

SET THE TONE

Wielding the *mood-enhancing* impact of colour with ease and verve, the team at KENNEDY NOLAN has given this Melbourne home dynamism and shape, adding a modern edge to *laid-back* suburbia.

By Annemarie Kiely
Photographed by Derek Swalwell



THESE PAGES in the lounge area of this Melbourne home, Strips sofas by Cini Boeri for Arflex from Space Furniture; Paloma coffee table from Sarah Ellison; Nebulae wall lights from Ross Gardam; artwork by Valerie Sparks. *Details, last pages.*

OPPOSITE PAGE in the northern courtyard, Mass Productions Tio outdoor chairs and table from In Good Company; landscape design by Amanda Oliver Gardens.

As the world slow-releases from lockdown and looks at 'living' through the prism of a pandemic, creatives everywhere are discussing the positivity and paucity of design for the home. What of its proportions and palettes have mitigated anxiety or amplified it? What details have delivered a lightness of spirit or seeded darker feelings? What objects have framed as superficial or served a vital new purpose?

As the design industry takes inventory of the inadequacies, architect Patrick Kennedy, cofounder of Melbourne practice Kennedy Nolan, zeroes in on Zoom — the video-conferencing software that made full screen-feature of living rooms everywhere during the stay-at-home period.

"Peoples' domestic environments are surprisingly awful," he says, quick to qualify that it has nothing to do with money or means. "All that white plaster, downlights and the bulk of air-conditioning units in the corner. So many rooms, so bereft of imagination and humanity. I always presumed that people lived in more interesting ways than that."

Agreeing that one person's 'interesting' is another's 'detestable', he declares that no-one finds "absolute aridity" engaging or uplifting. To hell with subjectivity, there are certain symmetries and scales; continuities of context and character; conduits to personal memory and adjacencies of colour that just elicit joy, the architect maintains. And yet we all paralyse at the sight of a paint chart and pick white.

Illustrating the power of colour and the impact of simple but considered "interventions", Kennedy tables his firm's latest renovation project — a grand Victorian house given the "good old box addition" in the early 1980s. The two-storey building was comfortable and commodious enough for the client — a family of five — but the relationship between its key elements was at best strained, at worst non-communicative. Kennedy sums up his approach to the renovation as one of re-engagement — opening up cloistered living rooms and creating a spatial ambivalence between them so that all exploration and experience of the house flowed with logic and levity.

"This was an interior project that grew a bit," he says of a short turnaround time that negated big structural changes. "The northern garden had been given all the astroturfed regard of an innocuous side strip, while the western side featured a swimming pool slammed cheek by jowl against the house. We first focused on getting the house and garden to turn to each other and talk, but that addition was pretty ordinary."

Switching up the north side's brick-walled diminution of landscape and light to an expanse of floor-to-ceiling glass, Kennedy broke up the predictability of its square-frame geometries with a supersize circle and triangle. This simple gesture animated the

areas they contained, both inside and out, and predisposed their spaces to playful shapes and colour palette.

"We use these platonic forms on the big things to break down the hackneyed idea of indoor-outdoor living," he says of the seemingly random inserts that impart a cartoon quality to the facade. "It's about celebrating thresholds, but also re-evaluating the notion of transparency."

Painting all window frames in "middle blue" to exaggerate their "Play School" appeal, Kennedy amplified their cuteness with the construct of a giant outdoor chimney that channels the smoke of a fireplace on one side and an integrated barbecue on the other. This totemic form, invested with all the endearing anthropomorphism of a big man leaning, is the draw to an outdoor area where stone crazy paving, bright green planting and brick walls modulate the paradox of enclosure and openness.

"We make emotional connections to the simple shapes and tones that say home," explains Kennedy. "We are interested in the tertiary colours, the slightly dirty hues full of depth, that react to different light conditions and amplify a spatial experience."

Where middle blue connotes play outside, it draws the mid-century nostalgia of a Fiat Bambino inside, splashing across surfaces that have been detailed to connect, isolate and order elements.

The wave of colour engulfs the 1950s-inflected kitchen, the rattan-faced cupboards of a laundry-concealing service cube, and a rug that abstracts the swell into surface pattern in the family room.

The holism of blue unites disparate periods of furniture, generates spatial flow, and reminds of the Gio Ponti-designed Parco Dei Principi hotel in Sorrento, Italy, where blue, white, light and the linearity of tile pattern induce calm and the urge for a holiday cocktail.

The comparison to Ponti pleases Kennedy, for he and co-principal Rachel Nolan have made contextually responsive, regional modernism — from Scandinavia to the suburban idioms of Robin Boyd and Guilford Bell — their field of research for the past 20 years. "We also react to the times we are in," he says of the contemporary fashion, music and art creeping into their oeuvre. "And travel plays a profound part."

Citing this project's insert of a jali — the Hindi term for a perforated screen — that Kennedy tweaked with timber battens to enclose an upper-level landing and filter light to lower family rooms, the architect argues that diverse, even conflicting cultural details can reach a détente with tone. The claim is validated by Kennedy Nolan's serial placing on awards' podiums for their artistry with architecture and "dirty colours".

"It's always an investigation into the imagination," says Kennedy as he circles back to the white wasteland backdrops of Zoom and blue's affinity with the infinite, the peaceful and all matters of the spirit. "We just try to connect with humanity." **VL**
kennedynolan.com.au

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PATRICK KENNEDY



THESE PAGES in another view of the lounge area, rattan armchair from Feelgood Designs; 9602 floor lamp by Paavo Tynell for Gubi from Criteria; Blossom rug by Annie Georgeson from Designer Rugs.





THIS PAGE, FROM TOP in the kitchen, custom **cabinetry** in Dulux Duck Egg Blue designed by Kennedy Nolan, produced by Grange Joinery; fior de bosco stone **island benchtop** produced by Grange Joinery; Vola **tapware** from Mary Noall; Applique de Marseille **wall sconces** by Le Corbusier for Nemo from Cult; Muuto Ridge **vases** from In Good Company; **sculpture** (in corner) by Caleb Shea. In the dining area, Didier Liqueur **dining table**; No. B9 Le Corbusier **chairs** from Thonet; Nebulae **pendant lights** from Ross Gardam; Carrara marble **floor tiles** from RMS Marble. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the sitting room, Gubi Stay **lounge chair** and John Bastiras Design **coffee table**, both from In Good Company; Cleo **armchairs** from Jordan; Pare **floor lamp** from Douglas & Bec; Pierre Frey Shaman **wallpaper** from Milgate; Astoria **carpet** from Tsar Carpets; Anna **vase** (on mantle) from Daniel Emma; **sculpture** by Simone Slee. *Details, last pages.*

