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By ANNEMARIE KIELY Photographed by DEREK SWALWELL

DRAMATIC TWIST The owners of this Melbourne architectural *modernist* abode charged *Kennedy Nolan* with bringing a vibrancy and CREATIVE SPIRIT to proceedings.



*This page* in the entry of this Melbourne home, **cabinetry** upholstered in James Malone Debussy from The Textile Company and produced by Martel Upholstery; Fermat **handles** from Barbera; Servomuto Easy Ovale **wall light** from Moebel; C1 Mono Spot **ceiling lights** by Vincent Van Duysen for Flos from Euroluce; Sari silk **rug** from Apadana Rugs & Carpets; **flooring** in yellow travertine from Artedomus; *Barindyila Barindyila (Sister, Sister)* four-panel **photograph** by Dr Christian Thompson AO from Sarah Scout Presents. *Details, last pages.*



*These pages* in the living area, Knoll Platner **chairs** by Warren Platner from Dedec; **cabinetry** upholstered in James Malone Debussy from The Textile Company and produced by Martel Upholstery and Charles Sandford; custom **rug** designed by Kennedy Nolan and produced by Loom; **ceiling** in polished plaster produced by Bishop Master Finishes; Juicy Jute **wallpaper** by Phillip Jeffries from The Textile Company; **flooring** and **pedestal** in Roccia travertine from Artedomus; Tahiti **lamp** by Ettore Sottsass for Memphis Milano from Mobilia (on pedestal); *Together* ceramic **sculptures** by Brendan Huntley from Tolarno Galleries (centre shelf, on left); *Diety* (bottom shelf, from left) and *House of Verraccio* **paintings** by Kez Hughes from Stockroom Kyneton.





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Without bogging down in the debate about architecture constituting art, the Fairlie apartment building — on the blue-chip boundary of the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria — is a tightly held tower that, true to all best creative endeavours, buries the aspirations and anxieties of its age in a technical bravura.

The building was designed in 1961 by the vibe-masters of Melbourne modernism Yuncken Freeman Brothers, Griffiths & Simpson, who innovated with a fine modular concrete frame floating over fully glazed curtain walls. It messages a moment when the veil of civic order held in tight tension with a fast-changing world and the want for greater transparency and freedoms — think Melbourne women getting first access to the contraceptive pill as censors ban the sale of D H Lawrence's steamy classic *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

"But it's not what most would classify as modernism," qualifies Patrick Kennedy, co-principal of Kennedy Nolan, who was briefed to rationalise the "cellular" mid-level apartment into "a single organism" that served art and object in the holistic manner of Sir John Soane's house-museum in London. "Fairlie has a slight hint of Hollywood Regency," says Kennedy — an end-of-glory days inflection of the international style that locally coloured from Marion Hall Best's blood-pumping gloss palette and furnished from Georges' exclusive Hostess Store.

Kennedy brushstrokes the clients as a "very knowledgeable" couple in advertising and the arts who have an intimate understanding of how colour, line, language and concept combine to solve a problem with a single idea that incites the purchase. They had formerly inhabited modernism — a Boyd and Grounds house — commissioned architecture from the late Allan Powell and needed no acclimation to design process or the legacy of place. But decades of crafting brands had taught that old vessels must empty before they can refill. This meant the Kennedy Nolan team — including architects Rachel Nolan and Adriana Hanna — had to steer clear of historic pastiche in a progressive homage that cast eyes to a collection of contemporary Australian art and "killer" views over greater Melbourne: not an easy task.

"It was never going to be a succession of rooms," says Kennedy of the design team's dissolution of dividing walls into a central block — in-filled with a compact kitchen, storage and service amenities — around which a race-track circuit directs journey through enfilade doorways on a city-like discovery of surprise corners. A cosy snug reveals with a contrast of blanket-check chairs (allusion to the client's Scottish heritage), custom-dyed persimmon grass cloth walls and paintings by local art stars Stephen Bush, Kirsty Budge, Amanda Marburg, Adam Lee and Damiano Bertoli.

Kennedy Nolan condensed three bedrooms into an east-wing master suite that surveys outer sprawl as far as the Dandenong Ranges until evening incurs the draw of a curtain in Pierre Frey crewel seemingly patterned from Le Corbusier's Architectural Polychromy, a colour system with spatial effects that inspired accents in other zones.

It is "Corb's" four flavours of orange in the living-dining wing that Kennedy eked to the full width of the apartment's western edge where 35 hectares of rare botanical species can be seen rising to towers telling of the city's architectural factions.

It is, bar none, the best framing of Melbourne needing naught but simple foil, says Kennedy, nominating beige, that much maligned colour of bourgeoisie, as the determinant of the entertaining zone's new pitted travertine floors, polished plaster ceiling and upholstered walls.

Happy to kick cliché back to quirk, Kennedy continues the play in the odd geometries of customised plinths and pedestals (as per Soane's museum) displaying sculptures positioned to elicit contentious or co-operative dialogues. Eyes are the omnipresent window to this art salon's soul, expressing identity — in straight-up portrait or subtext — with a diversity of styles spanning the figurative to First Nations abstraction, Brent Harris to Brendan Huntley. >

*This page* in the kitchen with a view of the dining area, Gebrüder Thonet Vienna Wiener Stuhl chairs upholstered in Kvadrat Coda fabric from Space Furniture; Venini Tronchi chandelier by Toni Zuccheri.







*This page* in another view of the kitchen, limed American oak **cabinetry** produced by Charles Sandford; **benchtop** and **splashback** in yellow travertine from Artedomus and produced by Vicstone. *Opposite page* in another view of the dining area, custom **dining table** by Thomas Lentini; **jug** by Vanessa Lucas from NGV; **curtain** in Laconia Air linen from Mokum and produced by Colleve; Juicy Jute **wallpaper** by Phillip Jeffries from The Textile Company; **flooring** and **pedestal** in Roccia travertine from Artedomus; *All is Dark is Midnight To Me (For K.L.)* artwork by Adam Lee from Station Gallery.





*This page* in another view of the living area, Kyoto tables by Gianfranco Frattini for Poltrona Frau from Mobilia; curtain in Laconia Air linen from Mokum and produced by Colleve; Mortgage sculpture by Heather B Swann. *Opposite page* in another view of the living area, Lange Production FK87 Grasshopper chaise lounge from Living Edge; Akari 25N floor lamp by Isamu Noguchi from In Good Company; Murano glass piece (top left) from Micheluzzi; Cloud No. 1 sculpture by Guan Wei from Arc One Gallery (on first plinth); White Ape sculpture by Lisa Roet (on centre plinth); Owl sculpture by David Noonan (on right plinth); Gratesquerie (No. 6) painting (on wall) by Brent Harris from Tolarno Galleries; Mokuy wood sculpture by Nawurapu Wunungmurra from Yirrkala; Canvas cross artwork by Andrew Kaminski; Bicycle Thieves sculpture by Heather B Swann from Station Gallery; pair of paintings by Makinti Napanangka from Papunya Tula Artists; Spinifex sculpture by Stacie Roberts from Tjanpi Desert Weavers; Dhatam (waterlilies) Larrakitj memorial pole by Malaluba Gumana; Mitiji Larrakitj memorial pole by Wukun Wanambi; Marranu Larrakitj memorial pole by Garawan Wanambi from Yirrkala.

< A major painting by Macedon-Ranges-based artist Adam Lee — pulling eyes into a transcendental portal — presides over a custom dining table by Thomas Lentini who played with asymmetry, at client request, to prescribe more interesting conversational dynamics during dinner parties. It anchors on expressively turned legs, under the amber glow of an over-scaled Venini Tronchi chandelier, which talks to tones pulsing in an adjacent rug referencing the art of colour theorist Josef Albers.

It is Kennedy's homage to Albers' tonal dimension exploration *Homage to a Square*; a perceptual complexity of colour that centres energy on a sitting area furnished with a "lumpy" but suitably recherché sofa described by the client, in repeat of a colleague's Instagram handle, as "Shit I bought during Covid".

The entry hall, in contrast, is a pupil-dilating tunnel of teal in which a four-panel *Flower Wall* photographic piece by Dr Christian Thompson AO appears to float. It primes for the drama beyond and begs question of a collecting bent or interest.

"We're not buying work to create a collection for anybody other than ourselves," affirms the client in contempt of the purchase premised on matching decor. "We are interested in the artists, the crafting, the making, the understanding, the nature of how that happens." Kennedy nods in affirmation and adds that for every question posed, the pieces look you right back in the eye and venture the answer, "Art expresses what words cannot." ■ [kennedynolan.com.au](http://kennedynolan.com.au)





*This page* in a bathroom, custom ceramic **basin** from Robert Gordon Interiors; **tapware** from Vola; **walls** and **basin surround** in Vixel tiles from Artedomus; **cabinetry** in limed oak designed by Kennedy Nolan and produced by Grange Joinery; **hook** from Studio Henry Wilson; Mermaid **figure** by Hans Bolling from ArchitectMade. *Opposite page* in the main bedroom, Brick **bed** by Paola Navone for Gervasoni from Anibou; Servomuto Portofino **wall light** from Moebel; **wall panels** upholstered in James Malone Debussy from The Textile Company and produced by Martel Upholstery and Grange Joinery; **curtain** in Pierre Frey Nikita fabric from Milgate and produced by Colleve; *Girl and Rabbit (Yellow gingham)* silk-screen **print** by Kate Daw from William Mora Galleries. All other artworks unknown by artists unknown *Details, last pages.*

