

# living colour

A palette of red, aqua and yellow is positively brilliant in this artist's inner-city home

STORY & STYLING HELEN ADAMS PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN PAUL URIZAR

A concrete block wall and polished concrete flooring give an industrial feel to the entrance, which opens to the living area. "I wanted to soften the building's angles with lots of curves, so I chose a round dining table from Retro on Regent and a Tom Dixon copper shade pendant light from De De Ce," says owner Cat Mills. Overlooking the table is *Painting #9* by artist Alan Jones, and the red armchairs nearby were inherited. "One of the only things left to do now is re-cover the armchairs and dining chairs in a matching fabric," says Cat. Watching over the scene is *Reno*, an artwork by Lucy Culliton.





CAT ALSO APPRECIATES CONTEMPORARY DESIGN, AS DEMONSTRATED IN HER SLEEK AND SHINY KITCHEN. "I'D SEEN A GLOSSY RED KITCHEN IN THE EARLY '90S AND WANTED ONE EVER SINCE."



The creativity of an artist isn't restricted to canvas – for some, it's apparent in the way they live their lives, the clothes they wear and, of course, how they decorate their homes. The colourful two-bedroom home of fine artist Cat Mills, in inner-city Sydney, is no exception.

From the street, the sophisticated grey steel-clad exterior leads you to expect a sleek and minimalist interior. Indoors, the sunny reality is anything but – the home is a vivacious mix of extreme colour and interesting forms, from Cat's op-shop glassware collection and oversized cushions dotted throughout the house to the textured finishes and impeccable detail of the building itself.

Despite being on a block that measures only 93 square metres, the home's clever design makes it feel much larger. The front door opens directly into the open-plan living space, where a sideboard and concrete wall create the impression of a separate entrance. The area contains a comfortable lounge room, dining area and an office and laundry hidden away behind sliding doors, while newly purchased furniture fits the space perfectly. "I found buying furniture a real struggle," admits Cat. "New pieces were really expensive and too plain, and I felt it would date in years to come." Her solution was to purchase a few key statement pieces and surround them with retro classics.

Cat also appreciates contemporary design, demonstrated by her sleek and shiny kitchen. "I'd seen a glossy red kitchen in the early >

Cat's generous four-seater sofa (above) by Jordan is covered in sumptuous cushions, some from KAS and others handcrafted by Cat. Art abounds in her home: above the sofa hang *Crossing Long* by Sally Moller and *Cal in Red Vest - After Cezanne* and *Portrait of Mark*, both by Cat. In the dining room (left), hangs an untitled painting by Cat and Duncan Liddle's artwork *Love is in the Air*. The kitchen's (opposite) bold colour scheme was dreamt up by Cat and sprayed by cabinet-maker Joe Sanchez (0404 495 848). Architect Trevor Hall designed the island bench, pouring the concrete top on site.

### the facts

**Who lives here?** Cat Mills, an artist  
**Before:** A single-storey run-down building with a poky kitchen, laundry and bathroom.  
**Now:** A light-filled two-storey, two-bedroom house on a similar footprint to the original property, full of space-saving ideas.  
**Where is it?** Inner-city Sydney.





### inside story

**What is your most extravagant purchase?**

"The Jordan couch. It's my first couch and I splashed out. Crushed velvet makes it soft, and it's a four-seater so there's plenty of space."

**Do you have a favourite shop?**

"Definitely Retro on Regent ([www.retroonregent.com.au](http://www.retroonregent.com.au)), a shop specialising in '50s, '60s and '70s homewares. It was a relief when I came across it, and now I get most of my furniture from there, including all of the Parker furniture that I adore."

**What is your artistic style?**

"It's painterly and drawing-based, rather than conceptual. I tend to do a lot of landscapes and portraiture."

**How does one hang art properly?**

"Don't match up the lines of frames as they are all different; instead, find the picture's centre point and match it with your eye line."

"WHEN USED" CORRECTLY COLOUR CAN DRAW YOU INTO A ROOM AND EXTEND THE FEELING OF SPACE. THE KEY IS TO BE SELECTIVE WITH THE COLOURS, AND NOT TO USE TOO MANY. [www.houseandhome.com.au](http://www.houseandhome.com.au)

< '90s and wanted one ever since," she explains. "But designing it was hard. I was looking around when the beige minimalist period was in fashion, which didn't quite suit my sensibility." In the end, Cat mixed the shade of red she wanted with her own oil paints and the joiner who made the cabinetry, Joe Sanchez, sprayed it that exact colour. The concrete benchtop and pale blue splashback contrast with and balance the deep red, while the exposed floor makes the space feel larger.

The colour doesn't fade upstairs, where the breezy aqua bathroom steals the show. "I just fell in love with the tiles," says Cat. "As with the kitchen, I knew I didn't want a minimalist scheme, so I also used grey mosaics for the floor and hung my green oil painting – one of my favourite colour palettes." A separate shower was another requirement, so architect Trevor Hall came up with an ingenious design that allowed for a spacious shower enclosure, with the room on either side used for wardrobes in an adjacent bedroom.

Cat's arty and elegant style is further enhanced by her extensive art collection, featuring many pieces by friends she met while studying at Sydney's National Art School. In the master bedroom, artwork is a major presence, enhanced by embroidered bed linen from one of Cat's recent trips to India and the intricate beading and texture of the cushions. This, alongside her op-shop collection of coloured glassware, creates vivid bursts against the white walls, counterbalanced by the greenery of the household plants on Cat's bedroom verandah. >

In the bedroom (opposite), the joyful colours of an untitled painting by Alan Jones gives the bedroom a Mediterranean mood. "Keeping the architectural elements simple allows for the use of colour," says architect Trevor Hall. Cat's artworks even make it into the bathroom (right), where her Hazel Dale Trees series picks up on the wibbly hue of the Bisazza glass mosaic tiles from Pezotti Tiles. A sculptural wall-mounted basin keeps the area looking uncluttered, lending a streamlined feel to the high-octane space.





< That this house came about at all is testament to the vision and enthusiasm of its owner. After living nearby in a shared warehouse for nearly seven years, Cat found this gem after an 11 month hunt, trawling through real estate agents and viewing endless properties. "Until then, it was either a terrace or a terrace," she laughs. "This was initially a complete dump with grease fat on the ceiling and rotten floorboards, but I knew it was the one – it had the potential I was looking for."

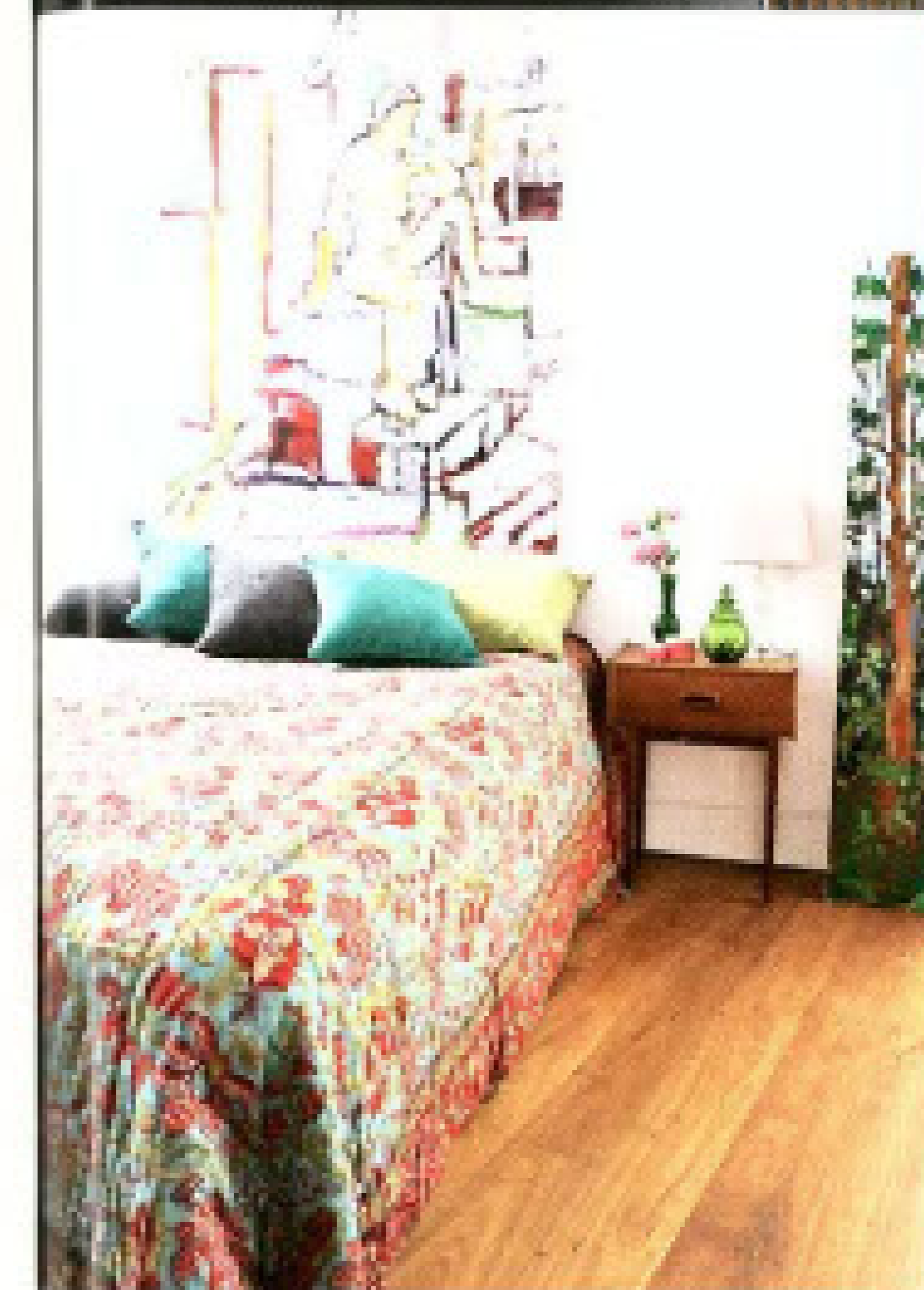
So she painted the walls white, knocked down a wall in the kitchen and that's when she enlisted independent architect Trevor to design the two-storey, two-bedroom house of her dreams. The work was completed six months later, coming in right on budget thanks to a fixed contract with builder Mardini Constructions.

Today, Cat is proud of the bright tones of pink, red, aqua, yellow and green with which she has livened up her house. "Aqua and blood red is my favourite combination," she says. "I love the contrast."

So do her visitors – which is all Cat ever hoped to achieve. "When friends come in they say, 'Wow, it's so bright and lively!' – it's a great feeling," says Cat. "I ultimately just set out to create a nice home."

Cat Mills' next exhibition is at Mary Place Gallery in Sydney's Paddington, September 3–16. To contact Trevor Hall Architects, call (02) 9557 6396 or visit [www.hallarchitects.com.au](http://www.hallarchitects.com.au). To contact Mardini Constructions, call 0419 714 719 or visit [www.mardiniconstructions.com.au](http://www.mardiniconstructions.com.au).

Lucy Culliton's bold painting Reno (left) creates a striking focal point next to the stairs. OPPOSITE: the happy display of op-shop glass (top right) sparkles in the sunlight and is a simple yet effective decorating device. In the bedroom (middle left), white walls and timber floors provide a blank canvas for the bright mix of bed linen and Cat's paintings. Louvered windows (middle right) look out to a cosy nook that's completed with a comfortable Mao & More chair. William Kentridge's abstract work hangs at the far end of the streamlined kitchen (bottom right).



**we love . . .**  
**The concealed laundry and office**  
 A laundry and home office are often one of the first things to be compromised when space is tight, but a clever design proves you don't have to have a large area to have functional spaces. In Cat's office (below), a joiner built the cabinetry, which provides adequate storage through shelves and drawers. Likewise, in the adjacent laundry space (below, left), shelving holds bags and shoes, with a handy hanging rack alongside. Separate sliding doors hide the spaces and painting the doors white helped them blend in with the rest of the room. "I think it works so well, because you can hide any mess behind the doors, and both areas are confined to that space," says Cat. "It is a really practical solution."

