

Taking it

The aim of this seductive Sydney coastal home is not to serve up one big 'wow', but to tantalise, intrigue and tease out the big reveal.

slow

By Joanne Gambale Photographed by Mads Mogensen
Produced by Martina Hunglinger



THIS PAGE in the living space of this home on the coastline near Sydney's Coogee, Ile Club sofas and daybed by Piero Lissoni from Living Divani; Poltrona Frau Ming's Heart armchairs by Shi-Chieh Lu; Eileen Carrara console (behind sofa) by Antonio Citterio from B&B Italia; Tribeca coffee table by Jean-Marie Massaud and Baba round side table by Roberto Barbieri, both for Poliform; Louis Poulsen AJ floor lamp from Cult; Oluce Atollo 235 table lamp by Vico Magistretti from Euroluce; Wind Low rug by Paola Lenti. *Details, last pages.*

THIS PAGE in the kitchen, Cappellini Hi Pad stools from Cult; **benchtop** and concealed **bar cabinetry** (to the left) in leathered Esmeralda marble. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the dining area, B&B Italia Eileen table from Space Furniture; Poliform Seattle chairs by Jean-Marie Massaud; Vibia Wireflow Square **pendant lights** by Arik Levy.

To reach the pinnacle of any life experience is all the more exhilarating for its approach — the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the odd tantalising tease — and that could be said for mountain climbing, bedtime frolicking or, in this case, architecture.

“I don’t like the phrase ‘wow-factor,’” says Italian-born, Sydney-based architect Renato D’Ettorre, who, when engaged to design a family home on a north-east-facing site along one of the Eastern Suburbs’ most popular coastlines, resisted the urge to sketch a glass box. Not only would the home be victim to glare and heat for much of the year, but the climax of its 180-degree panoramic ocean view would be reached too early — and where would be the fun in that?

Instead, D’Ettorre — inspired by a barn near his birthplace in Italy’s Abruzzo region — wrapped perforated bricks around the upper north-east sides of the building (at ground level, before it dips into the cliff edge), so that you enter this home like a child into a garden of hidden Easter eggs, searching out those golden glimpses of sea and shore. “It’s not instant drama,” says D’Ettorre. “I wanted to engage curiosity, intrigue, encourage exploration. We play on compression, expansion, pocket views and expansive views.”

There’s another advantage to this kind of playful design. The home was built for a family of five, and though the tweens have become teens since the build began in 2014, they have loved its hide-and-seek appeal. “There’s a surprise around every corner,” says the owner, “and the kids love the perforated bridges.” It’s a journey of discovery and peepholes. »





THESE PAGES
the infinity lap pool,
beneath an exterior
of white ceramic glazed
perforated bricks.

THIS PAGE in the entryway, perforated **bricks** made by PGH Bricks & Pavers; Infinito **ceiling light** by Davide Groppi from Dedece; Viabizzuno **floor lights** from VBO Australia. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the courtyard, Tait Tidal **chairs** by Trent Jansen.

« The process from conception to completion has taken the adults on a similar journey. It all started with a must-have block of land and its exclusive aspect, followed by a moment of inspiration in front of the TV when a series featuring D’Ettorre’s Solis project on Hamilton Island set the owners’ hearts aflutter.

The brief was for something “hard-wearing, no-fuss” to withstand a corrosive coastal atmosphere and very busy parents, but it was basically open-ended; an important factor for D’Ettorre, whose creative process flows as organically as his nature-inspired designs.

The architect spent his early years in a small village of Abruzzo, but in a traditional home that protected him from the elements, much to his chagrin. So as a student he championed the integration of a home’s surrounds into its interior. He became obsessed with the architectural use of water, and now declares that a good

building should feel like a “breathing organism”. He loves the idea that a block of stone is carved by the elements over a millennium. “You don’t build a house, you carve out a house.”

To this end he loves stucco, favours simplicity, and is stereotypically Italian in his passion for the rousing sound of the home’s water feature. Along the pergola crawls pigface and snake vine, while wattle yellow and ocean turquoise are brought inside as accents — a palette devised by D’Ettorre’s wife, interior designer Belinda Brown.

“We took a leap of faith with Renato,” says the owner, “but we knew he had it in him. And where he went from good to great was in the variations — even though everyone had warned us that this is where you lose money during a build. We would see opportunities and make changes along the way — and pretty much everything he suggested, we went with.” »

“I wanted to engage curiosity, intrigue, encourage exploration. We play on compression, expansion, pocket views and expansive views” **RENATO D’ETTORRE**





THIS PAGE near the entrance, Corian desk; Eames Aluminium Group chairs from Herman Miller; Davide Groppi Less for Less table lamp; artwork by Martine Emdur. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the master ensuite, Boffi shower, customised showerhead and wall-mounted mixer.

« Namely a gold-dig of an excavation that uncovered a striking sandstone wall beneath ground level, which instigated a floor plan reshuffle to utilise its beauty and natural cooling properties (the home is full of sustainable design features and air con is restricted to the bedrooms). The subterranean 'den' is as calming as the ocean-facing living space above is exhilarating.

So, yes, the ocean does finally get its own stage, or panoramic widescreen, just a flight of stairs below the entrance. And it is glorious — it is wow — but it is glare-free because of those perforated bricks acting like a visor above. And just as apparent as D'Ettorre's enthusiasm for Romanesque (unexpected lookouts and peepholes) and Medieval (bridges, meandering ways) is his admiration for Islamic architecture; glazed white ceramic on the outside, the bricks create something akin to a religious experience inside.

“There are so many patterns,” says the owner with a peaceful expression, “and some only last for a moment and you can miss them. Early in the morning, a golden light glows through the brick walls like a scene in a church. Depending on the time of day or year, there are different dot patterns across the floor. There are often rainbows on the deck.”

Our tour of the house was punctuated with these magical distractions, and whenever the clouds allowed we saw on the ceiling ripples of light reflecting from the infinity lap pool beyond the large glass doors, an effect metaphorically reflected in the kitchen's Esmeralda green marble cabinetry and benchtop.

“Renato's a master,” says the owner. “I think it's going to be a hard one for him to top.” **VL**

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THIS PAGE in the main bedroom, B&B Italia Husk swivel chair by Patricia Urquiola and Living Divani Moon side table by Mist-o, both from Space Furniture; David Muston bed base; Viabizzuno Roy Parete lamps from VBO Australia; Bemboka bedlinen. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the courtyard, custom-made dining table with handmade glazed Moroccan tiles. *Details, last pages.*

