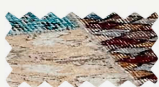


bright christmas

The classic neutrals of this Melbourne home provide the perfect backdrop for the festive season's joyful colour

STORY SHELLEY TUSTIN STYLING JO McCOMISKEY PHOTOGRAPHY DEREK SWALWELL



RUG

Vintage overdyed patchwork rug, from \$1800/240cm x 170cm, Halcyon Lake Rugs & Carpets.



In the gleaming new kitchen of her transformed Melbourne home, Ruth ([above](#)) gets in the festive spirit with bubbles and the family's gingerbread house, traditionally made by her three teenagers with help from their grandmother. The Yuletide mood extends into the adjacent living room ([opposite](#)), where a Christmas tree from My Christmas stands sentinel on the Victorian ash floorboards. The boards, stained dark chocolate, provide dramatic contrast to the room's neutral pieces, including the slouchy couches from Jordan and a set of nesting coffee tables from Rose St Trading Co. >



They say travel broadens the mind but for Ruth, Eric and their three teenage children, it also provided a little European know-how for beautifully simple Christmases at home. “We had a white Christmas in Germany and Austria a couple of years ago, which was such a special thing to do with the kids,” says Ruth about the memorable trip with Henry, now 18, Emily, 16, and Isabelle, 14. “Christmas is amazing there, with the markets and celebrations. It really inspired us and is part of the reason we love the festive season so much in our house.”

Imbibing their Melbourne home with Yuletide spirit is that much more joyful since the completion of a recent renovation, which transformed the rear of this graceful Victorian property into a light-filled vision of modern classic design. Having lived here happily for eight years, the family had no intention of moving, but the old-fashioned layout of the 1886 home lacked a few key features: open spaces for entertaining – especially at Christmas-time – a retreat for growing children, and a connection to the outdoors, particularly the pool at the rear.

The road to renovated bliss was a long one, with two architects failing to impress before the couple found designer Jo McIntyre of Beautiful Home. “We were ready to sign on the dotted line with a builder and thought, ‘We are spending all this money and the design isn’t our dream home.’ But within two weeks of engaging Jo, we had our perfect house,” Ruth recalls. >

“DECORATING A HOUSE IS AN *evolving* PROCESS. YOU DO IT *over time* AND YOU HAVE TO BE PATIENT” ~ RUTH



TABLE SETTING (left) “I do like a modern setting, but my table is always different,” says Ruth. For Christmas lunch, Royal Doulton plates from The Works add a pop of colour against white linen napery and a white wooden tree from Celebrating Christmas. The table itself is a statement, with a beautiful parquetry top and enough room for 14 people.

(THIS PAGE BOTTOM LEFT) MARBLE COASTERS, THE WORKS. COPPER CUTLERY, TURNER AND LANE. LACE SNOWFLAKES, CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS. (OPPOSITE) FABRIC STORAGE BAG (WITH HERBS), OXZYDE

WE LOVE

Textured tiles

It's the small details that bring this kitchen to life. White tiles are a highly versatile choice for a splashback, suited to both modern and traditional kitchens. The gloss 'Mottle' tiles (\$128/sqm, Perini) used here have a subtle texture that resembles handmade ceramic tiles and add a feeling of real luxury.

KITCHEN (this page & opposite, top left & bottom right) Ruth wanted to retain some traditional elements in the extension to give the home a sense of continuity and flow. Designer Jo achieved this in the kitchen with Shaker-style cabinetry (by Creative Cabinets) and pewter drawer pulls, adding a bold shot of black around the island bench to underpin a beautiful slab of Carrara marble. The black is echoed in the elegant 'Tear Drop' embossed pendants from My Brother Albert. The butler's pantry at the rear is an entertainer's dream – ideal for food preparation and hiding dinner-party detritus – and its open shelves display pretty Charlene Mullen for Royal Doulton plates.



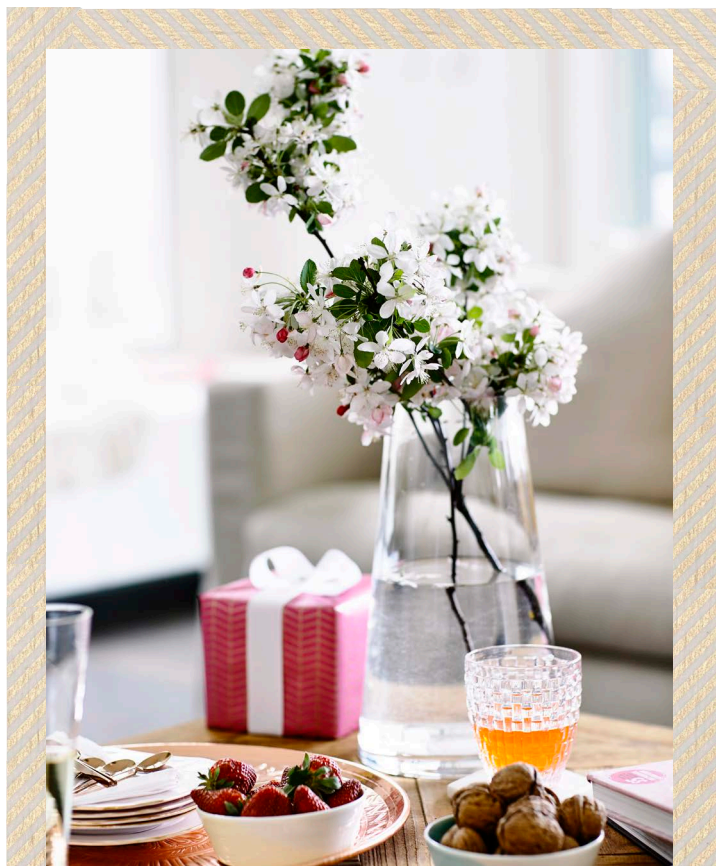
FABRIC

Get the look with
Pegasus 'Bowden' in
Berry, from \$59/m,
James Dunlop Textiles.

< The warren of rooms at the rear was demolished to make way for a more contemporary design: an open-plan kitchen/living area opening to a generous covered deck, and an upstairs teen retreat with three bedrooms, a family room and multi-zoned bathroom. The front rooms, oozing heritage charm, were preserved, with a few minor improvements to maximise the light. "The traditional Victorian hallway is quite narrow, so we put in double doorways to all the rooms, which gives the impression of a much grander, wider entrance," says Ruth.

All this light, combined with a base palette of snowy white, provides the perfect backdrop for more lively hues, particularly at Christmas, when the family goes bauble-mad. "Now that the kids are older, they do a lot of the decorating," Ruth says. Even when they were small, their mum embraced their enthusiastic, if aesthetically wobbly, skills. "I love having them involved."

For their first Christmas in the revamped home last year, all of the family's relatives came from Adelaide to help celebrate. "We had a huge lunch on the deck," says Ruth. "We had the double oven and the built-in barbecue going... and it was great that everyone could work together in the kitchen." But the most precious of Christmas traditions for the family is decorating a gingerbread house, with Ruth's mother and her grandchildren getting together to bake and decorate this very special Christmas lunch centrepiece. "Even though they're teenagers, my kids still love making it," says Ruth.



"WE LOVE *Christmas*. IT'S THE FAMILY'S FAVOURITE TIME OF THE YEAR AND WE GO A *bit crazy*" ~ RUTH



LIVING ROOM DETAILS (this page & opposite) Striped armchairs are paired with gold cushions from The Works, creating a colourful vignette. "We have quite a neutral palette throughout the house but I've tried to bring in colour with things like cushions," says Ruth. The open-plan living space is perfect for the couple's regular large-scale gatherings, with guests able to drift between the kitchen island, living area, dining table and deck. >





ENSUITE (above left) The kitchen finishes are repeated in the bathrooms for consistency. “We bought two big slabs of marble for the kitchen, all the bathrooms and the laundry,” explains Ruth. Chic accessories include a Bamboka towel from The Bedspread Shop and a Morgan & Finch soap dish from Bed Bath N’ Table. **ISABELLE’S ROOM (above right)** A built-in window seat flanked by shelves is enlivened by colourful pieces such as Canvas Home cushions, a green ‘Uppvisa’ noticeboard from Ikea and a pink jute rug from Temple & Webster. “I love to buy a mix of stuff,” says Ruth. “You get your big items but then fill in the rest – the pieces you change regularly – with slightly more economical things.” **EMILY’S ROOM (top right)** Eldest daughter Emily’s room is packed with colour, but with a grown-up element in the form of the linen buttonback chair from Ruby Star Traders (just seen at right). “Em wanted something sophisticated but comfy so she could curl her feet up and read a book,” says Ruth. “This chair was perfect.” Cheerful patterns and hues were added in the quilt cover, tree print and side table, all from Adairs.

MASTER BEDROOM (this page & opposite, top left) This is one of the four original, more formal rooms at the front of Ruth and Eric's home. "You could almost call it the grown-up end of the house," says Ruth. There's quirky details, such as the antique mannequin (a gift from Eric to his wife), yet the space retains a degree of grandeur, from the original fireplace to the large 'Beverinton' lantern from Robert Kitto. "It's magnificent," says Ruth. "It casts a beautiful gentle light over the room and makes quite a statement." Elegant blue bedlinen from The Bedspread Shop adds to the room's inviting aura. >





FRONT DOOR
Aquanamel in Black,
\$47.45/litre, Dulux.

ENTRANCE Phoebe the spoodle welcomes guests at the home's glossy front door, decorated with a wreath from My Christmas. Newly painted original Anaglypta wallpaper adorns the walls in the light-filled hallway.

INSIDE STORY

Who lives here?

Ruth, a stay-at-home mum; her husband Eric, a chartered accountant; their children, Henry, 18, Emily, 16, and Isabelle, 14; and spoodle Phoebe.

How does the family get into the Christmas spirit?

Ruth: "We get the kids together and start decorating the house – it's something we do as a family. We've collected so many decorations over the years and putting them up brings back many happy memories."

What do summers look like here?

"Lots of casual entertaining – barbecues with friends, kids everywhere, fun and laughter."

Where do you find your decorating inspiration?

"Sometimes there's a special piece to decorate around, such as the rug in the family room. Otherwise, it's hours flicking through magazines or trawling through Pinterest, Instagram and Houzz."

What is your favourite part of the home?

"The island bench in the kitchen. I love the marble top and everyone gathers around it when we entertain."



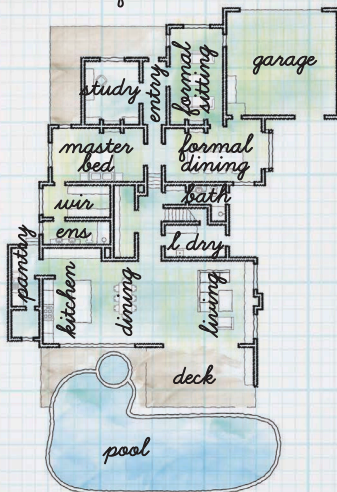
With its original marble fireplace, the formal living room is where the family gathers on cold nights – and where the three kids hang their Christmas stockings.



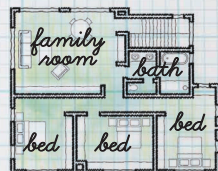
Youngest daughter Isabelle trims the living room tree, supervised by Ruth and Phoebe.

PLANS

Ground floor



First floor



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