

DESIGN

With Thomson Carpenter



# Island bliss

Devoid of cars and only reachable by boat, Dangar Island is a remote retreat in the Hawkesbury River, an hour north of Sydney. Thomson Carpenter meets South African interior designer Greg Mellor, who has made this tranquil hinterland his home.





“I cannot remember not being interested in design,” muses Greg Mellor as he sips a gin and tonic (with a dash of Campari) on the loggia of his stunning, albeit incredibly understated island home. “My father was in construction and involved in large scale property development, so for as long as I can remember there have been drawing boards, scale rulers and plans around the house.

“It was always assumed – by me, my family and anyone who knew me – that I would be an architect; interior design was not really something boys did,” he laughs.

Nonetheless, having completed his schooling at St Johns in Johannesburg, Mellor went on to study interiors at Design Time in Cape Town. He moved to Sydney in 2005 with his partner of eight years, Nicholas Krull, a graphic designer.

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Mellor first stumbled across Dangar as a young boy while on a family holiday during which his father was training on the Hawkesbury for a canoe race. He instantly became enthralled. As chance would have it, several decades later while Mellor and Krull were renting a house in Redfern, sale details of a dilapidated timber “shed” on the island came through their door.

“We purchased the cottage on a bit of a whim, with the intention of giving it a lick of paint and using it on weekends. As often happens, the lick of paint became a much

bigger renovation and we moved up there full time two years ago.”

Today the house embodies everything that has become synonymous with Mellor and his inconspicuous approach to classic, timeless and comfortable interior design. Whitewashed walls and exposed timber flooring provide a relaxed foil to a collection of European antiques, soft linens and natural materials such as sea-grass and hemp. In keeping with Mellor’s maxim that all interiors should incorporate an “element of humour”, there are little quirks here and there, such as a tortoise’s carcass on a bookshelf, iconic 1950’s Jakobsen Series 7 chairs around a well-used French provincial kitchen table and an assortment of high Victorian portraits in a bathroom. This home

is certainly not the soulless grey and white design Australia is often associated with.

As Mellor puts it, “Australia – and Sydney in particular – has always been renowned for the ‘slick white box’ look. While this aesthetic is still appropriate for some buildings, it is a relief that Australians are becoming more comfortable with the idea of slightly more traditional interiors, feeling more at ease with drawing reference from Europe and the USA and adapting accordingly.”

On inspirational characters, Mellor notes South African designers Gregor Jenkin and



Boyd Ferguson as two of the biggest influences on his style; Jenkin, an old school friend, for his lateral thinking and use of obscure objects and Boyd, who, according to Mellor, has helped pioneer an African design identity. And then, of course, there is Sydney-based New York designer Thomas Hamel with whom Mellor worked for several years.

“Thomas embodies the quintessential Upper East Side design ethos and his sharp and decidedly tailored approach to interiors has been highly influential on my own style.”

Mellor is quick to affirm that, as a designer, one is constantly learning and thereafter evolving and creating new dimensions of style. “I would still hope to be learning everyday and loving what I do in five years time. I want to be able to look back with pride at the five years past and be very excited about the five years to come,” he says. Island bliss indeed.

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