The serene renovation of a heritage Victorian home in Melbourne

Timeless architecture is given a distinctly modern update in this Armadale mansion dotting back to 1890. Photographed by Pieter Estersohn, it's the perfect home for Armadale's Zoning by Melanie Dickerson.

Vanessa Hess

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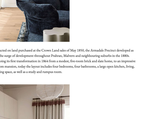
Throughout the suburb of Armadale, in Melbourne's inner southeast, genteel heritage mansions line wide, leafy streets. The quiet grandeur of these incredible homes, many of which date back to the mid-1890s, cannot be understated, though for those looking to renovate, they pose a particular challenge—how to merge the old with the new.

For Los Bunyan, director of her eponymous design studio, an extensive brief on an 1890 square metre Victorian home in Armadale's prestigious Hawksburn neighbourhood was a dream project. Overlooking the leafy right of the home's legacy. "Proportions came from Armadale's heritage—Victorian and Federation architectural cues, watered materials, and a calming palette," Bunton tells Vogue Living. "The home was originally built around 1890 as a Victorian villa, that has undergone sympathetic evolution. Original features such as pressed metal ceilings and sash windows were preserved, while the layout was modernised to suit contemporary life. Where needed, additions echo the original style in a restrained, architectural integrity."

Constructed on land purchased at the Crown Land sales of May 1890, the Armadale Precinct developed as per one of the range of development throughout Prahran, Malvern and neighbouring suburbs in the 1890s. Undergoing its first transformation in 1964 from a modest, five-room brick and slate home, to an impressive nine-room mansion, today the layout includes four bedrooms, four bathrooms, a large open kitchen, living and dining space, as well as a study and marquee room.



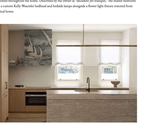
Home to a young family of five, the brief called for a space that balanced liveable practicality—given there are two children under the age of five living in the house—with a "soft, sophisticated and timeless" aesthetic. A refined tone, with warm, textural materials like travertine and oak flooring create a restful foundation that we were able to layer on with colour and texture," Bunton, who worked with Armadillo Architecture on the project. "The final result is a confident and classy home that can be enjoyed by all members of the family."

Opting for a colour scheme featuring soft neutrals—creamy whites and warm taupes—Bunton then incorporated accents of green and blue to "add personality without overwhelming the serenity."

From the navy rug and plush lounge in the living room to the subtle green tones framing the fireplace (a nod to the surrounding Hawksburn bushland), as well those warm shades of pink and cream pottery of interest to the eye. "Each living space has its own story," Bunton explains. "It's almost an artwork in itself. A nook to the eastern-facing sunroom, and also dedicated."

Lighting plays a vital role in each space, with a diverse range of eclectic installations—both large and small—found dotted throughout the home. Described by the owner as "decadent yet tranquil," the master bedroom features a custom Kelly Wearstler bullhead and bedside lamps alongside a brass light fixture rescued from the original home.

In the spacious kitchen, a luminous gold fixture hit light bronze above the travertine benchtop, designed by Los in collaboration with Sarah Ducrou. "It's one those moments big and simple in enough finished and just how," she explains. "It turned out so beautifully after many trials and refinements. It's pretty but also soft."



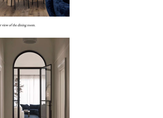
Mirroring the warm cream tones and undulations of the countertop, an artwork by Ben Manny ties together the elements in perfect harmony. "I adore Ben's work and Los has sculptural wall pieces in many projects, but this particular work jumped at me as I felt the raw textures and earthy palette echo the natural finishes of the kitchen," Bunton enthuses. "I felt it created a collector dialogue between art and architecture. I especially love the watered imperfections in it."

Positioned opposite the master bathroom at the front of the house, the study boasts soaring four-metre high ceilings and a moody, dramatic palette of deep blues and greens. "It's a space for the family to work, relax and read and a celebration of words and publishers," Bunton says of her personal favourite space within the home. "We designed full-height open joinery to walnut and drag black stone, finished with large handmade offer bundles, filled with contemporary furniture, this room strikes a balance between sophistication and creativity."

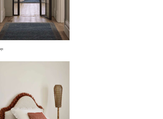
Another view of the dining room.

A hallway.

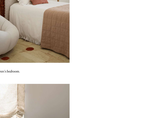
A children's bedroom.



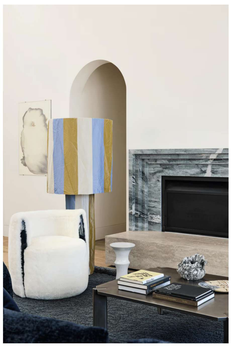
A close up of a banquette.



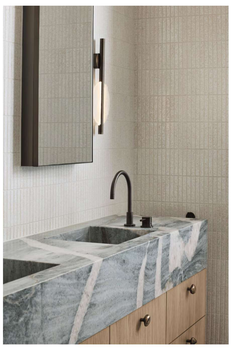
Another view of the kitchen.



The door through to the kitchen.

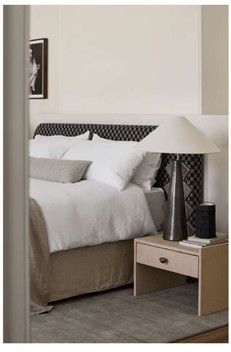


Another view of the living room.



A bathroom.

Another bathroom.



A bedroom.

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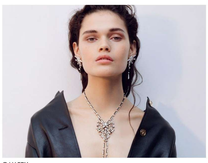

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