

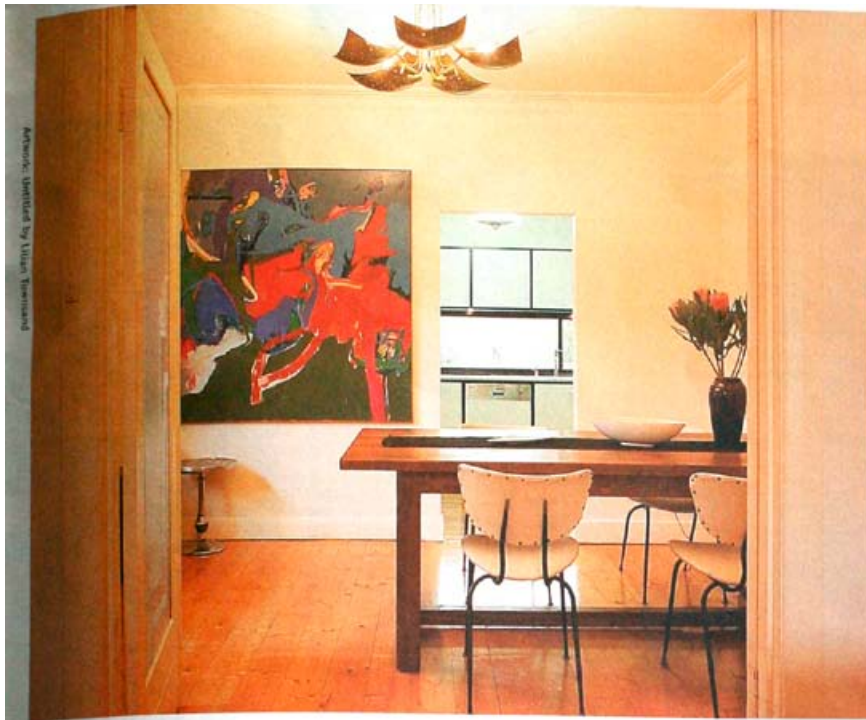
renovation



# Mondrian's way

Three's company as far as this colourful renovation of a 60-year-old property is concerned

Words Michelle Ainley Photography Mark Taylor



**T**his is the story of a house that took six decades to discover itself. And even then, it took two sympathetic owners and an interior designer with vision to free it of its stuffy exterior. Originally a 1940s weatherboard, then an ugly 1960s brick-veneer, owners Camille and Kath saw beyond the poky rooms and drab brown bricks. They saw potential, and, thankfully, had patience to live through the transformation. Although they lived in the Fairfield

"ugly duckling" for almost two years before the renovation started in 2002, they were talking to architect Nicolina Caia the year before. And that timeframe was important for two reasons: the owners got to know their house and the architect got to know her clients. There were things that had to go, like the tacky lino and wallpaper. But other things, such as the elaborate glass Art Deco light fittings in the lounge and dining room, would stay. "I really appreciated keeping the

lights because I find it discouraging if you're working with people who want to get rid of everything," Nicolina says. "It's nice to have things to work with that come with a bit of history." But one thing that definitely had to go was the kitchen in the middle of the house. Dubbed "Central Station", it had no external windows and doorways on every wall. It was a headache for two keen cooks to work in. The kitchen is now in a room that was added to the rear of the house in the '70s. It has a new adjoining sunroom, lots of light and bench space. The old central kitchen area now houses a huge bathroom and powder room. And, like any good renovation, the transition from the front of the house to the new kitchen and sunroom at the back, is seamless. "I wanted a relationship between the outside and inside," says Kath, a mosaic artist who has grand plans for the rear garden area. "And I wanted the renovation to integrate with the main house so you couldn't tell where the new started. "Although the kitchen is modern, it doesn't have those stark hard edges; it still has a warmth to it." Nicolina's suggestion of a Mondrian colour scheme — splashes of the three



primary colours — in the kitchen was daring, but she thought it would appeal to her clients' artistic bent. "I knew Kath and Camille were creative and would not be scared off by the Mondrian concept. They certainly gave me lots of latitude," she says. "We wanted something different," Camille says. "And we love the result; it's really '50s eclectic." The use of Mondrian colours fits in with the retro feel of the house. Other design elements include: The use of linear windows in the kitchen. Their black rims frame glimpses (or snapshots) of the garden and amplify the effect of the larger cube-shaped window in the sunroom. The absence of handles on the cupboards, which maintains the streamlined effect. The choice of Stone Italiana benchtops — a subtle reference to 1950s terrazzo. And the original Art Deco light fittings still grace the front formal rooms — the green one in the "House of Reps" dining room and the red one in the "Senate" lounge. Other pieces of furniture, either salvaged or found at second-hand shops, complete the package. Two chairs, now in the sunroom, were salvaged from the old house,

while two bar stools that were in Camille's previous home became key parts of the new kitchen/meals area. "This area was a huge challenge," Nicolina says. "Originally, the sunroom was going to be an outside porch, but Kath didn't fancy having to cross a porch to get from the hallway to the kitchen. "But for it to be an inside area, there would be no window in the bathroom. To maximise light, we introduced this huge glass box concept and made the bathroom wall glass bricks." Interior designer Nicolina Caia can be contacted on 9481 4151.



Before

- Streamlined**  
Cupboards without handles are features of the kitchen (extreme left)
- Central Station**  
The original kitchen had no external windows (far left)
- Sitting pretty**  
Camille brought these two bar stools from her previous home (top)
- Retained**  
The green light fitting in the House of Reps dining room stayed (top left)