

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN 

# Mansion

INCORPORATING NEWS FROM DOW JONES'

AUSTRALIA

PLUS  
12-page  
Interiors  
section

## BAY WATCH

*Byron's booming appeal*

*Status quo*  
Vaucluse holds its lead

*Homing instinct*  
Expats put down roots

*Jamie Durie*  
Seed House's space odyssey



# Interiors

Mansion  
AUSTRALIA

**City footprint**  
A townhouse for the times

**Less is more**  
Pared-back pieces in focus

**In the round**  
Hans Wegner's Circle Chair



The west-facing formal living room is screened by a row of linden trees that filter the harsh light

# ELEGANT SOLUTION

*A townhouse design borrowing from the vertical lines of Georgian architecture completely reinterprets the compact dwelling form*

Story by SAM DUNCAN  
Photographs by DEREK SWALWELL  
Styling by SIMONE HAAG



# F

or architect Paul Conrad, his “forever home” didn’t come to fruition when he designed his own family abode. That’s because he enjoyed the process so much he wants to do it all again – many times.

“It was great working for myself as a client,” says Conrad. “I’m constantly thinking about ideas and different ways of doing things, so it’s the perfect way to experiment. I just wish I was a sculptor and then those ideas would be a little cheaper to experiment with.”

Conrad designed two townhouses for the roughly 600sq m block in the Melbourne suburb of Malvern where he lived in an old house that was to be knocked down. The plan was to sell one and live in the other.

“The traditional townhouse typology has been around for a long time,” he says, “whether it be traditional workers’ cottages in Australia or row housing in London. It’s a highly efficient type of housing.” Part of the appeal for Conrad was the smaller physical footprint of a townhouse and the use of available space. “With a significantly growing population needing housing, we should try to [create that] within existing suburbs rather than just having cities grow endlessly,” he says.

Conrad’s townhouse, Hornsby Residence, is a modern interpretation of the style without the negative aspects traditionally associated with it: lack of natural light and small, pokey rooms.

He drew inspiration from the famed Georgian architecture of Bath in the UK: tall, elegant, vertical proportions, and the associated ideas of rhythm and structure.

“A lot of those traditional townhouse types are heavy masonry buildings,” he says. “I like the real solidity, rather than a lot of contemporary buildings that have thin walls and a more ephemeral, flimsy sense to them.”

After graduating from university, Conrad worked in London for a year – an experience that proved influential.

“That’s when classical concepts really came home to me,” he says, “their importance in design and how they’re still relevant today. It’s not necessarily about creating classical buildings, but it’s just looking at those ideas and concepts that have been around for hundreds of years and building upon them.”

After London, Conrad returned to Australia and worked at a big architectural firm for a period. He founded Conrad Architects in 2008, having grown frustrated with the politics. “I wanted to start a boutique practice that would stay relatively small and just focus on doing great work,” he says.

Designing his own home for the first time with Hornsby Residence proved liberating. He designed the entire ground floor facade as a row of french doors.

“It’s almost like a temple floor plan, being a row of columns and





*Timber floors, Carrara marble and white decor accents, with art and furniture chosen to layer the space, help create a home of order and elegance*



*A light-coloured palette for the interiors sets up an atmosphere of timelessness and calm*

openings,” he says. “I wanted to push that idea to the extreme and have that very rigorous geometry to the facade.”

Conrad says living in the old house on the site for a decent period before developing the townhouse concepts gave him time to really understand the environment and climate, and the quality of the sunlight – a luxury not usually possible.

His favourite room is the formal living room. It’s west facing – western light is typically considered harsh, but a row of linden trees Conrad planted in the front yard responds to the planning of the room and filters the light in just the right way. “It’s just an exceptional spot to sit in that filtered light, particularly in the late afternoon,” he says.

Conrad prioritised several design elements over maximising the number of bedrooms and bathrooms. The living room has a double height that could otherwise have

accommodated another upstairs bedroom. “With the extra quality of space achieved with that void, we prefer three bedrooms over four,” he says.

For the interiors, Conrad says the aim was to create “a sense of timelessness and calm within the house”.

A light-coloured palette, timber floors, Carrara marble and white decor accents achieve the tranquility Conrad sought. Against this background, a rich mixture of furniture and art was carefully selected to layer the space, creating a home of order and elegance. It manages to merge modernist values of intelligent planning and strong lines with classic ideals of beauty and detail.

“We, like everyone, live busy lives,” Conrad says. “We needed our house to have a sense of escape and sanctuary. And so that was really driving a restrained and minimal materials palette.” **M**