

HEART OF THE MATTER

On the surface, this Sydney warehouse conversion is a skilfully crafted home filled with a lifetime of collectables. Closer inspection reveals an intriguing personal journey, framed around family and informed by a deep connection to the creative world.

By Lisa Green Photographed by Ross Honeysett Art directed & styled by Don Cameron



HAIR AND MAKE-UP: DANIELE BUTCHER



THIS PAGE Naomi and Boris Tasic on the landing of their Sydney home; BassamFellows CB-21 Tractor stool from Living Edge; American oak flooring (throughout) from Precision Flooring, custom laid by Élan Construct; *Composition 16* artwork by Julije Knifer from Galerija Kaptol. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the kitchen/dining area, black marble Incas dining tables and Tre 3 dining chairs, all by Angelo Mangiarotti for Agapecasa, enquiries to Artedomus; 1950s pull-out bar by Osvaldo Borsani for Tecno from Don Cameron Gallery; *Eve* artwork by Stephen Nothing. *Details, last pages.*

THESE PAGES in the kitchen/
dining area, custom
sideboard by Élan Construct;
Futagami brass **trivets**
(on tables) purchased in
Japan; Mad et Len **candles**
(on table); Giunone **pendant**
light by Vico Magistretti from
Don Cameron Gallery; Focus
spotlights from XAL; yellow
Refractions **sculpture** (on
sideboard) by Phillip Low
from Hub Furniture; **bowl**
(on sideboard) designed by
Boris Tosic and made by Élan
Construct; *Message in a Bottle*
(2002) **artwork** (on right
wall) by Charles Blackman.
In the living area, Wave **sofa**
by Giovanni Offredi for
Saporiti Italia and Giunone
floor lamp by Vico
Magistretti for Artemide
from Don Cameron Gallery;
vintage yarn Turkish
handknotted #8081 **rug**
from Robyn Cosgrove;
sculpture (on windowsill
at back left) by Dušan
Džamonja from Galerija
Kaptol; wooden **dolls** (on
windowsill at back centre)
by Alexander Girard for Vitra,
enquiries to Living Edge;
Untitled (1986) **artwork**
(on back wall) by John
Coburn; *Untitled* (2012-2013)
artwork (in round frame)
by Bill Henson.





It was the final piece of the picture, a triangular bench in walnut timber, angles blunted, edges rounded. As the centrepiece of Naomi Tusic's kitchen and home, it works hard, a robust and beautiful monument to family life crafted by her joiner husband Boris. Its arrival signalled the end of a four-year project, a man's mission to build a *zamak* (Croatian for 'castle') in Sydney's Paddington for his family, and a home befitting of an art collection decades in the making.

When he jumped ship in Sydney Harbour in 1989, the lanky Croatian merchant seaman made his way to Kings Cross and within hours had talked his way into a construction job. It seems somehow fitting that Boris and his family are now firmly anchored here, a mere 10-minute walk from where his Australian story began.

The Tosics bought the 1892 brick warehouse from well-known food and lifestyle photographer Petrina Tinslay, whose studio was on the ground floor. The late artist Margaret Olley is another former owner and had apparently entertained the idea of it being her studio. These were meaningful omens given the couple's love of art and entertaining. "I just felt it was the one somehow," Naomi says. "It felt like a great blank canvas for Boris to do something wonderful."

A master of quick demolition and rebuilds, Boris has honed his craft on an impressive list of commercial interior and residential projects through his business, Élan Construct, which is enabled by his joinery workshop in Western Sydney. "I always wondered what I was capable of doing. 'What can I build for myself and for my family?'" he says. "This house answered my emotional need to provide somewhere for all of us to come together."

And then there was his art collection. It would drive the design intent — guided by Woods Bagot's Domenic Alvaro with input from numerous other friends from the design world. The eventual plan would see the staircase climb the eastern wall of the building, the lift tucked behind it, mid-floor. There's a basement car space, storeroom, gym and screening room. At ground level a corridor leads past the garage to the laundry and lift, with guest bedroom and studio beyond. The glass-enclosed open-tread staircase rises from the entry to the family's private quarters.

Next floor up, among the treetops, is a glorious open-plan living zone for cooking, dining and lounging. There are 13 windows and paintings fill every section of wall in between. When the sun is high it streams into the kitchen through the glass-bottomed pool on the rooftop terrace, sending reflections rippling through the space. The writhing forms of the couple's two boys — Mali, 13, and Quinn, 7 — swimming overhead are like a Martine Emdur photograph in perpetual motion, and Naomi can keep an eye on them as she glides around her domain.

High ceilings, plentiful light and the moody depths of the walnut joinery lay strong foundations for the interior. This is a spacious home — four floors plus rooftop — but it has palpable warmth and intimacy. Boris's skills and design eye have been directed into every corner of the home. From hand-turned balustrades, Milan-style door jambs and grass-cloth wardrobe doors to the fully integrated kitchen, the joinery is a feature on every level. "I work with

lots of timber but, in the end, it comes down to personality," says Boris. "Walnut is classic; it matches with any other colour, it doesn't go out of fashion, you can dress it up or dress it down. It is a bit masculine on this scale — the entire house is walnut — but it's balanced by the white."

He's spent years getting to know the timber better. "The whole world uses walnut for premium-grade furniture. It's beautiful and it's soft to work with. It's not really a hardwood like they say. It's more malleable, you can do things to it. And it's kind of a grateful timber to work with. The more you carve into it the more it exposes itself and its beauty."

Assembled over 25 years, Boris's art collection, arranged in vignettes throughout the house, conjures a feeling of home, too. "It's kind of an emotional moment to see your own journey," he says. There's a Ben Quilty triptych in the screening room, a Dale Frank in the study. Robert Dickerson works occupy a wall behind the bath and in the living space, a John Coburn, a Charles Blackman and

a Norman Lindsay keep company on one wall. There's an arresting Del Kathryn Barton painting on level two and her collage series flashes by as the glass lift moves between floors.

"Art was always something I wanted to know more about," says Boris. He collected exclusively Australian artists in the beginning, then looked to US and European markets. "I started looking back into my history and I discovered a lot of great 1960s artists from Croatia. They've become more famous of late."

Long-time collaborator Don Cameron, an art director, stylist and Italian furniture importer, was drawn into the Tusic orbit after visiting Paramount by The Office

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Space, the luxury club-like boutique Surry Hills headquarters for the couple's co-working business. "When I went in there and saw the amount of love and energy and thought and consideration that went into every aspect and every decision in that space — and then the art — it was really a very strong thing for me," says Cameron. "It was the hand of an artist I think."

The two have joined forces on many projects, including this home, with spectacular results. "Through my friendship with Don, I've learnt to appreciate vintage design," says Boris. "It's a nice story that not everything is made. Something can be found, something can be made, something can be reclaimed."

It's a notion that carries through the entire home's narrative. "When I learnt English, my favourite word was 'pre-loved,'" he says. "And it's still one of my favourite words. Pre-loved is such a beautiful word to say because somebody loved it and I kind of inherited it. And will continue loving it." VL

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THIS PAGE, FROM TOP in another view of the kitchen, walnut table and custom joinery by Élan Construct; vase from Alm; tableware by Marc Newson for Noritake from Living Edge. In a further view of the kitchen, Established & Sons Lighthouse lamp from Living Edge; *In the Rose Garden* (2011) artwork by Robert Dickerson from Dickerson Gallery; *Three Breast at Hanging Rock* (1987) artwork by John Perceval from Olsen Gallery; artwork by Del Kathryn Barton, a gift from the artist.



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THESE PAGES in the study, Bassam Fellows CB-53 low back **sofa**, CB-510 high back **lounge chair**, CB-361 Circular **coffee table** (left) and CB-36 Circular **coffee table**, CB-33 Tray Rack **side table**, CB-21 Tractor **stool**, all from Living Edge; 606 Universal **shelving system** by Dieter Rams for Vitsoe; Lari **lamp** by Angelo Mangiarotti for Karakter Copenhagen and Spider **ceiling lamp** by Serge Mouille from Don Cameron Gallery; kelim **rug** from Robyn Cosgrove; *Untitled* (2002) **artwork** by Dale Frank; **photograph** of Boris Tosic taken by Gary Heery, **in frame** by Boris Tosic.



THIS PAGE in the powder room, custom **mirror** and **door** by Élan Construct; Agape Pear **toilet** by Patricia Urquiola, Bjhon 1 **basin** by Angelo Mangiarotti and Fez **taps**, all from Artedomus; round **mirror** from Hub Furniture; walls in Agape Maximum porcelain **panels** from Artedomus.



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP at the landing, lift core **joinery**, **stairs** and **hand rail**, all by Élan Construct; **artwork** by Del Kathryn Barton. In the study, custom **desk** by Élan Construct; Walter Knoll FK bucket **chair**; BassamFellows **daybed** from Living Edge; **floor lamp** by Serge Mouille; custom brass **mirror** purchased in Japan; Tripod **table lamp** by Serge Mouille from Cult; **curtains** in Warwick Aesop linen/ polyester in Mist by Serenity Fedele Upholstery; honed **Bedonia tiles** from Artedomus; *p.139* **artwork** (2015) (on left) by Linus Bill + Adrien Horn; **sculpture** (on shelf) by David Umemoto from Hub Furniture; **artworks** (on shelf) by Del Kathryn Barton, a gift from the artist.

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THESE PAGES in the main bedroom, Moroso Highlands **bed** by Patricia Urquiola from Hub Furniture; Society Limonta **bed linen** and throw, enquiries to Ondene; Marsotto Galata **side table** by Konstantin Greic from Hub Furniture; 1956 Pierre Jeanneret teak and cane **armchair** from Don Cameron Gallery; Agape DR **bath** by Marcio Kogan and Agape Fez **taps** from Artedomus; Vipp **towels** from Cult; DCW Editions Biny **bedside light** from Spence & Lyda; Iranian pure wool kelim **rug** from Robyn Cosgrove; *Untitled* (2012–2013) **photograph** by Bill Henson from Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery. *Man with Child* **artwork** by Robert Dickerson (reflected view).





THIS PAGE, FROM TOP in the gym, Élan Construct bench by David Whittaker; Wood floor lamp by Fernando and Humberto Campana for Skitsch from Hub Furniture. In the screening room beyond, Eames lounge chair and ottoman from Living Edge; vintage yarn Turkish rug from Robyn Cosgrove; *Kuta Rorschach* (2014) artwork by Ben Quilty. On the rooftop terrace, Swisspearl Dune modular sofa, Porto low table and stools, all from Robert Plumb; custom canopy in Accoya pine by Élan Construct. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in another view of the rooftop terrace, Schultz 1966 chaise lounge from Dedec; Vola FS3 shower from Sydney Tap & Bathroomware; glass-bottom custom pool by Adriatic Pools; flamed Bedonia tiles by Artedomus. *Details, last pages.*