



A stately Melbourne home receives a

makeover that honours its heritage while forging a brighter future.



These pages In the entry, door and trims painted in Dulux 'Celtic Rush'. Maison 'Mozart' floorboards from George Fethers & Co. Staircase in Porter's Paints 'Watermark'. Custom stair runner from Halcyon Lake. 'Cristol' chandelier in antique brass from The Montauk Lighting Co. Louis XVI-style side and console tables from Miguel Meirelles Antiques. Vase from Astier de Villatte. Artwork by Greg Wood on wall from Otomys, and on table by Luke Crouch, bought direct. On side table white ceramic vase on left by Irene Grishin-Selzer and vase on right by Alterfact both from Pépite.

# Higher calling

Words CHRIS PEARSON Photography TIMOTHY KAYE

These pages Adding a contemporary air in the kitchen, Prandina 'Flyer W3' articulated wall lights from Inlite. Arabescato Vagli honed marble benchtop from Signorino. Maison 'Mozart' floorboards from George Fethers & Co. Branco Vena honed marble wall tiles from G-Lux. Joinery in Dulux 'Grey Pebble'. Jolie 'Core' joinery hardware in Old Silver from Two Tease. Gaggenau 400 series oven, 400 series extractor, 200 Series gas cooktop, all from E&S Trading. Joinery by 360 Construction Group.



Stepping into the luminous hallway of this elegant 1889 home in Melbourne's southeast is a revelation. The grand staircase is graced with a stained-glass window, its ethereal light bathing the space below in a patchwork of delicate colour. But, equally intriguingly, the heavenly stairway gets lighter as you walk up it. It's no trick of the eye – in their meticulous attention to detail, architects Robson Rak crafted the carpet in 12 shades, with each step lighter than the one below.

But, when the owners, a couple with two children now in their 20s, bought the red-brick home in 2004, the hallway, boasting mouldings, turned balustrades and arches was handsome, but it was also earthbound and oppressive, thanks to treacle-toned timbers and a dark stairway.

While the two-storey house had enjoyed its early glory days as a stately home, it had been subsequently subdivided into flats and then it reverted to a single residence, resulting in poky awkward rooms oddly juxtaposed with the original grand spaces. But the greatest sin was a rear extension out of step with the front and, strangely, with a tenuous connection to the back garden, which as a result was little, if ever, used.

"After a three-year stint in London, we realised it was time to renovate," says the owner. "Having lived in a beautiful home there, we wondered how we could maintain a sense of tradition but still bring in a contemporary freshness. The challenge was to juggle old and new, and not lose its soul." »



**This page, from top** In the dining room, *The Architect* artwork by Teo Treloar. Custom Rosa Aurora marble and bronze metal table by Barbera Design. Ceramic sculpture on left by Daniel Leone and two ceramic sculptures by Dawn Vachon on right, all from Pépite. Walls painted in Porter's Paints 'Watermark' with trims in Dulux 'Natural White'. In the powder room, 'Voyage Botanique' wallpaper from Ananbô, Paris. 'Bridges 2' wall sconce from Allied Maker. Brodware 'Manhattan' wall set in Weathered Brass from E&S Trading. Custom vanity in Calacatta Gold honed marble from G-Lux. Trim in Dulux 'Natural White'. **Opposite page** In the informal living/dining area, walls in Porter's Paints 'Grey Pepper'. Moroso 'Gentry' sofa and 'Net' side table in Blush, both from Mobilia. Glass bowl by Billy James Crellin from Pépite on coffee table. Italian vintage pendant light from eModerno. 'Pia' chairs and 'Ten' table from Great Dane. Vase by Alterfact on left and ceramic vessel (right) by Gom Maker both from Pépite. Gubi 'A1965' pendant light from In Good Company. Artwork by Lael McDonald from Sketch Co Gallery. Curtains in Mokum 'Satori' fabric in Stonewash from James Dunlop Textiles.



« In 2019, the couple asked Robson Rak architects Kathryn Robson and Chris Rak to deliver their home into the 21st century while respecting its distinguished heritage. "They knew we were familiar with period homes," says Kathryn, "and that we could respect it and upgrade it at the same time." Its gorgeous original features were to be honoured and revitalised, while the new elements were to be unashamedly modern, with a nod to the owner's Swedish roots. Although Scandi was not specifically mentioned, it was to have echoes of its uncluttered, elegant aesthetic. "The client wanted it lighter, paler and uplifted, while embracing and respecting the heritage elements," says Kathryn. "They saw this as their forever home, for their children and future grandchildren."

"We wanted a home that could be in London, Stockholm or Paris as well as Melbourne. My main inspiration was the London house we had luckily lived in," says the owner. "I wanted a light-filled kitchen that will stand the test of time. My husband needed a beautiful wine cellar. But the stained-glass windows were not to go!"

Robson Rak sliced off the back, replacing it with a streamlined addition etched in black zinc, with banks of steel-framed French doors connecting seamlessly to the backyard remodelled by Mud Office. On the ground floor, it accommodates a long »

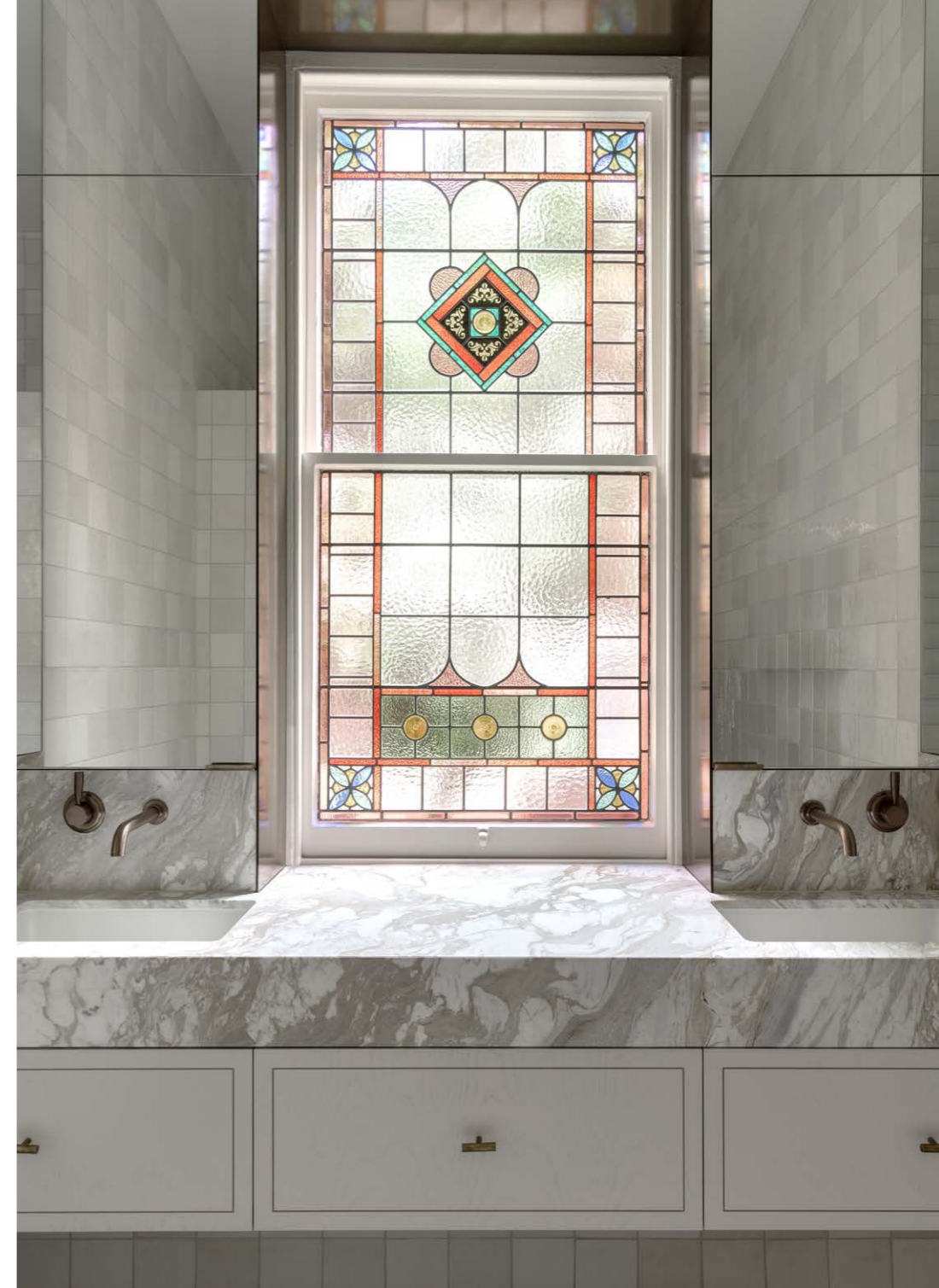




### SPEED READ

» When the owners bought this two-storey 1880s brick home in Melbourne's southeast, it was a strange mishmash of the original grand rooms and small poky spaces, due to being subdivided in an earlier iteration. And it had a poor connection with the backyard. » After returning from a stint in London, they wanted to upgrade the home to create a smooth connection with the garden and juggle the ground-floor rooms to accommodate a larger kitchen and a wine cellar. They wanted to honour its past while making it functional and contemporary. » Architects Robson Rak shaved off the back and replaced it with a slick addition in black zinc, which houses a new kitchen and dining area, connected to the backyard with banks of steel-framed doors. » The palette is in soft putty greys with pops of colour echoing the stained-glass windows, with the blue carpet of the hallway, in its graduated tones, a standout. » The furnishings combine Scandinavian style with Italian and the owners' antiques.

**This page** In one of the bedrooms, 'Owan' pendant light from MCM House. Karakter 'Lari' table lamp from Mobilia. *While You Were Away* artwork by Luke Crouch. Walls in Dulux 'Natural White'. **Opposite page** In the family bathroom, custom vanity in Calacatta Gold honed marble from G-Lux. Brodware 'Manhattan' tapware in Statue Bronze from E&S Trading. Joinery in Dulux 'Grey Pebble'. Jolie 'Core' joinery hardware in Old Silver from Two Tease.



« kitchen and casual dining area. "There is a distinction between old sections and new, which is brought out in black zinc, making them recessive to stand out against the green," says Kathryn. They also juggled the floor plan, so the kitchen became the family room, while preserving a formal dining room and living room each side of the entry and tucking in a powder room by the stairs.

A guest bedroom occupies this ground level, complementing the four bedrooms upstairs which only got a remodelled bathroom together with a new balcony in the two-storey extension. "We retained the ornate arches, stained-glass windows and panelling, refurbishing them where necessary and, most significantly, repainted all that heavy timberwork a light grey," says Kathryn.

While the overall palette is neutral, there are no harsh whites, says Chris, with all the walls and joinery a "putty" pale-grey, with classic white and grey marble in the kitchen, while the bathrooms sport a minty green marble, offset in the powder room with a stunning wallpaper that really makes a splash. The striking stained-

glass windows, with their kaleidoscopic hues, provided the inspiration for pops of colour throughout, with pink veining in the marble hall table, hints of pink on the living room sofa and the lovingly crafted blue carpet in the hallway.

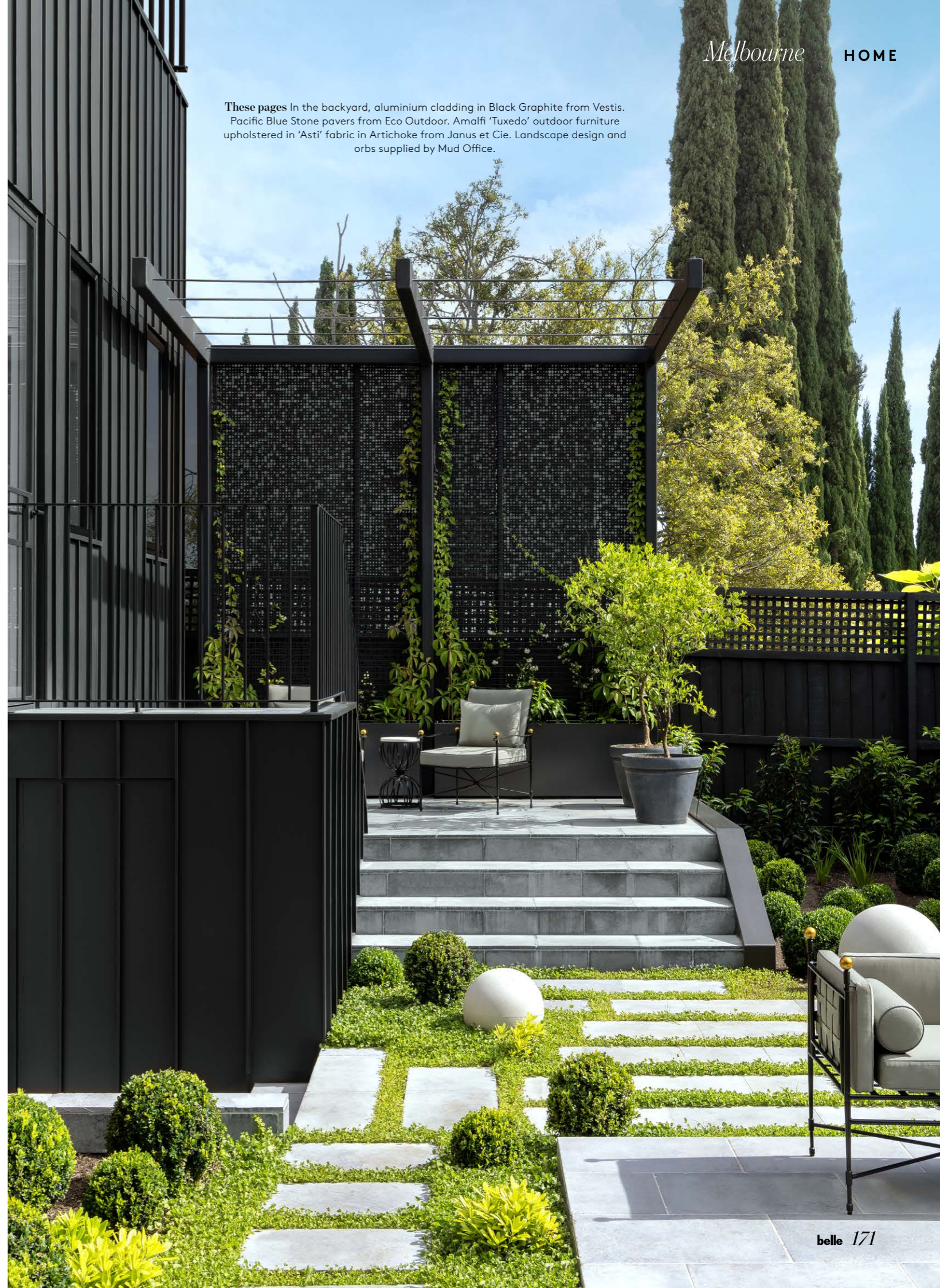
The furniture and the light fittings are a fusion of Italian and Scandi, "restrained, with attention to detail," says Kathryn, combined with the owners' antiques. The casual dining area sports a Scandi light and dining table while an ornate brass Italian mid-century pendant light hovers above a sofa nearby. In the kitchen, Shaker-style joinery routed out and with glass fronts pays homage to an earlier time, but then two thoroughly modern wall lights sweep out over the island bench.

"I love the beautiful kitchen with its doors leading to the garden," says Kathryn. "We have created an outdoor space not there before," adds Chris. "And there is real excitement in the entrance hall." Says the owner, "We adore coming home and opening that blue door."

▣ [robsonrak.com.au](http://robsonrak.com.au); [mudoffice.com.au](http://mudoffice.com.au)



These pages In the backyard, aluminium cladding in Black Graphite from Vestis. Pacific Blue Stone pavers from Eco Outdoor. Amalfi 'Tuxedo' outdoor furniture upholstered in 'Asti' fabric in Artichoke from Janus et Cie. Landscape design and orbs supplied by Mud Office.



SIGNATURE STYLE  
KEY PIECES

1 'Owan' pendant light in white resin, \$1190, from MCM House. 2 'Elysian' kitchen mixer in Brushed Gunmetal, \$289.90, from ABI Interiors. 3 Linen duvet cover set in Pinstripe, \$410/queen, from Cultiver. 4 Amalfi 'Tuxedo' lounge chair in Slate, from \$8945, from Janus et Cie. 5 LG 'Series 9' 10kg front load washing machine in Black, \$1399, from Harvey Norman.