



## apartment living

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Since 1980 the Historic Houses Trust has interpreted Elizabeth Bay House as the home of Colonial Secretary Alexander Macleay and his family (1839–1845). While this is often seen as the most important story about the ‘finest house in the colony’ there are other stories to tell. In the mid 20th century, for example, the house was converted into flats.

In the interwar years, affordable housing close to the city and public transport was in high demand. While purpose-built apartment blocks started to appear on the Darlinghurst Ridge, some built on the sites of demolished 19th century marine villas, a number of other mansions were remodelled into flats.

In 1941 the owner, Mrs Evangeline Murray, with architect Charles C Phillips, subdivided Elizabeth Bay House into 15 flats. The ground floor rooms were divided into bed-sitting rooms, with kitchens and bathrooms accommodated in single-storey wings built over the side terraces and in the former dressing rooms and partitioned corners of the upstairs bedrooms. The alterations were carried out sympathetically, with little damage to the original fabric of the house.

Mrs Eva Pozniak and her daughter Judith moved into Flat 11 in 1963 (now the exhibition preparation room and the maid’s room) where they lived for eleven years. In addition to the lease, Mrs Pozniak signed a document agreeing not to paint the cedar joinery or interfere with the other building fabric. Her lounge cum dining and bedroom contained a wardrobe, two divans, a cedar chest of drawers and two small tables. There was a small kitchen with a green and cream ‘Kookaburra’ gas stove, fridge, sink and linoleum floor covering and an adjacent bathroom with white enamel bath, toilet and space for a washing machine and hand basin. The front door to Elizabeth Bay House was locked only at night. In an oral history interview recorded in April, Mrs Pozniak remembered the house with affection and the time spent there, although hard, as memorable.

The HHT has always felt an obligation to explore and challenge prevailing ideas and assumptions applied to conservation and interpretation practices. For these reasons alone, it seemed perfectly natural that we should allow several of our most creative and distinguished designers the opportunity to show how they might treat

the interiors of this greatest of Australian colonial houses today. Durbach Block and Freedman Rembal were invited to design contemporary self-contained apartments in the drawing and dining rooms for the *Changing spaces* installation. The project has also provided an opportunity to explore the history of Elizabeth Bay House for the 34 years from 1940 to 1974 when it had been divided into flats.

**Suzanne Bravery** Curator

*Changing spaces* until 30 April 2006, Elizabeth Bay House. Open Tuesday to Sunday 10am – 4.30pm

