



Timing it RIGHT

This narrow 1880s Sydney terrace punches above its weight thanks to smart spatial planning and a dynamic decorating approach.

STORY John McDonald | STYLING Kate Nixon | PHOTOGRAPHY Maree Homer



DINING An imposing artwork, *Blue Dandy* by Paul Ryan, has an equally handsome backdrop in seagrass wallpaper from Ascraft. The Jordan 'Maggie' dining chairs, seen reflected in a mirror-faced cabinet, are covered in Ralph Lauren 'La Garoupe' linen in Indigo. **ENTRY** Walter, the owners' cavalier King Charles spaniel. The signage above the door references the area's heritage, and the salvaged door has a cathedral-glass window that opens for ventilation.



Lauren Mahoney's passion for late-1800s architectural styles made her property search a very specific one: she fancied old fireplaces, ornate tiles, broad skirtings, high ceilings, formal architraves and pretty iron lacework. She and her husband Steven Zahra were targeting Sydney's inner west. One day in October 2014, a phone call from a property agent made things happen - immediately. "We bought the house that very night," says Lauren.

Lauren, the creative director of interior design firm Decoroom Interior Designers, usually recommends living in a house for a while before renovating, but in her case she was raring to go the day they picked up the keys. "We had a four-month settlement, which gave me time to plan everything and have the tradies ready to get started the day after settlement."

The three-bedroom property was built in 1884 as part of a development of workers' terraces. All were narrow (this one is just shy of 4m), with compact rooms and creaky old staircases. The heritage bones were still there when Lauren and Steven bought it, but the charm had been lost as the home was modernised in a mishmash of styles. "Ornate Paddington cornices had been replaced with plain cove styles; ultra-modern lighting clashed with classic ceiling roses; and the window treatments and joinery were inappropriate for the era of the house," says Lauren. Furthermore, the colour scheme was "bland and boring", and the kitchen and

'I WOULD LOVE A LARGER KITCHEN BUT THE WORK INVOLVED WASN'T WORTH THE COST.' Lauren



the palette

Porter's Paints French Silver (bathroom mirror)

Dulux Sharp Blue (kitchen cabinets)

Carrara marble (bathroom tiles)

THIS IS THE LIFE

Lauren and Steve's kitchen is a triumph of small-space design. "I would have loved a larger kitchen but the chimney was in the way and the structural work involved with extending wasn't worth the cost - financially or emotionally," says Lauren. The L-shaped layout delivers plenty of circulation space, while glass panels in the cabinet doors trick the eye, giving the impression that they are deeper than they really are.

KITCHEN Carrara marble looks striking but needs careful maintenance; Lauren cleans it with a non-toxic product, Murchison-Hume Counter Intelligence. Behind the sink is the original chimney. Cabinets painted Dulux Sharp Blue. Oven, Ilve. **LIVING/DINING** La Chasse De Compiègne wallpaper by De Gournay (through Milgate) evokes stately country homes in Europe. In the dining room, an Escea fireplace was installed to retrofit the room and match the original in the living room.



HALL/STAIRS Lauren's whimsical collection of vintage plates injects another layer of detail and personality; most of these were sourced from the US and Etsy. The floors, formerly a mix of various honey tones, were sanded and treated with Feast Watson Black Japan. The artworks are antique lithographs. Commercial-grade sisal on the stairs is a soundproofing measure. **Smart buy:** European Birchgrove sisal, \$165/m², International Floorcoverings. **MAIN BEDROOM** Lauren also believes in the power of pattern and colour to resolve small spaces. Ralph Lauren 'Marlowe Floral' wallpaper in Prussian Blue, Radford. Custom bed from Montique Exclusive Furniture covered in Schumacher 'Lange' glazed linen in Delft. Pimlico table lamp, Laura Kincade. **Designer buy:** Montataire nightstand with stone top, \$2345, Max Sparrow. **NURSERY** Colefax and Fowler 'Messina' wallpaper in Aqua is the prettiest of backdrops for baby Aerin's room. Curtains in Lavinia linen-viscose fabric, Domus Textiles. Blythe change table/dresser and convertible cot, Pottery Barn Kids.



'IT NEEDED TO BE ELEGANT AND OPULENT – SORT OF 1800s WITH A 21ST-CENTURY TWIST.' *Lauren*



sole bathroom were dated and tired. There were magnificent 3.3m-high ceilings to work with though...

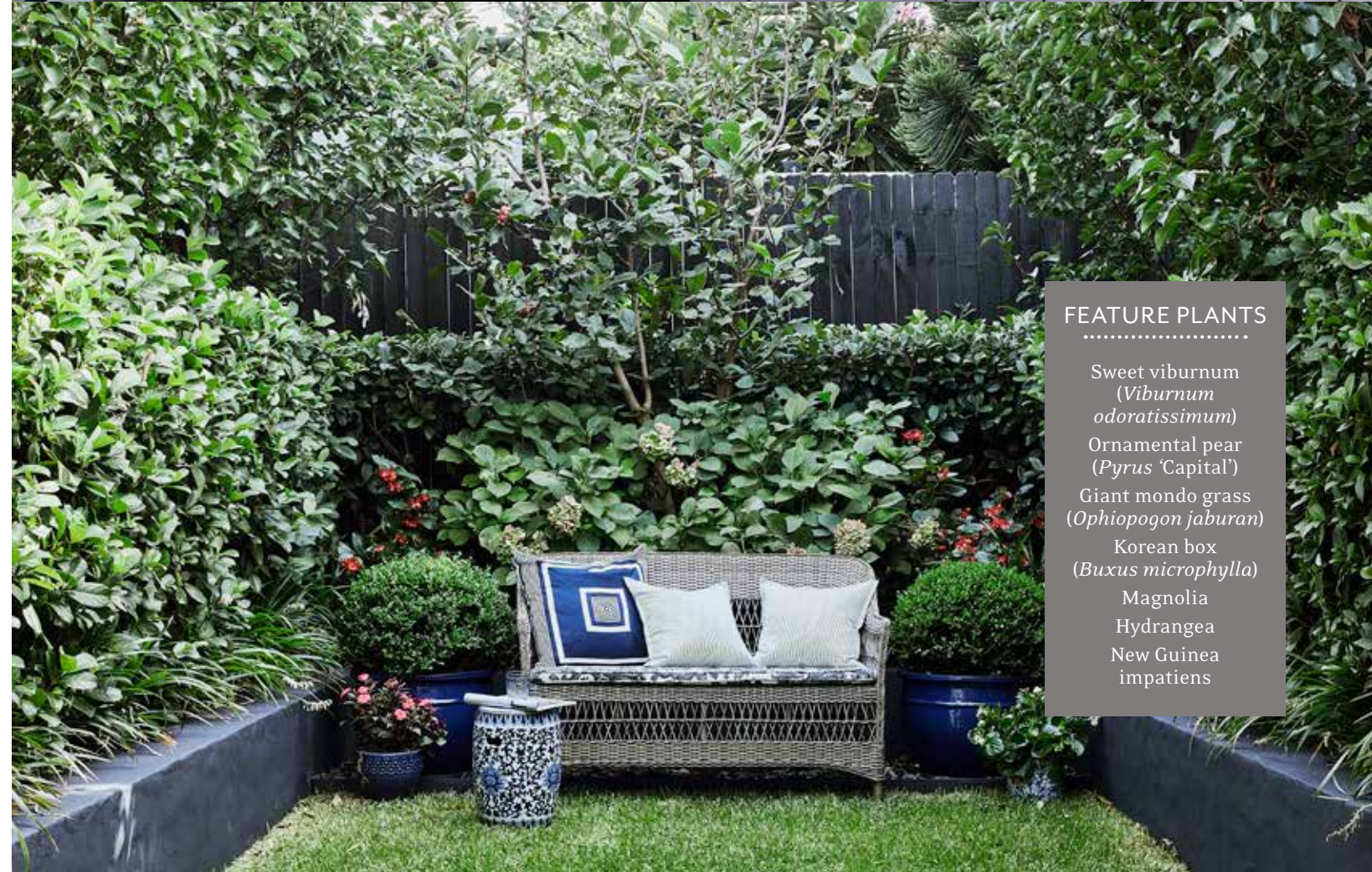
The renovation took three years from go to woah, and the couple lived on site throughout the process. "We attacked the home from every angle," says Lauren. "We did the kitchen and floors first, then lighting, windows, wallpaper and installed a new rear deck. We updated the existing downstairs bathroom plus created another upstairs in what was previously a pretty awkward powder room." Finally, they relandscaped both front and back gardens.

The footprint is essentially the same as the original structure, but thanks to Lauren and Steven's masterful design and decorating touches, the home now has a feeling of expansiveness that was not previously present. "Small and difficult spaces are my specialty," says Lauren, laughing.

She's no slouch when it comes to decorating either. As a design professional, her clients' requirements come first. In her own home, however, Lauren could let her heart lead. She wanted an opulent, detailed, colourful decor that honoured the architecture and period of the building.

Last year, the impending arrival of baby Aerin saw the upstairs study converted into a gorgeously girly nursery. The last piece in this wonderful project done and dusted.

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SMALL SPACES, BIG IDEAS

Lauren's top tips for making compact homes feel larger? Extend window treatments and joinery to the ceiling to create the illusion of height in a room. Extending tiles to the ceiling in the bathroom will have the same effect. Storage is essential, so design joinery into every available nook. Mirrors bounce light around a room; the reflection visually extends it too. Well-placed lighting demarcates zones and can also create a feeling of height.

'WE INSTALLED DECKING FLUSH WITH THE BACKYARD. IT FEELS LIKE WE'VE INCREASED THE SIZE OF THE HOUSE.' *Steven, owner*

PERGOLA/DECK The Re-Trouve setting from Ke-zu is a place for work as well as play – there is no formal office area in the home now baby Aerin has arrived. Mirrored Star chandelier, Worlds Away. The laundry and a bar fridge are concealed in the joinery behind Steven. *For Where to Buy, see page 206.* **H&G**