

APARTMENT LIVING

# PIPE DREAM

It took higher-level thinking – and smart plumbing – to give this architecturally significant apartment a clever redesign. Here, the key concepts for maximising its space are grouped into simple steps

## DROP THE WALLS

This Melbourne apartment is located in an iconic 1960s Robin Boyd building overlooking Victoria's Royal Botanic Gardens. The professional couple who live there turned to Nexus Designs to help them update it. The interior design team, led by director Sonia Simpfendorfer and associate Bridget Ryan, would have been pleased to keep any original features, but the two-bedroom bolthole had already undergone a 1980s or early '90s makeover. "The original fit-out, which would've been beautiful to preserve, didn't exist in any way that we could salvage," says Sonia. "So, we took everything out and started from scratch."

Top of the list was unfurling the enclosed kitchen. Walls were removed, the space was stretched out and a new central island with a Laminex White Natural benchtop went in. "It makes the kitchen feel so much bigger," says Sonia. "You don't feel trapped in this little box anymore." They also found extra room overhead. "When this building was made compliant for fire regulations about 20 years ago, they put in sprinkler systems with really horrible plasterboard bulkheads. We wanted to get as much height as possible, so we exposed all the fire services."

That came with a lucky discovery. "We were excited to find that the sprinkler pipes were orange and looked so cool," says Sonia. "We already knew we wanted to use orange for the project because it's such a 1960s colour." However, the plastic pipes weren't fire compliant, so were replaced with new metal ones, powdercoated in Dulux Orange X15 – an excellent match for the Astra Walker taps in the orange finish used throughout.





## 2 MAKE AN ENTRANCE

Early impressions count, and this tight, dark entry wasn't cutting it. "Our first priority was to get as much natural light into the gloomy hall as possible," says Sonia. "When you're dealing with a small space, any feeling of openness you can introduce really helps."

To achieve this, a door was repositioned in one of the bedrooms. This added an opening in the corridor which now brings in light through the bedroom's window and offers an instant glimpse of the leafy views. The hallway was also widened. "We actually made the bathrooms a tiny bit smaller to get a more spacious feeling in the corridor," says Sonia. "You might think, 'Why would you make a corridor bigger?' but it creates the feeling of flow and is so much better."

Of course, a 'drop zone' is a must as you enter. Here, they opted for a custom floating shelf for good reason. "It gives you all the functionality of a table, without the visual bulk," explains Sonia. White curved hooks from Normann Copenhagen are just the place for hanging hats and bags. It's no coincidence that the handles are the same hue as the doors. "We powdercoated all the handles to match the doors. It's another way of reducing visual clutter – one of our little secrets for making things look streamlined."

**"The less things touch the ground, the more spacious things feel"**

SONIA SIMPFENDORFER, CREATIVE DIRECTOR



## 3 SHELVES THAT IDEA

Built-in shelving is inconspicuously tucked away in the hall. "That was where they had some of the original 1960s walnut joinery – architect Robin Boyd originally had it as a telephone bench," says Sonia. "When we couldn't save that because it had been chopped into to add fire sprinklers, we thought it was a great place to have some open shelves. We made them super thick and kept them all white. It honours what was there in the 1960s, but gives it a different purpose." The contemporary iteration is a convenient place to keep books and other prized possessions owned by the couple, without intruding on the living space.

# 5 GO FLAT OUT

The apartment is full of secret storage, with joinery running across the back wall and one side of the kitchen. “There was this lump of a column there. One of the tricks we used was to smooth out surfaces and make everything tall, like the joinery which goes up to the ceiling,” says Sonia.

The light shade of Laminex Paper Bark (a colour also used on the apartment’s doors and handles) enhances the expansive feeling. “It’s one of our favourite colours because it’s not green, it’s not grey, it’s not beige. It’s somehow somewhere between all of those three.”

There’s also a sleek built-in American-oak-veneer desk at a window overlooking the rooftops of South Yarra. It’s an extra space for working, eating or reading, with a Hay ‘Rey’ stool in Red from Cult Design that tucks away tidily when not in use.



# 4 SIZE DOWN

Slim fixtures, such as the kitchen’s Polar Wall rangehood by Falmec, help to visually expand the space. “It wasn’t quite the right white, so we got it powdercoated to match the wall colour, which is Haymes Magnolia Moonlight in low sheen,” says Sonia (pictured).

The open, white Ikea ‘Botkyrka’ shelves are also a space-saving choice. “We’re never afraid to mix something from Ikea with something more high-end. They’re just little metal shelves. We love them because the metal is so thin, so you don’t have these big boxes of joinery.”

“Sometimes making things bigger actually makes the space feel more open” SONIA

# 6 HAVE FUN

When it comes to the furniture, less is more in a pocket-sized space – but you don't need to surrender personality altogether. "There are two different kinds of chairs in that little collection, but they're all in the same timber," says Sonia. "So, you get visual interest but don't impose on the space too much."

A round table is an option that people don't always consider. "They're so nice to sit at and don't take up much space." The Hay 'Rey' table in Slate Blue, along with a Hay vase, platter, plates and napkins from Cult Design, add vibrance.

On the wall, a Mark Schaller artwork (not shown) hangs near the black and white calendar. "This is a subtle way of bringing in colour without it being too overwhelming," Sonia points out.



"We wanted to keep things compact but still give them some interest" SONIA

# 7 DOUBLE UP

Multi-tasking pieces are a cure-all when you're short on space. In this apartment, the Hay 'Rey' stools can be moved around easily (and double as small tables) plus there's an &Tradition 'Boomerang' chair that works wherever it's needed.

The built-in desks in the bedrooms are also multi-functional masterpieces. "We ran those desks across the full width of both bedrooms," says Sonia. "It's this very multi-purpose piece of joinery. We know we need to accommodate some work-from-home zones wherever we can and this is a way of not committing to one particular function."

The desks are made from the same American-oak veneer as the one in the kitchen, and this repetition of elements is a design tactic. "One of our things, particularly in small spaces, is to use the least number of materials as many times as we can. So, there's one timber, which we repeat; there's one paint finish; there's one laminate colour; and that helps with the feeling of flow and spaciousness."

Keeping things simple is the key. "We tried to keep the palette pretty subtle," says Sonia of the two-seater Gubi 'Wonder' sofa spotted with Hay cushions. The Gubi 'Pedrera' coffee table and Hay 'Common' table lamp are also from Cult Design.





“You can just stand in the bathroom with the cupboard door open and all of your stuff is accessible” SONIA

## 8 DIVIDE AND CONQUER

It's not technically a two-bathroom apartment as the former single bathroom has been split into two separate spaces. “When we took the project on, these wet areas were all together. So, we thought we'd separate the functions. It just helps, practically, that someone can be using the bathroom separately,” says Sonia.

The bathroom with the toilet, basin and laundry has been designed with a frosted-glass wall divide to retain the natural light from the windows. “We did everything we could to magnify the amount of light in that space,” says Sonia. Along with a washing machine and dryer, there's a pull-out washing line. “You can hang clothes from there in front of the window or, if you're doing the ironing, there's a place to hang shirts. We love the silhouettes of the clothing against the frosted light from the window. It makes the laundry look beautiful.”

Next door is a second bathroom area, containing a shower and Omvivo 'Neo 700' basin and storage running up the wall. “That tall cupboard is one of my favourite things,” says Sonia. “You can have everything from towels to make-up in there and, rather than having it all out on the bench, you just stand there with the door open and use them.” The illuminating round PH Mirror from PH Furniture matches the one in the entry.

## 9 TAKE IT ALL IN

Glass doors to the balcony can be opened to expand the living area, with alfresco seating overlooking the Botanic Gardens. “The dining table inside is reasonably small, but then we've got a more generous table out on the terrace,” says Sonia, who helped choose the Hay 'Palissade' table and chairs in Olive, with a matching bench seat on the side, all from Cult Design. “The apartment isn't up on the 20th floor or something, so it's a really nice space to be outside. It feels like you can actually see what's going on in the beautiful location.”

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