



FACT FILE

**THE BRIEF**  
To renovate and decorate a traditional home, while marrying modern and French Provincial styles

**THE INTERIOR DESIGNER**  
Christine Hamilton

**THE BUILDER**  
Rob Roberts, Dewkent Builders



**A** The Federation facade **B** The living and dining area has French Provincial features **C** Designer Christine Hamilton **D** and **E** Calcutta marble and black granite benchtops have been used in the kitchen **F** The midnight blue carpet on the stairs was imported **G** The music room is resplendent in red **H** A light and airy bedroom **I** The black marble ensuite



# Best of both worlds

Seemingly disparate design styles can be blended together beautifully, writes **Robyn Willis**

On paper, this project doesn't look like it should work. Delays with council, a busy blended family, who were largely absent because of work commitments, and a brief to mix decorating styles does not exactly sound like a dream job to work on.

However, not only were all obstacles overcome but the finished product is a stylish and spacious and family home.

**Need for room**  
Interior designer Christine Hamilton says the professional couple who own the property wanted to update their two-storey Federation home in Manly to make more room for their four children.

"When we started, the family was living

in it but it was a shambles," she says. "I would call it almost unliveable but they had been staying in it with their children. They were living on top of each other and had no time to organise the house."

**Nod of approval**  
Plans to demolish most of the fragile building alarmed council who were concerned about heritage but, after long delays and a commitment to retain the facade, approval was given in late 2008.

With no architect on hand and the owners preoccupied with family and work, Christine and builder Rob Roberts from Dewkent Builders set to work.

Despite its appearance from the street, the house is actually four levels, with a subterranean basement below and an attic above the main areas.

Rob says the excavation work for the basement cost both time and money and added to the almost 18-month-long building process.

While a few rooms on the ground floor were retained, the new work was extensive. At ground level, the original rooms either side of the hallway were designed to be a kitchen to the right and a music room to the left. The hallway then followed through to an open-plan living and dining area leading on to the pool and outdoor entertaining area.

Although this is a contemporary concept, Christine says the owners were keen to maintain a traditional feel.

She says they had very different ideas about how the house should look.

"The husband wanted the French Provincial look so he was very interested in

details like the cornices and the ceilings," Christine says. "The wife liked contemporary clean lines so she got the black marble bathroom and bedroom (upstairs)."

**Living in luxury**  
The new open-plan living area has detailed cornices with a central ceiling rose and an equally opulent travertine marble floor that continues into the outdoor area.

The kitchen, too, has luxurious finishes with black granite benchtops along either wall and a central island benchtop in calcutta marble.

"I explained that marble is porous and can stain and be scratched," Christine says. "But in the end you couldn't put anything else in there because nothing else would work."

Indeed, the all-white kitchen cupboards and intricately detailed ceiling were always going to demand equally lavish benchtops. The red-on-red music room was one of the last spaces to be decorated.

"The wife is into music but, by the time we got down to colour, I had been working with them for about 12 months and they had a good idea of what I was capable of so they trusted to leave things to me," Christine says. "They said they wanted something different so that's what I did."

White picture rails, skirting boards and ceiling maintain a fresh look to the room, while Christine added gold accents to up the luxe factor.

An embroidered silk ottoman breaks up the solid colour, although the thought of resting your feet on such a beautiful piece of furniture is daunting.

"It's not a room for the kids," Christine says simply.

**Decorating divide**

Negotiating the differing decorating styles of husband and wife was surprisingly pleasant, Christine says, because despite their views they were happy to work together to compromise.

"The husband wanted a chesterfield sofa in the living area which the wife didn't want, but I used the other two upholstered chairs to soften it," she says.

Given they had hired her to do the job, in the end they were happy to defer to Christine's judgment.

"There was a lot of trust involved and they were incredibly nice people, but there was an understanding that you do your job and I'll do mine," she says.

That trusting relationship came to the fore when Christine had to decorate the house in their absence.

Needless to say, the emails were flying thick and fast.

"They both work in the financial sector so design is not their skill set, but they were great clients," she says.

"They had an idea of what they wanted it to look like but it is very much a family home. They travel a lot so they stay in a lot

of hotels and quality is important to them – everything had to be the best."

Upstairs, the mostly neutral palette has been carried through the sleeping accommodation but with a very contemporary shift.

This is most evident in the spacious black marble ensuite complete with wall-mounted joinery and frameless shower.

A centrally positioned black-and-white family bathroom is easily accessible from one of the three additional bedrooms.

Although Christine says it was one of her more unusual projects, it was a pleasure to work with the family to achieve the result they wanted.

"The husband and wife were incredibly together – they were a real team," Christine says. "They sorted their (decorating) differences out themselves and they were a joy to work with."

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