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PERFECT FIT

Fashion designer and vintage collector Michael Bracewell has a knack for making the beautiful totally liveable, both at work and in his chic Sydney home

STORY ANNA McCOOE STYLING LISA HILTON PHOTOGRAPHY CATH MUSCAT



LIVING ROOM (opposite) Caitlin Bracewell and daughter Xanthe relax in their chic and cheerful home, complete with a design showpiece – an original Hans J. Wegner chair (above). Originally sourced for husband Michael's shop Penny Arcade, the chair was soon smuggled home. "It's perfect; it's a piece I'll never sell," says Michael.



Home, like a favourite pair of jeans, is where we feel most comfortable. Not too formal or rigid, a good home moulds to fit, shifting and evolving to our own unique stride. Fashion designer Michael Bracewell's home is like a vintage pair of Levi's – straight-legged, not flared. "The house isn't a suit or a tracksuit; it's denim and you can do anything with it," says Michael. "It's functional yet elegant."

The creative talent behind Australian fashion label Bracewell, it's little wonder Michael's family home can be matched to a fashion staple. With his new vintage store Penny Arcade in Sydney's Surry Hills, there's no shortage of pieces with which he can accessorise and experiment. Family holidays double as sourcing trips, eBay is a regular ritual and visiting auction houses a weekly pilgrimage – and yes, a few beloved finds do make it into his home in Sydney's inner west. "I like to add modern fabrics to timber pieces from the 1960s and '70s and place them in a contemporary setting," says Michael. "It's the juxtaposition of old and new that I enjoy, but not too old; I don't do 'nana.'"

While Michael spends much of his time sourcing and reworking mid-century furniture, it's his wife Caitlin who has shaped their Federation sandstone cottage for their modern family – the couple and

their three children, Olly, 15, Daisy, 13, and Xanthe, 11. Like one of the dusty chairs Michael rescues from the auction floor, it took a keen eye to spot the potential in what was initially a dilapidated cottage. "The house was in a state of disrepair, literally falling down around us, but the location was amazing," says Caitlin of the old house set amidst parks, Sydney's much-loved bay walk and a thriving local village.

The family spent two cramped years in the house before renovating, which gave them a good grasp of what they needed; namely, lots of built-in storage and a layout that centred around the kitchen to make housework and entertaining a breeze. Thanks to a close partnership with architect Jisuk Han of X Squared Design, their home fulfils all these functions. "Jisuk has children about the same age, so she understood what we needed and came up with solutions that are incredibly practical," says Caitlin.

After an open-plan extension aimed at reclaiming every inch of liveable space and a complete restyling, the end result is a happy home that marries Michael's designer tastes with Caitlin's sense of '60s nostalgia. "I always wanted to live in *The Brady Bunch* house when I was growing up," she smiles. "I loved the colours, the timber and the staircase with all the kids lined up – this is my grown up version of that!" >

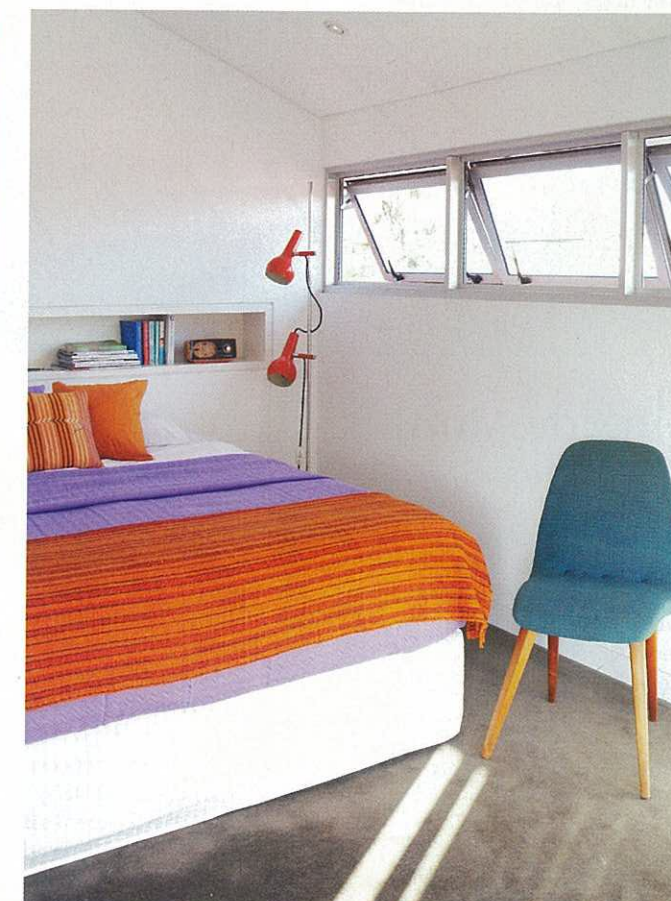
DINING SPACE As a keen entertainer and super mum, Caitlin often fills her oversized dining table, which seats up to 16. Michael sourced the table from Home Furnishing On Consignment; call (02) 8338 8000. Almost a perfect match, the Danish dining chairs were sourced from Penny Arcade. Finishing off the room's retro feel, the Murano glass pendant shade was picked up on a trip to London and brought back in Michael's carry-on luggage.



LIVING ROOM (opposite page) "The open-plan extension adds volume and also connects with the backyard for more of an inside-out experience," says architect Jisuk Han. "Now the kids can spend their time outdoors while Caitlin supervises from the kitchen." Cushions from Bholu and Papaya add an extra degree of comfort and bring some colour into the space, along with a dynamic painting by Willy Sheather; visit www.wsg.net.au to see more from this artist.

HALLWAYS (top left) Bringing the retro-modern home to life, the brightly painted feature wall spans the whole length of the house. "I think the home would be a bit bland without it," says Caitlin. For a similar hue, try Aztec Glimmer from Dulux. The wall also provides a vibrant backdrop to the couple's art collection, such as a painting by Ken Johnson above a cedar chest, a collection of resin vases from Dinosaur Designs and a vintage poster (top right) picked up at Tarlo & Graham on a trip to Melbourne; call Tarlo & Graham on (03) 9521 2221.

MASTER BEDROOM (right) This room's clean and uncluttered feel is all thanks to clever storage solutions. Behind the bed, a built-in display unit fitted with lighting stores all the couple's knick-knacks. Louvred windows encourage air flow, while the vintage-style colour palette of violet and orange creates a comfortable mood. "This is my favourite room. Looking out over the park, it feels like I'm living in the treetops," says Caitlin. >





BALCONY (left) "It's the balcony that attracted us to the house in the first place. We practically lived on it during the first two years," says Michael. The 1970s leather sofa was picked up at an auction for a steal and the Clement Meadmore chair is from Penny Arcade.

KITCHEN (below) The long lines of this galley-style kitchen boast masses of marble benchspace for Caitlin to display her pastry skills, and long stretches of double polyurethane cabinets to store her cooking accoutrements. "I'm obsessed with storage, I can't get enough of it!" she says with a laugh.



BEDROOM (left) In Daisy's bedroom, graphic style climbs the walls. We love the Domestic wall vinyl decals, picked up from Lola et Moi in Sydney's Balmain; call (02) 9810 1391 or visit www.lolaetmoi.com.au.

BATHROOM (right) With the wet area waterproofed and separated from the powder room, this bathroom is a dream to clean. "A contained bath and shower means the bulk of the bathroom tends to stay clean," says architect Jisuk. The bath sits against a full-length window and shower, which can be turned onto the walls for easier scrubbing. The separate pamper zone consists of a basin and storage, with a punch of colour courtesy of a Missoni 'lbo' handtowel from Spence & Lyda; call (02) 9212 6747.



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Could this be a design aficionado and resident chef's idea of heaven? With masses of cooking essentials lined up along the benchtop but no clutter to speak of, the streamlined look is thanks to a cupboard concealed behind a sliding splashback, a signature mark of architect Jisuk Han and a godsend for keeping utensils within reach. Jisuk worked with a joiner to fit toughened frosted glass doors to a sliding track and introduced low-voltage lights to the shallow cavity for added functionality. If frosted glass isn't your style, she suggests mirror or colour-backed toughened glass matched to your cabinetry. "You want the storage area to fade into the background."



CERAMIC COLLECTION (below)

Caitlin's collection of ceramics is made up of personal and unexpected pieces. "The Susie Cooper coffee set was my mum's, she put it on lay-by the day she got engaged and at the time it was frightfully expensive." The complete set is now a collector's holy grail and Caitlin is always on the lookout for more. By mixing the iconic set with a \$10 vase from St Vincent de Paul Society and a '70s lamp souvenir from Penny Arcade, the display taps into a sense of warm nostalgia.

To check out Penny Arcade, call (02) 9281 8830 or visit www.pennyarcade.com.au. For more on Bracewell, visit www.bracewell.com.au.

To contact architect Jisuk Han of X Squared Design, call (02) 9810 8255.

Inside story

Who lives here? Fashion designer Michael Bracewell; his wife Caitlin, an avid cook; their children, Olly, 15, Daisy, 13 and Xanthe, 11; dog Puppa and cats Blossom and Billy.

Why does a fashion veteran open a vintage furniture store? Michael: "Before Penny Arcade, the space was always a furniture store. Then Spence & Lyda opened across the road and there was a lot happening in the area design-wise. I wanted to keep it going."

Where and when do you do your sourcing? "It never stops. The pieces in the shop and in our home come from around the world, from London to Paris and LA. Some pieces come from surfing the net, and sometimes

people bring furniture to me. Family holidays usually turn into work but we're not the kind to lie around a beach all day - we like to explore!"

How do you choose your treasures? "There are no boundaries in what I buy for the store, it's just what I like. It has to be something I'd want in my own house, and often that's where a favourite piece will end up."

Favourite shopping haunts? "I love London, especially Brick Lane and surrounding side streets for Starburst clocks and basically anything I can carry, and the Arabic region around Goldhawk Road in Shepherd's Bush for chandeliers."

Best renovating advice? Caitlin: "To wait. We lived in the house for two years as we

learned what worked and what didn't."

Highlights? "We worked with a brilliant architect [Jisuk Han] who ensured that every power point is where it needed to be, and our builder, Domenico Capogreco [of Capo Constructions, call 0408 499 492] was fantastic."

Any regrets? "I love the expansive marble benchtop in the kitchen because I do lots of pastry work, and the huge dining table which seats up to 16, but the kitchen sink is way too small, it's silly. I will change it one day."

If this house were an item of clothing, what would it be? Xanthe: "Dad says it's denim, but to me it's a bikini because I have lots of fun when I'm in it."

