



A SPACE ODYSSEY

Step inside this Melbourne family home and you quickly realise this is no ordinary inner-city terrace. The secret, they tell us, is storage. We just had to delve deeper

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Homeowners Emma and Ben spent five years creating their family home with the open-plan living area (this page) a beloved spot. The couple first spotted the Nemo 'Crown Minor' pendant (opposite) in Paris, before buying it locally at Cult.



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Cast back to six years ago. Emma and Ben are new parents and have just moved into their single-storey Victorian terrace in Melbourne's Middle Park. "It was cold. Dark. Extremely run down," recalls Emma. Indeed this was the stuff renovators' dreams are made of. There were all the usual terrace-house period charms – 3.4-metre-high ceilings and a pretty front facade. There were the ubiquitous failings, too – a dodgy and dated kitchen, shabby bathroom and narrow 5-metre footprint.

And yet, the couple had big plans for their little brick house. Emma is a stylist and the driving force behind the operation while Ben, who works in IT, shared her vision for a warm, family-oriented home. "We have similar tastes," says Ben, "but Emma is the brains, she can pull it all together." Emma, blushing, adds, "Doing this project – our own thing – was a dream come true. So yes, I had lots of ideas up my sleeve." →

the details

Who lives here: Emma, a stylist; Ben, who's in IT; and their kids Oscar, 6; Louis, 3; and Mimi, 9 weeks.
What they were looking for: A house to accommodate a growing family.
Budget range: Six figures.
Timeline: Five years from concept to completion.

Biggest win: The sense of space in the open-plan living area, due to the full-height cabinetry, glass doors and ceilings.
Biggest challenge: Locating the stairs in a house that was just five metres wide.
Favourite room: The kitchen with the dining area on one side and kids playing in the living area on the other.



hidden treasures

Storage was always going to be the couple's salvation. Their family was growing (they now have three kids) and the plan was for the house to grow with them. They extended out and up, creating a light-filled kitchen, dining and living area in the back and adding two bedrooms and a courtyard upstairs. And yet there was no escaping the narrow five-metre stretch from boundary to boundary. Every millimetre had to be carefully allocated. Enter interior designer Chelsea Hing to push the couple's ideas and floorplan further. Chelsea integrated full-height storage into the framework to contain all the paraphenalia of family life. With this deft move, she also provided an opportunity to add texture and define zones. Add builder Alistair Jack of Cojack Developments and this reno was ready to go. "If you work with people who understand your creative vision, renovating can be really fun," says Emma.

EASY LIVING Walking through the house, there's a moment when the full-height dark joinery gives way to a stretch of slim, glossy cabinets. This marks the start of the living zone (opposite). The design, says Chelsea, provides some reprieve. "There needs to be a logical rhythm to storage, a balance between the impact of full-fronted joinery and the relief of lighter sections." The two-pack gloss-finished cabinets in Resene Half Napa wrap around the wall-mounted TV. All the wires run behind the plasterboard to the side cabinet. The upper cabinets house books while the accessible lower drawers are dedicated to the kids. "They can get toys out themselves and pack up after," says Emma.

DOUBLE DUTY The bathroom (above) feels restful, despite also being a working laundry. An oak wall is actually two huge bifold doors that push open to reveal the washing machine, dryer, shelving and sink. "We wanted it to be functional but also atmospheric," says Emma. The full-length timber vanity stashes essentials out of sight while underneath a vintage box holds an arrangement of rolled fluffy white towels.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER "Containing the storage along one wall allows the eye to sweep the length of the home," says Chelsea. In the kitchen (right), a wall of joinery houses two fridges, two pantries and an appliance cupboard. The dark-stained oak is uncommon in narrow spaces but that, says Chelsea, is worth readdressing. "Dark tones dissolve divisions between joinery elements so there are no stops or starts." The couple had to work hard to get the finish just right. After nine other iterations, they finally found their perfect mix with a 'Black Olive' stain with 30 per cent gloss from The Traditional Stain Company. →



Emma and Ben's home, with the help of interior designer Chelsea Hing, features an intoxicating blend of textures. Grey matte tiles, warm honey timber and louvres give this bathroom (above) resort appeal. In the kitchen (right), ebony-toned cabinetry combines with marble and stainless steel benchtops for a modern yet inviting look.



**open secret*

"The whole objective was to create three zones," says Emma of the open-plan kitchen, living and dining area. "We put the kitchen in the middle to break up the space." The stairs also act to define the kitchen.

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**collector's edition*

Emma updates the composition and items of this display in the master bedroom. "One small change can give the room a totally different feel," she says. Currently on show are a pair of Two Ruffians prints from Turner & Lane.



personal touches

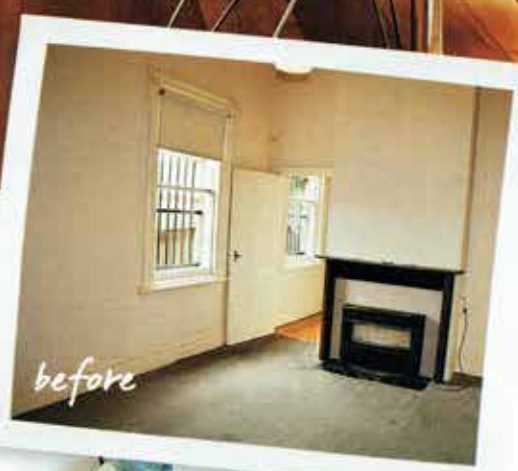
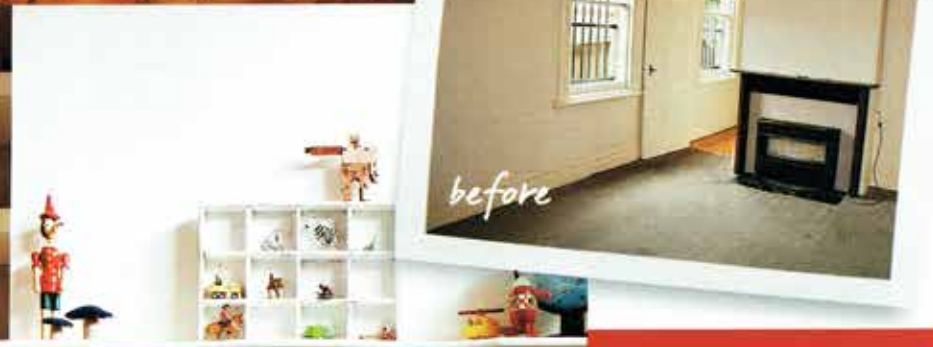
After four years planning and a year building, the couple almost has their dream family house. They just have to decide what goes where. Emma calls this the fun part. "Display is a passion - it's what makes a house feel like a home," she says.

On the walls and dotted across surfaces are keepsakes from European adventures alongside the kids' artwork. There's foliage all around, a smattering of high-end designer furniture and the odd quirky market find. Emma's vignettes are relaxed but still seem meant to be. "It helps to group things," advises Emma. "And not to overload the senses. You don't have to cover every surface in a room - some empty space is a good thing. Oh and don't be afraid of pops of colour." Ben interjects, "But Emma just has an eye for these things." We have to agree.

HEART & SOUL France and French wine hold a special place in the couple's hearts. Here, in their bedroom (opposite), they pay homage to their Gallic adventures with an ad-hoc compilation of vintage wine crates. The assortment has come together over years of fossicking at markets, thrift shops and antiques stores. "It's a sentimental collection," says Emma. The crates house Emma's magazines and also show off the kids' artworks. And Emma says the kids are often found rearranging the crates' objects. "They have developed a real appreciation for styling. Oscar, in particular, is always suggesting how things should be."

ON THE SURFACE "I love having opportunities to change my displays," says Emma. The built-in cabinetry in the living area not only houses toys, it also provides a pedestal for an ever-evolving collection of pieces. Two floating oak shelves, in the same black stain as the kitchen, provide further opportunities for Emma to collate and curate her wares. Emma continues, "The display isn't static; there's always something new to catch the eye."

MATERIAL MATTERS "I love the contrast of natural rustic textures with gloss," says Emma. "The friction creates warmth that makes a house more homely." In the bathroom, Emma has used the space above and below the vanity to introduce a welcoming feel. A mirrored wall and smooth rectified tiles from The City Tiler combine with the timber elements of the space. Above on the vanity top, Emma brings fresh blooms into the mix. "Flowers and foliage are a big indulgence in this house," she says. ✦
For more information on Chelsea's work, visit chelseahing.com.au. For details on builders Cojack Developments, go to cojack.com.au.



The marble-topped dining table (above) was made by Emma's uncle, Gordon Mathers. Its veined surface contrasts with the soaped Oregon timber console table from Mark Tuckey. Topped with treasured toys and figurines, the mantelpiece in Louis's bedroom (left) is another spot for exhibiting favourite pieces.