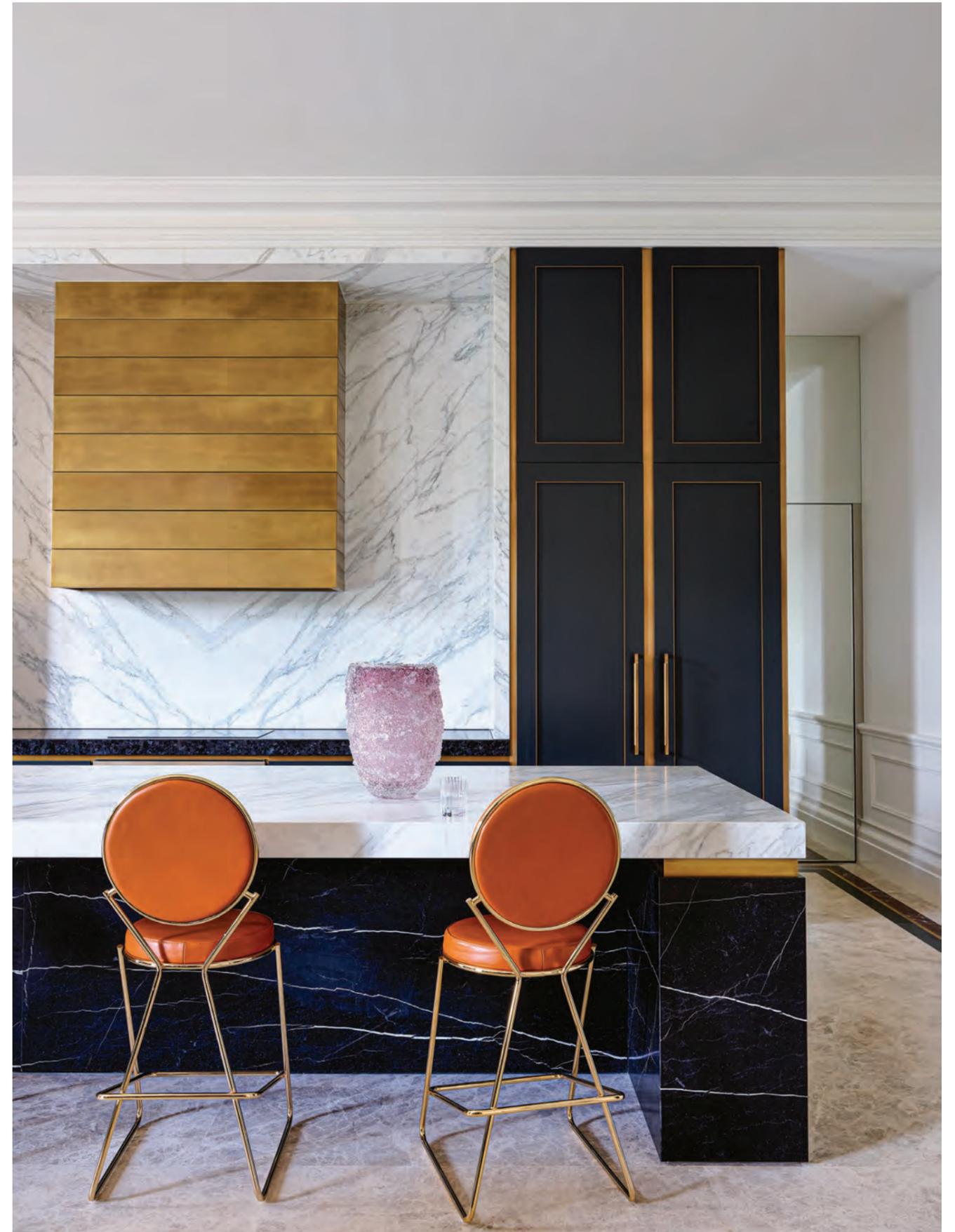
Feigning sympathy for the boredom that Walton “must be suffering now that the house is complete,” she laughs and looks to the architect for comment. He draws breath, then declares “that if another person walks through my office door and says they’ve got a little project, I’ll say ‘let me show you little.’” **VL**

traviswalton.com.au

OPPOSITE PAGE in a view of the entrance hall, Jaz console by Christophe Delcourt from Ondene; Trophee green vase by Pool, sourced in France; Lefka open scale vase by Claudia Frignani; stair runner by RC+D.



THIS PAGE in the family dining area, Minotti Lou dining table and Fil Noir dining chairs, all from Dedeece; Fractal cabinet by Patrick Naggar from Ralph Pucci; vase by Dalo from Galeria Riviera; curtains in Jean Paul Gaultier fabric from South Pacific Fabrics; custom Petra pendant light by Christopher Boots; *Tòrera 2* (2019) artwork by Borja Guijarro. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the kitchen, Moroso Double Zero stools from Hub Furniture; Granzioli X Collection vase by Fabio Maria Micucci for Ralph Pucci.





THIS PAGE in the main bedroom, Minotti Grand Jacques sofa from Dedecce; Arcolor coffee table from Poliform; Baxter Nepal chair (beside sofa) from Criteria; Moroso Redondo armchair by Patricia Urquiola from Hub Furniture; cushion from Gucci; 19th-century French marble pedestal and 19th-century Chinoiserie-style lamp; silk-viscose carpet from RC+D; Kathak artwork by Jai Vasicek from Fenton & Fenton. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the formal living room, antique console; Tornado vase by the Campana Brothers from Artemest; acid marble table lamp by Lee Broom from The Future Perfect, enquiries to Space Furniture; vase by John Booth; *The Feast of Trimalchio, Arrival of the Golden Boat* (2010) artwork by AES+F.





THIS PAGE in the ensuite, custom bath; Arflex Botolo armchair from Poliform; Venini Solum side table from Designstuff; chandelier made with vintage Murano glass from Castorina & Co; marble walls and flooring from Parthenon Marble. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in her dressing room, Areti wears Gucci; Canapé Alpha sofa by Pierre Paulin; curtains made in Dedar velvet fabric from South Pacific Fabrics; joinery by LWW Interiors; silk-viscose carpet from RC+D.

THIS PAGE in the garage, **flooring** by Alternative Surfaces.
OPPOSITE PAGE in the backyard, landscaped by Jack Merlo, **Otto chairs**
and **ottoman** by Paola Lenti from Dedecce. *Details, last pages.*

