

*True*

*romance*



It was supposed to be an investment property. But once design dynamos ARENT & PYKE began to weave their spell, the owners of this Spanish mission-style apartment soon found themselves deeply besotted.

By Joanne Gambale  
Photographed by Anson Smart  
Styled by Claire Delmar



**THIS PAGE** from the vestibule into the central living space, PP225 Flag Halyard armchair by Hans J Wegner for PP Möbler, from Cult; black brushed oak B&B Italia cabinet; *Man in Overalls* artwork (2006) by McLean Edwards; *Abstract Forms* sculpture (circa '50s) from Alm. **OPPOSITE PAGE** entrance to the stuccoed Spanish mission-style building in Sydney's Bellevue Hill. *Details, last pages.*



**THIS PAGE** homeowners Karl Wissler and Kim McKay; flooring by Tongue N Groove; flowers by Hermetica.  
**OPPOSITE PAGE** the view of the harbour from the rooftop apartment.





**T**here is more than a single story of metamorphosis to be told here. One is that of the home. The other is that of the home's unsuspecting mistress, who had not entered into this agreement expecting to find a new love.

Over the years, plenty have experienced real estate romance; they fall in love at first sight, are swept off their feet, just *have* to have the home in question. Not so Kim McKay. She was a stranger to the notion of 'home' and what it meant when she first viewed the top-floor apartment named in a Spanish mission-style building in Sydney's Bellevue Hill, and so shrugged contentedly at it as a potential investment.

It wasn't until the engagement of interior designers Juliette Arent and Sarah-Jane Pyke, their excitement at the romance of the architecture, and their enthusiastic sharing of potential aesthetic directions that McKay's soul began to lift. "I was happy to keep living in my terribly tiny two-bedroom apartment in Bondi," she

says. "I didn't know this feeling I have now because I'd never experienced it. If I had I'd have done this thing sooner."

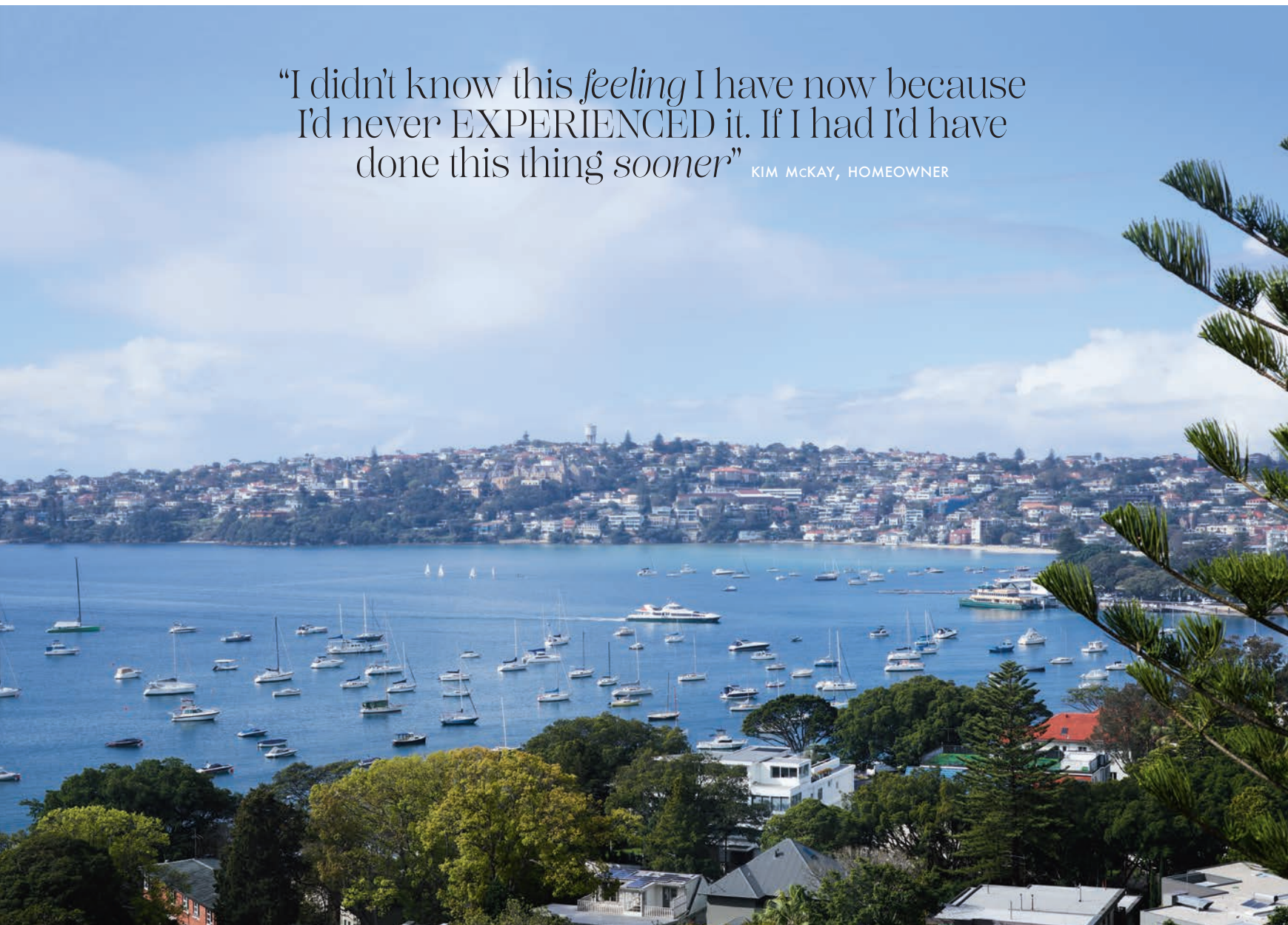
McKay, a PR and marketing entrepreneur, and her husband of 14 years, film executive Karl Wissler, have known a married life of high-flying travel. Among her clients are the Santa Monica and Hawaii tourism boards and lots of upmarket hotels. He frequents the film festivals of Toronto, Berlin, Cannes and Los Angeles. She's overseas for up to four months of the year, he for three. Hotels make them happy. "Room service is the most wonderful thing in the world — I can't even!" she says.

The motivation to ease off a little on the travel came from Wissler. The search for an investment property was on and off but when he sent her a link to the apartment's listing while in Australia, she just happened to be sitting with a friend of the property's real estate agent, in South Africa. Fate? She wasn't about to get carried away.

"We didn't go in [to the viewing] together as we couldn't find a park. It wasn't romantic," she says. "The Spanish mission >>

"I didn't know this *feeling* I have now because I'd never EXPERIENCED it. If I had I'd have done this thing *sooner*"

KIM MCKAY, HOMEOWNER









The grand living area with vaulted ceiling, garland friezes and a fluted archway that leads to the dining/sunroom and harbour views. A pair of pink velvet Moroso Redondo lounge chairs and Diesel for Moroso Nebula Nine sofa from Hub; Cassina Rio coffee table from Space Furniture; black brushed oak B&B Italia cabinet; Cadrys rug; *Rehappening* (2018) artwork by Cameron Stead; *Autumn Arrangement* artwork by Vanessa Stockard, from Art2Muse Gallery.



**THIS PAGE** in the bedroom, a 19th-century embossed hand-painted Spanish leather screen from The Vault; Sika Design Paris chair by Arne Jacobsen from Domo. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the kitchen, hand-finished Milano gloss ceramic tiles from The Art of Tiles; ceramics from Planet Furniture; artwork by Jelle Van Den Berg; *Close Up* sculpture by Yanni Souvatzoglou, from Art2Muse Gallery.





“It was a very *special* property that deserved soft intervention. Keeping all the grace and *beauty* of it would require a *delicate* touch” SARAH-JANE PYKE, DESIGNER





<< style was something we'd always loved from our early days staying at the Beverly Hills Hotel, but the offer wasn't emotional, it was logical. It became romantic as we started to make it a home."

Sydney-based design studio Arent & Pyke came highly recommended. McKay looked at the company's website "and didn't hate it. I had no idea about the journey I was about to take," she says. "Last time I bought furniture shabby chic was a thing".

Confident in their fine-tuned approach, a decade on from their inception, the design duo was exactly what McKay needed. "She was so open from the start," says Arent, "and she freely admitted she didn't have a vision for it. They'd never really made a home or built a collection before."

The circa-1928 building has an apartment on each of its four floors. McKay and Wissler found theirs, at the top, relatively untouched but for a '90s kitchen, still with lots of little quirks including a French-style garland frieze and fluted archways. "It was a very special property that deserved soft intervention," says Pyke.

"Keeping all the grace and beauty of it would require a delicate touch. We've actually intervened quite a lot, and yet it feels modest."

Those interventions include a new fireplace, removal of a wall and the addition of a large arched opening between the kitchen and sitting room, in keeping with the others but for its glass cavity sliding doors. Otherwise the floor plan, it was agreed, worked well already, and Arent & Pyke's design aids the progression of volumes from the classic vestibule to the central living space with its vaulted ceiling (which conceals all the room's lighting) through to the dining room — a sunroom that's like a box seat to the theatre that is Sydney's picturesque harbour. Wings either side take this home beyond typical apartment living. One side is a grand master of walk-in wardrobe, large ensuite, yoga studio and bedroom replete with a "princess and the pea bed" requested by McKay, and the other is for guests and gathering.

Both Arent and Pyke have an affinity with this style of home after living in 1930s apartments in Darling Point, Edgecliff and Double





Bay for years. Their reaction to this one centred around the charm and Parisian style of its heritage details and elevated appointment. “We’ve always used an eclectic mix of styles,” explains Pyke, “but the French decorative style has also always been about mixing eras and antiques and chinoiserie. The mix also means clients can keep adding to it and not have to worry, ‘Does this match...?’”

It was during the curation of this “mix” that McKay’s metamorphosis began. Initial briefs had reflected mostly on her hotel obsession: she needed “an abundance of the little things — to never run out of fluffy towels, and a hair dryer in a cabinet that’s always plugged in”. Now she was obsessing over tiles and textiles, for the first time in her life.

“How much her eyes have been opened,” Arent marvels. “Some people don’t know the transformative power of an interior. Until you’re in it: that’s when you have the heart moment.”

She agonised over every choice they brought to the table. “Every day in my work I make a million decisions and make them quickly...

but to figure out what I liked and didn’t like took a long time.” After years of hardly noticing art she was “open to learning” and going to all the galleries. Says Arent: “We’ve received so many emails saying, ‘You’ve transformed the way I feel about it all.’”

McKay says she’s fallen in love with art and beautiful things, and she’s fallen in love with the whole notion of ‘home’. “I was in Sydney from May to September,” she says, just moments after arriving back from LA (while making her mandatory homecoming cup of tea). “That’s a bit of a record.”

Wissler is around more, too. “Our work had taken us away from each other but this home has brought us back together. There’s nowhere else we’d rather be.” **VL**

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**THIS PAGE** in the bedroom, **bedhead** by CK Upholsterers; Society **bed linen**, from Ondene; Caravane **bed linen**, from Montmartre Store. Gubi Bestlite **BL6 lamp**; Dulux Hildegard **paint**. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the ensuite, Melange Pill Form **sconce** by Kelly Wearstler; *Turkish Bathing Women* **artwork** by David Hamilton. *Details, last pages.*

