

# home style

April 28 | 2013

## My space

Maree Howley and other leading designers take us into their personal interiors



THE SUNDAY AGE



**S** WE CAN'T LIVE IN STARK SPACES. WE ARE BOWERBIRDS, WE NEED THINGS THAT REMIND US OF WHO WE ARE - THAT IS WHY THERE IS NO DESIGN FORMULA, NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL.

Maree Howley



# Personal best

Our three guest designers are leaders in their field. They invite us to their homes and reveal how they decorate their private spaces.



● REPORT ZINTA JURJANS HEARD

“Living well is the best revenge.” This old chestnut dates back to the 1600s. They must have known a thing or two about the importance of engaging an interior designer for their residences – there are some things that are best left to professionals.

Behind every enviable picture in glossy homemaker magazines is a professional designer who has choreographed the scene, created the perfect balance of the audacious and elegant, the yin and yang of great design.

>>

*Tutu*, from the Ballet series by Melbourne artist David Moore, has pride of place in Maree Howley's apartment that has expansive park views (pictured right).  
PHOTOS: SUSAN GORDON-BROWN

They chose the perfect shape of the arm on the sofa, the right wallpaper from thousands of options, the perfect paint colour, even group knick-knacks so that they morph from garage sale to photo-shoot-ready.

Maree Howley has a two-generation perspective on helping clients live well. She started her business, Beautiful Room, in the early 1990s, when Canterbury was full of young renovators.

"There was a wave of young families in the area. Things were tight for them, so we ran decorating classes, how to use colour, how to make lampshades. Country style was big, practical and lovely," she recalls.

Howley and design go back so way. At 16, while living near Tamworth, she won a scholarship to study fashion in Sydney, one of only two awarded in the state.

Back home, she taught fashion and soft furnishings, showing country women how to whip up curtains, blinds, lampshades and fancy toilet roll holders; it was the wacky 1970s, she laughs.

Canterbury has changed. "Families now moving in aren't at first-home level," she says. "They are more likely to be in their late 30s and onto their third home. They know more about design and they have more to spend."

On some projects Howley acts as designer/project manager. "I make sure that the internal home the clients hope to get, they get."

On other projects she is the decorator. "Decor is the emotional part of the home."

Her couturier training gives her a quicksilver eye for detail.

Howley's retail showroom, Beautiful Room, is also a design centre – order fine wallpaper, a bedhead or sofa, buy a piece of jewellery, or commission a complete interior design service.

During every school holiday break, she and her team closes up shop and the showroom gets a

**I'M MAD FOR ...  
PENDANT LIGHTING IN  
PLACES YOU WOULD  
NOT IMAGINE; I LOVE  
CONTEMPORARY  
COUNTRY, WHITE  
SOFAS AND RUSTIC  
FLOORING."**

Terri Shannon





**Terri Shannon in her meticulously styled home. Her hallway sets the tone for the rest of the house with a light pendant from La Maison, a custom-made bench seat and rug from Armadillo & Co. PHOTOS: SUSAN GORDON-BROWN**

complete makeover: “a pop-up shop without moving.”

Modernism is giving way to a softer look, she says. “We can’t live in stark spaces. We are bowerbirds, we need things that remind us of who we are – that is why there is no design formula, no one-size-fits-all.”

A good homemaking attitude, according to Howley, means never resting on your laurels. “Refresh and renew, create seasonal changes just as we do with clothing. Change cushions and sofa slip covers seasonally. In winter pull out woolly textures and porcelain; in summer linens and glass. The seasonal home keeps freshness. We need to engage with rooms – this way good choices in furniture and cushions are given longevity.”

This designer has moved on, too. The family home, where she raised four children, has given way to apartment living. She and her partner live in East Melbourne, where walls of glass and views to the horizon give a sense of luxury and neutrals in a palette of winning shades create high fashion. While over-size paintings feature prominently, there are tiny touches layered against the boldness – such as a pretty vintage teacup and silver teapot next to a bowl of roses in the hall. A soft, feminine vignette.

She loves the “expansiveness” of her apartment. “It’s gorgeous looking onto the park – and there’s no gardening.”

## TERRI SHANNON'S DESTINY

Over in Williamstown, the internet is running hot with followers poring over Terri Shannon’s work, while her email is inundated with queries.

She founded Bloom Interior Design and Decoration 12 years ago, just three years out of university. Her career has blossomed. Currently she has 20 projects on the go all over Melbourne.

Some of this high traffic is the fault of her terrific website, [bloominteriordesign.com.au](http://bloominteriordesign.com.au), where black and white shots of graphically strong rooms come to life in colour with the click of the mouse.

Interior design was her destiny. As a child, Shannon loved to cruise through display homes. She laughs at the memory – she even liked to inspect caravans (now she grimaces at that thought). Her passion for decorating comes from her mother, whom Shannon describes as a “fanatical redecorator”.

Shannon’s home has been a client magnet. “A lot of my clients like my house,” she laughs.

Yes, it’s stunning. This is her seventh home and still a work in progress. The design has a glamorous crispness: off-black floors and doors pop against the pristine whiteness, rugs and tiles are graphically strong, light fittings are enviable.

Without drawing breath, she exclaims: “I love American interiors, Ralph Lauren, a contemporary mix of furniture, lots of fabrics; I love linen and velvet, wallpaper and lots of marble, beautiful floor tiles; I’m mad for joinery, great cabinetry, beautiful handles and pendant lighting in places you would not imagine; I love contemporary country, white sofas and rustic flooring.”

In the 12 years since she started Bloom, her clients have become more knowledgeable. “They are now more aware of the broad range of the process and they do their research – because of the internet, anyone can find anything. That aspect can be testing, but mostly we have good clients who trust what we say.

“These days we are doing a lot more project management. Clients are time-poor; they want to renovate but don’t have time. Half our clients now want me to organise the builder, the painting, wallpaper hanging and the landscaping.”

She says people aren’t moving as much, they are staying put and renovating.

A demographic change is the younger age group coming to her for help.

“The 25 to 35 group are buying two-bedroom apartments and commissioning us to do the fit-out. Young people are recognising the value of good interior designers and decorators.”

**MITCHELL'S CUTTING EDGE**

Mr Mitchell reflects its owner Andrew Mitchell – witty and edgy. It could also be the name of a chic restaurant or bar. Not surprising, since Mitchell's background is hospitality. His elegant business card is printed on thick blotting paper-like stock that's made from pub-coaster card.

He says the branding of his business captures the message that his business is a service. "It's a bit cheeky, not intimidating, not overly intellectual.

"It's important to connect with people at a relaxed level. The name creates intrigue. It has an old-fashioned ring that connects to the service style we offer. We don't stamp our brand on people, we listen and then deliver."

His first project – in Bowral, NSW – was published in *Belle*. He was on his way. His retail outlet and design service, Urban Pad, in Prahran, looked after inner-city dwellers. These days his practice is designing major houses and commercial fit outs far and wide.

Mitchell says that client briefings now are less about following design trends.

"Gone are the days of people asking for a Tuscan house or a Balinese garden. We live in Melbourne and the design has to have relevance to the location," he says.

"Interiors now are a representation of how people want to live. People don't want pretension but a beautiful home. Our clients know who they are in a design sense, but don't have time to do it for themselves."

If there was anything that stamps a Mr Mitchell project, it's adding a modern twist.

For a client who loves crystal chandeliers, he chose three and clustered them together for a knockout, unique effect. A heritage-listed house was pared back to deliver a contemporary, no-fuss edge. In an all-white house he gave the clients a striking charcoal study. >>

**INTERIORS NOW ARE  
A REPRESENTATION  
OF HOW PEOPLE  
WANT TO LIVE.  
PEOPLE DON'T WANT  
PRETENSION BUT A  
BEAUTIFUL HOME.**

Andrew Mitchell



Andrew Mitchell's office: the wall of wallpaper is by Cole and Son and the mirror by Di Riddell of INEX Living.  
PHOTO: SUSAN GORDON-BROWN

His Windsor office really shows who he is as a person and designer.

The space is dramatically dark, a chrome-shiny mirror looks extravagant, the Cole and Son flocked silver foil wallpaper (called Damask Flock) is glamorous.

There are pale timber stools from Zuster that have the style of Scandinavia-meets-Africa; a candelabra-style light fitting is pure industrial raw metal with exposed globes and wires held by wooden clothes pegs. It's a clash of design worlds that is brilliantly rich.

"I love the crossover from commercial to residential design," he says, pointing to a wall-mounted back-lit light box that shows the Melbourne skyline. It's the same image he used in a huge format in his fit-out of the Railway Hotel next door.

What's the best advantage for an interior? "The aspect," he says without hesitation. "People yearn for an aspect, to sit and contemplate, a sense of space, whether it's elevated or just the ability to look at a wall of greenery. To be able to escape the business of everyday life."

The one thing these designers have in common, apart from their extensive media coverage and internet exposure, is that word of mouth is a powerful promoter for generating new clients.

When friends are living well, you'd want to, too. Wouldn't you?

#### LINKS

- [beautifulroom.com.au](http://beautifulroom.com.au) 9830 4045
- [bloominteriordesign.com.au](http://bloominteriordesign.com.au) 0411 017 369
- [mrmitchell.com.au](http://mrmitchell.com.au) 0402 028 103

Above right and right: In these Mitchell-designed interiors, the light over the dining table is called Tian Xia, from Artemide, and has colour-changing LED lighting, while the dining table is custom-designed in Corian and has B&B Italia Febo dining chairs; an antler chandelier and period desk feature in the dark office of a Victorian house.



## IN SUPPORT OF BREAST CANCER

Beautiful Room's Canterbury retail studio will be decorated in shades of pink during the month of May in support of the National Breast Cancer Foundation – and in tribute to a Beautiful Room family member waging her own campaign against breast cancer.

One in eight women is impacted by breast cancer and Beautiful Room is helping raise much-needed funds to battle the disease.

A community gala, Living Shades of Pink (with wine and canapes), will be held in the studio, at Theatre Place, Maling Road, Canterbury, May 1, 6.30pm to 9pm.

Total proceeds from ticket sales – \$75 per ticket – will be donated to the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

The Beautiful Room design team, along with donations and support from Wildflower Restaurant, Arthur G Furniture, Domestic Textiles, Marco Fabrics, Deva Alchemy, Xocolatl Artisan Chocolates and many other furniture and fabric design partners, are getting together to create what promises to be a very special night.

ARIA and Green Room-nominated jazz vocalist and violinist Fem Belling and band are providing the music and entertainment.

A silent auction of designer furniture and lifestyle pieces will be held at the function. Tickets are limited.

For more details, contact Sophie on 9830 4045. Check out [beautifulroom.com.au](http://beautifulroom.com.au) or [facebook.com/beautifulroom](https://www.facebook.com/beautifulroom) for updates.