

all that JAZZ

With the freewheeling ebullience of improvised tune, this contemporary MELBOURNE home is the result of a *sublime symphony* of design talent that flows together in PERFECT HARMONY.

By Annemarie Kiely

Photographed by Lisa Cohen

THIS PAGE the spiralling staircase near the entrance of this Armadale home. In the formal living room beyond, Oluce Superluna 397 **floor lamp**; *A Shallow Breath* (2018) **artwork** by Jonny Niesche from Station Gallery. *Details, last pages.*





THESE PAGES in the formal living room, Moooi Bart XL sofas; Gubi fringed poufs from Luke Furniture; Glas Italia Atlantis Tavoli Bassi coffee table; Valsecchi 1918 Fairy Tales side table; E15 Enoki side table; Studio Henry Wilson Surface Sconce lamp (on shelf); sheer linen curtains by Clearview Sun Control; artworks by artists unknown.

THIS PAGE in the entry, linen **curtain** by Clearview Sun Control; polished plaster **walls**; limestone **floor tiles** from Stonetile Ind; *In the Flesh* (2018) **artwork** by Jonny Niesche. **OPPOSITE PAGE** view of the home from the street. Landscape design by Ayus Botanical.



In the inner Melbourne suburb of Armadale, where mock historic homes join in melodious tribute to the grand estates from which their land has been carved, one house blows a wildly incongruous tune. It is the concrete distillation of jazz; all improvised lines shooting in random directions in accord with the Miles Davis dictum: “Don’t play what’s there, play what’s not there.”

And what was not there, in a pocket where the housing stock fizzles with all the period fluff of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, was the architecture of now, a nuanced response to a warp-speed world and all its attendant worries.

Michael Leeton, director of Leeton Pointon Architects, is happy with the parallel drawn between the structured unpredictability of jazz and his latest project — a “big program” family home that hunkers and hovers, in errant L-plan, above a site big enough to constitute parkland.

It replaces a 1980s red-brick residence, one worth saving in wall section and slab to meet the budget of a new-house build. He recalls it had a ‘keep-out’ front fence and a building bulk that pushed to perimeters and begged the grab-back of garden.

“We worked for one year to make sure that the client got everything they wanted within the parameters of price and place,” says Leeton of the accommodation he shaped for a family of five. “Interestingly, they didn’t express their design aspirations in terms of scale or stuff, but rather sound. They wanted a complete removal from the noise.”

He qualifies that dissonance as a full sensory phenomenon, suggesting that the hyper-stimulation of digital has redefined happiness as silence across the haptic, the visual and the aural. ‘Quiet’ is the new luxury, he intimates.

Leeton was fully attentive to the power of absence, removing the existing front fence — “giving the house back to the street” — and instating a minimally detailed circular driveway to steer passage to a porte-cochère capped with giant concrete dish. He bent it like Neimeyer — the Brazilian architect who built the bossa nova into habitable form — and flanked this sculpted declaration of arrival with swaying concrete walls that worked to conceal the bulk of residence behind.

He afforded a street-peek through a pivoting glass door into the property’s pearlescent entry foyer, a cloistered void of ghost-gum grey with an arcing drape of like-coloured linen to both amp up the theatre of arrival and augment privacy. This monasticism instantly conditions the dial down in volume of voice and activity.

Leeton pulls back the sweep of pooling linen to reveal a sequence of living rooms that connect like clustering soap bubbles down the tiered fall of land. They froth large around a spiralling steel stair that he painted in the ubiquitous pale shade to match polished plaster walls and pitted limestone floors. This unilateral blanching (save for a select oak section and a study antithetically

plunged into black) confounds the start and end of surface and seemingly casts the stair as an organism intent on colonising space.

Its migrating lines order into shapes suggestive of the port side of a ship — one sailing into the subliminal space of dreams — on the upper level, where private sleeping pods peer down to a rear garden set with wide-reaching golden elms and a raised swimming pool (solution to the reduction of ugly regulation fencing).

Leeton cites the emotional serenity of built work by Mexican architect Luis Barragán and the twisting formal elegance of sculptures by Clement Meadmore as sources for his scheme. “I wanted an organic sense of flow,” he says, “and so made all shapes irregular or asymmetrical”.

But how can so many circular hyperboloids meet so seamlessly across such a large structure? The question elicits a deep sigh and headshake from Leeton, who talks of “old-school handcrafting and fine-tuning on site” to melt the monumentality of the steel stair imperceptibly into adjacent surface.

Intrinsic to the success of the resultant architectural harmony is a tight ensemble of talent; a band of players that includes the percussive genius of interior designer Allison Pye (her syncopating beats judiciously colouring composition) and the base rhythms of builder Len Bogatin, who twists concrete like it was treacle. Their collective response to the orchestration of Leeton, who played “violin and alto sax in the day”, makes sublime melody of the seemingly accidental pleasures of sun and silence — sharp black notes on white playing across major and minor scale.

The virtuoso impact of the whole condenses into the philosophising words of the Victorian-era art critic John Ruskin: “We don’t want our buildings merely to shelter us; we also want them to speak to us”. Or, in this instance, we want them to resound with all the unpredictable dynamism of, and defence against, the world we now inhabit. **VL**

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THESE PAGES in the dining area and kitchen, Mattiazzi She Said **dining chairs** and **bar stools** from District; Agostino & Brown Tambootie **table**; Gubi Semi Pendant **lamp** from Luke Furniture; limestone **island bench**; handmade **tiles** on splashback from Stonetile Ind; custom-made steel **rangehood**; Architect Collection **floorboards** in White Smoked from Royal Oak Floors (also used for the curved wall behind the staircase).



THIS PAGE in the main bedroom, custom **bench seat** and leather **cushions**; sheer linen **curtains** by Clearview Sun Control; in the ensuite beyond, Agape **bath** from Artedomus; Noma **side table** from Country Road. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the first-floor powder room, solid surface pedestal **basin**; Agape **mixer** from Artedomus; Attila **side table** by Philippe Starck for Kartell.



THESE PAGES in the sunken lounge room, custom **bench seat** and **cushions**; Prostoria Cloud **sofa** from Luke Furniture; Diesel by Moroso Cloudscape **armchair** from Hub Furniture; Tom Dixon Offcut **stools**; Luceplan Counterbalance **wall light**; feature **ceiling** in Architect Collection **floorboards** in White Smoked from Royal Oak Floors.





THIS PAGE in the dining terrace, custom **bench seat** and **cushions**; Massproductions Tio **dining chairs** from Luke Furniture; SP01 Eileen **dining table** from Space Furniture. **OPPOSITE PAGE** the curved volume of the house's cantilever wing as seen from the pool terrace. *Details, last pages.*