

Mansion

INCORPORATING NEWS FROM DOW JONES' MANSION GLOBAL

AUSTRALIA

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12-PAGE
INTERIORS
SECTION

COLOURFAST
Kit Kemp's design tips

RAISING THE BAR
Why home gyms are all the rage

POCKETS OF PLENTY
Secret spots drawing the big money

**BACK IN
THE RACE**

Melbourne prestige pulls ahead



British interior designer Kit Kemp's shop inside New York's famed Bergdorf Goodman store. See Page 50

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Editor's letter

Tax-free expat money coupled with low interest rates continue to push the Sydney prestige market to new heights, while Melbourne is energising itself with a string of high-price sales.

With the market in flux and Sydney prestige agents, particularly in the eastern suburbs, working 12-hour days to satisfy vendors and buyers, developers and realtors are now questioning when this extraordinary roaring boom will end.

Economist Dr Andrew Wilson says Sydney and Melbourne home values are merely catching up with prices of three years ago, given that COVID had suppressed values.

"The Sydney market has the extra leg-up with the expats," Dr Wilson concedes. "We saw that last week with the sale of a \$20 million penthouse unit in Bondi. There is big money coming out of Sydney at the moment."

In a major scoop for this issue, we feature international designer Kit Kemp freely sharing her design ideas for Australian homes, while our writer Sue Wallace gives us a look inside the Kichmond penthouse apartment of Chyka Keebaugh, of *The Real Housewives of Melbourne* fame, in all its colourful glory.

Elsewhere, we look at Brisbane's prestige property market, Emily Pettafor reveals the unique islands on offer in Queensland's Whitsundays, and our international real estate correspondent Dolly Lenz tells us all about the value and importance of home gyms.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Lisa Allen
Editor

12 COVER A five-bedroom home at 6 Lascelles Avenue, Toorak, recently sold with an asking price of \$12 million. It was designed in the 1930s by Marcus Martin and renovated by Stephen Akehurst



COLOUR YOUR WORLD

Sharing her passion for bold, creative design, Kit Kemp has filled her latest book with divine inspiration



A hot pink cushion with orange zigzag trim; a towering, bold-patterned bedhead; and a quirky collection of 70 bowling shoes purchased from eBay over a year – that’s what the star of British interior design, Kit Kemp, is all about.

And she’s set to share her treasure chest of design tips in her new book *Design Secrets*, to be released in May.

It’s packed with advice on how to create a room that invigorates the senses, a staircase that invites you to linger on each step, and an entrance hall that’s a place to dream. Her tips will help transform the humdrum into the memorable and magical with a good dose of quirky.

Kemp and her husband, Tim, are co-founders of the boutique Firmdale Hotels in London and New York, and pioneers of luxury hotel design and service. Her distinctive “look at me” decor features a kaleidoscope of glorious colours, bold patterns and textures that evoke wonder. “I believe the best rooms never want us to leave,” she says. “There is a certain something that captures the imagination and stays with us forever.”

“I walk into some rooms that are beautiful but they are instantly forgettable when you leave. That’s why I love using colour, collections and special pieces to spice up people’s lives.”

As for the latest design trends, Kemp, with her eagle eye for detail, says it’s all about colour. “I think people are becoming braver with colour, and I know Australians are always adventurous and love the use of colour and are much bolder than us,” she says. Cushions are the answer, add colour and make bold statements, but don’t be boring – add a trim, an appliqué, splash the colour and mix up the fabrics. “If you have your eye on expensive fabric, use it for one side of the cushion with a contrast,” Kemp says.

Oversized bedheads with press-studs are striking signature pieces in her hotel rooms. “I like a headboard, as it shows off the fabric design on a flat surface and you can build the decor around that,” she says. She loves using handmade and decorated statement pieces, including wall hangings, paintings and



specialty items. “The thoughtfulness and character of a lovingly made object is worth a million times more than an accessory that has no meaning or soul,” she says.

Maybe you will be inspired to gather your souvenir spoons into a quirky collection framed on a wall, or turn that top shop jacket bought decades ago into a curtain trim. “You can build rooms around one small piece of stunning fabric or a special something you treasure,” says Kemp, who heads a team of eight at her Kemp Design Studio in London.

She hopes her book will plant a creative seed, encourage a new way of looking at interiors and inspire confidence to be “fabulously different”. “I think everyone is looking for fresh ideas, especially with lockdowns, and there are simple things that don’t cost a fortune to change the look of a room,” she says. “People are also looking for some grandiose touches and there’s a lot of creativity around at the moment.”

Never afraid to shy away from the conventional, Kemp uses dots, spots, stripes, zigzags and appliqué that sit happily with florals, geometrics and checks in the brightest of shades, turning drab into remarkable. She is all about detailed, whimsical storytelling. At times it’s a little like stepping into a fairytale as she works her magic, often with found fabric from another life and everyday objects grouped together in eclectic collections.

So was Kemp an inquisitive child who sat sketching for hours? “No, I was always out climbing trees with my two brothers,” she says. “I was a bit of a tomboy and didn’t do much sitting around drawing.” Neither did she inherit her love of interior design from her family. “They were of the philosophy that if you can remember the last time something was decorated it doesn’t need redoing.”

Kemp is the creative director of Firmdale Hotels, while Tim is the property developer. They have three adult daughters and four devoted Cavalier King Charles spaniels. They opened Dorset Square Hotel in 1985, and now have eight hotels in London and two in New York. Each is distinctive – Kemp

creates a “village” feel, using prompts from surrounding neighbourhoods. “You should feel a sense of arrival and know where you are or there should be something that resonates with a particular area,” she says.

As for those bowling shoes, they feature at the Croc Bowling Alley at Ham Yard Hotel in London.

As well as new builds, the Kemps love breathing life into dilapidated areas, as with their latest venture, the Warren Street Hotel in New York’s Tribeca district. The former car park will feature 70 bedrooms across 11 stories, with a restaurant and bar.

Last November Kemp opened a shop in New York’s Bergdorf Goodman store, featuring one-off pieces. She’s also had fun developing a lighting collection for Porta Romana, including the Rocking Robin, inspired by Alexander Calder’s mobile designs. She has collaborated with Wedgwood, Wilton Carpets, Andrew Martin, Anthropologie, Christopher Farr, Chelsea Textiles and Fine Cell Work to create collections of tableware, furniture, fabrics, wallpaper and fragrance.

Her love of artisan work features in her book’s chapter “Meet the Maker”, which delves into the creative minds of retired sailor turned woolworker Colin Millington, renowned ceramist Martha Freud, sustainable fashion designer Clio Peppiatti and figurative painter Joe Fan.

So, is an Australian Firmdale Hotel on the cards? “I would love to see a Firmdale Hotel in Australia one day and I am open to suggestions,” Kemp says.

Describing 2020 as “challenging”, she believes that when the world reopens people will travel less but stay longer in one place.

As for the greatest compliment she could receive, it’s when a guest picks up a bespoke piece or found object and asks, “Where did this come from?” or “What is this?” Imagination heightened, senses awakened and dreams triggered – Kemp has achieved what she set out to do.

Kit Kemp’s Design Secrets is out May 5, Hardie Grant, \$49.99



In her book *Design Secrets*, Kit Kemp reveals how she turns drab into remarkable with the clever use of dots, stripes and zigzags that happily mix with florals, geometrics and checks in myriad textures and bold colours