HOME

BY *Karen McCartney*
PHOTOGRAPH BY *Tom Ferguson*

I RECENTLY visited southern France's Aude region to interview a Dutch artist and his fashion designer partner. Their village *maison,* which had until recently been derelict, was a work in progress, with areas of great decorative resolve twinned with others that felt (perhaps purposely) unfinished.

Collections of blue-and-white porcelain were sourced from markets, vintage fabrics were layered over chairs, and wall paints (shipped from their previous home in Antwerp) were magically melded together to create unusual hews. What struck me most, however, was the couple's ability to find beauty in the placement of objects that verged on the ugly. As I pointed this out to them, I heard my partner take a sharp intake of breath. I had meant it as a compliment; they'd found that elusive link between intriguing, beautiful and odd.

As I cast my eye across the best of Australian interiors, I see the same instinct at work. Sydney-based designer firm Arent & Pyke caught my attention with its recently completed apartment in Pyrmont, Sydney (shown left). Designed by Americans Ben and Aja Blanc, the "Apollo" mirror pairs two elements that should, in theory, have no relationship: a split, circular mirrored surface and hanging threads of hand-spun silk fibre.

"The mirror is both sculptural and functional, but its 'Cousin It' fringing imbues it with a distinct humanistic quality," says Juliette Arent. Always on the lookout for pieces that add humour, spirit or gravitas to a space, Arent used the mirror as a starting point around which other items in the vestibule could pivot. "Our client was intrigued, and agreed to its inclusion," she says. "We always knew this piece would arouse curiosity." The combination of the iconic Flos Snoopy table lamp by Castiglioni, and a custom-designed console which borrows shapes and materiality from another era, creates a supporting context.

Sarah Hook well understands this dynamic; her Melbourne store Franque is known for its eclectic mix of contemporary art and antiquities. "I like our clients to feel a little challenged in their purchases," she says. "The best pieces should not feel 100 per cent right, but rather a little off centre. The choices have to be a reflection of them, though, and excite them. They, in turn, will sing."

By way of example, Hook suggests twinning an 18th-century French dining table with a contemporary, geometric sculpture by Australian artist Peter Cole. "They say artists' homes are the most interesting because they decorate for themselves, not because someone told them where and how to place things," says Hook.

She is passionate about objects with a rich and layered history, which she believes carry more value and hence enter the territory of the rare and desirable. "This is storytelling – and storytelling is the new luxury." ∎

STYLING TIP:
"It's terrific when two pieces which don't seem to relate actually bring each other alive."
SARAH HOOK

WILD THING
Some of the most interesting objects walk a fine line between ugly and beautiful.

WE LOVE

Italy's best-dressed fingers and lobes have been sparkling with the whimsical creations of Rome jeweller Delfina Delettrez for a couple of years now. The rest of the globe is only now starting to catch on. We're currently obsessed with her gold, pearl and enamel "ABC" earrings – worn singly, of course – which feature one of her favourite motifs, the evil eye. "I believe in the power of stones and materials, but more in the thoughts and energy infused by their wearer," says the fourth-generation craftswoman of her charming fascination with symbols and talismans.

Delfina Delettrez "ABC" 18-carat gold, pearl and enamel earring, **$408**; NET-A-PORTER.COM

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STYLING BY *Pilar Paredes*

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