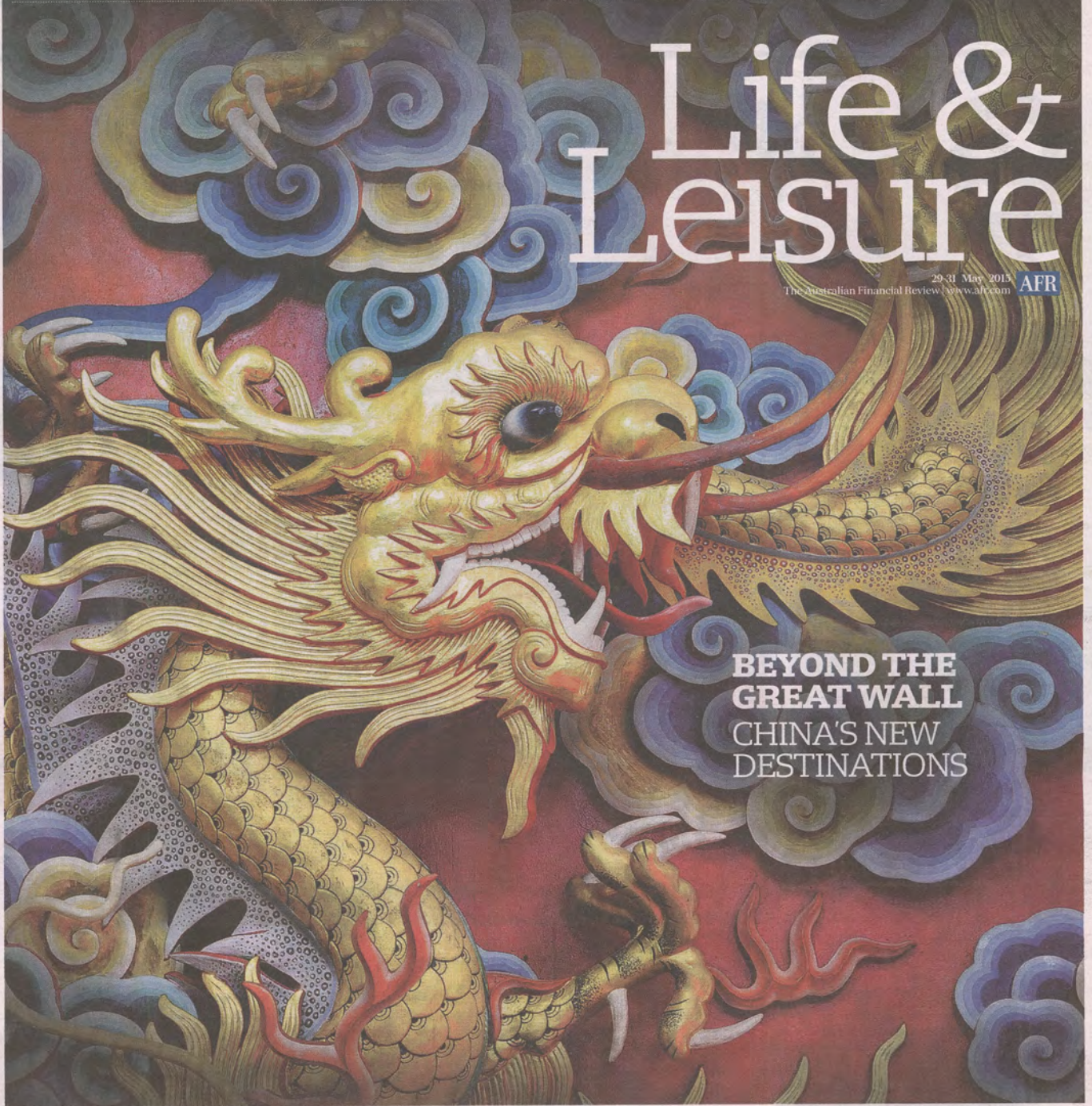


SPORT SURFING'S TITLE WAVE WATCHES SPACE HEROES TRAVEL ROOFTOP GLAMPING DESIGN PERIOD MAKEOVERS

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PROPERTY ARCHITECTURE

Grand designs reimagined

Sympathetic makeovers give stately old homes a new lease on life, writes Stephen Craft.

Large period homes can feel awkward to live in, even if they're substantial in size. Endless rooms, occupied fleetingly throughout the day or used only for special occasions, can be as functional as a shotgun-style corridor that's used as the main circulation spine.

However, opening up spaces or filling rooms with the right furniture, can make the grandest house feel like a home. Melbourne-based b.e Architecture has transformed a number of grand period homes into comfortable homes suited to contemporary living. And while some of these houses become even larger, all the spaces are used daily. "Sometimes it's not the size of a room, but how it feels. It can feel cavernous if there's insufficient light or minimal connection to the outdoors," architect Andrew Piva, a director of the practice, says. "You also need to know how a space will be used irrespective of its scale."

The architecture firm has recently undertaken a substantial renovation of a large house in Toorak. Originally built in the 1930s, the two-storey house had more than sufficient room for a family with three children. However, many of the rooms felt enclosed and appeared segmented from each other. The architects gutted many of the rooms, retaining many of the external walls and the distinctive pitched roof.

The renovation also included a series of copper-clad pavilions that snake around the house. And unlike the previous configuration, the spaces in both the original and additional wings are fluid. Large steel-and-glass sliding doors and windows also extend vistas throughout the house and into the garden. "Each space is a destination, but it hasn't been conceived for one singular purpose. The feeling of a space is more important than its size," Piva says.

Architect Helen Rice, director of Rice Design, was also mindful of creating a home in a large Victorian terrace in South Yarra, Melbourne. Many of the features within the three-level home had been altered in the 1970s, including elevating bathroom floors to allow for plumbing below. One of the few original features remaining was the chunky timber staircase that took several turns to reach the top level. "The staircase was extremely awkward, almost filling the entire passage," says Rice, who replaced the ascent with a sleek contemporary staircase made from steel and bluestone treads. "The staircase is now one simple line offering



transparency between levels and to adjacent rooms," Rice says.

Rice Design's renovation also included removing walls between the central passage and living areas. A separating wall between what was originally dining and living areas is now one open space.

"The beauty of Victorian houses of this scale is they have generous ceilings [3.6 metres]. Unfortunately, the rooms are often too small for their ceiling heights," says Rice. Natural light now enters the main living areas from both sides of the house. To further increase light, a new skylight was also installed over the stairs. Rice's brief was also to create a home that could accommodate a large collection of contemporary art, providing as much

Clockwise from top: the Toorak home transformed by b.e Architecture; interior designer Caecilia Potter revels in her home's period features; Helen Rice put in a new staircase to achieve "transparency between levels".



unencumbered wall space as possible. Interior designer Caecilia Potter, director of Atticus & Milo also made a grand Victorian property into her own home, rather than a museum. Located in Hawthorn, Melbourne, the Victorian house, with its distinctive tower, is thought to have been designed by the eminent architect John Beswicke in 1891. "There are elements of the French second empire," Potter, who purchased the house a few years ago, says. Previously used as a commercial office, the Hawthorn house was relatively intact, apart from a few inappropriate partitions.

[A room] can feel cavernous if there's insufficient light or minimal connection to the outdoors. Andrew Piva, b.e Architecture

"There is a rich patina through the house," Potter says, pointing out timber-lined walls and detailed architraves over doorways. One of the main structural changes made by Potter was removing a wall between what would have originally been used as a formal dining room and the adjacent room used as a kitchen and butler's pantry. "This wouldn't have suited the way we live," says Potter, who used the front dining room for all meals. And instead of high-back Victorian armchairs, the dining suite is contemporary. A 1950s sideboard also displays a variety of tribal art. What was previously the kitchen is now used as a billiard room. And to add some life to an otherwise darkened room, Potter included a sideboard covered with bright harlequin-style wallpaper. Stacks of books, records and memorabilia are dotted around. "We couldn't live in a house that felt like a museum. A home should be joyful to be in, irrespective of its size," Potter says.



TRAVELLER Simon Tancred director Hidden Italy

First, business or economy?

Always economy - I'm a skinflint and I enjoy spending the savings when I get to my destination.

Most frequented destination

Italy. I spend three months of the year there (in spring and autumn) mostly walking in out-of-the-way places, although I do get to visit some of the bigger centres as well, such as Milan, Venice, Turin and Trieste, depending on where the tours start and finish.

If I ran my own airline I would...

Put more leg room in economy.

The worst place you've been lost

Probably the most worrying experience

was when I was scoping out a new walk by myself in the forests around Mount Amiata in southern Tuscany. Despite it being early May, I hit snow and foolishly pressed on. I became disoriented and started worrying as the day dragged on. Fortunately, Italy being Italy and not outback Australia, as the sun was setting, I came around a corner to a small mountain hotel, with warm drinks, a fireplace and a phone to call a taxi.

Most memorable overseas dining

Two extremes. I love Ristorante del Cambio in the centre of Turin, an elegant restaurant that has been servicing the city's rich and powerful since 1757. It has creaking parquet floors, fading mirrors and rattling chandeliers, with relaxed service presenting the finest Piedmontese cuisine and wines. On the other hand, it is also hard to beat the barbecued suckling pig, slow-roasted over coals, that I enjoyed for lunch in the mountains of Sardinia last year. It was served on a cork platter with home-grown tomatoes, local olive oil and local

wine (Cannonau, a robust red) and was eaten while sitting on a dry-stone wall shaded by oak trees.

In the suitcase

As little as possible, within reason. The heaviest item, and my greatest indulgence, is my handmade leather hiking boots. They fit like a glove and will last forever.

How do you make the most of a spare afternoon in a strange city?

It depends what the city has to offer. I usually like to grab a map and walk - heading for the water, if there is any - finding somewhere to grab a bite to eat and a drink, and watch the world go by. If there is a celebrated museum or art gallery, I'll make a point of fitting that in as well.

Travel tips

Travel light and don't try to do everything. You can always come back.

What technology do you use?

I'm travelling with a new Toshiba Kira (somewhere between a notebook and laptop), which is light, robust and very

fast, and my smartphone. My favourite app is Walkmeter, which maps and logs all the details of the walks.

Best overseas purchase

My hiking boots.

Best travel tale

My first time in Florence as a backpacker. After continuous late nights, the manager of the pensione was finally true to his word and locked us out. It was February and lightly snowing. Florence was ours, with no one else about. We roamed the streets and squares until dawn, when the central markets opened and we squeezed in with the workers for a mug of hot coffee and croissants. It was magical.

Best thing about travelling

It takes you out of your comfort zone and opens you up to new experiences.

Top travel gripe

People complaining about plane travel. I think we should all take a deep breath, relax and marvel at the miracle of flight.

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