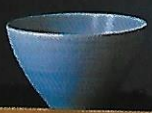


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GEORGE FREEDMAN











There are lots of improvements interior designer George Freedman would like to make to his four-storey stone terrace house in East Sydney. Some day he'll attach a bathroom and dressing room to his bedroom on the top floor and take out a downstairs wall to extend the kitchen. But not just now.

When your name is attached to some of Sydney's most celebrated corporate, institutional, commercial and domestic interiors, you might be expected to have a bad case of repetitive refurbishment syndrome (RRS) in your own abode. But, no. George has done it all before. He's renovated places 'three times domestically and twice officewise' and is aware of how disruptive the process always turns out to be. To undertake it again, 'I'd have to move out. The office would have to move out. And then I would start being cranky like a client.' Memories linger of his childhood in New York, where it was the custom to have apartments painted every three years. For the two weeks each paint-job took, all he seemed to hear was 'we can't do this because the painters are in'. It's simpler to stay with the status quo.

As it is, the house is welcoming and seasoned, furnished with 'stuff' he says he's had forever. Two Mies van der Rohe (MR) cantilever chairs were a gift from his former employer Knoll when he left New York in 1970 to live in Australia. He's owned the 1928 French library table for twenty years. The two French chairs covered with grey Italian suede are circa 1780 or 1840, depending on which expert you ask. When his mother died not long ago, he inherited 'things that I would not necessarily have selected in terms of design element'. Their power lies in their associations. 'There's a blue porcelain elephant downstairs with two broken tusks. In my memory, the tusks somehow have always been broken.'

It is easy to feel comfortable in a house where nobody fusses if the pets settle on a costly rug and scratch a bit. His two dogs, Duffy McFala and Peejay, are the latest in a succession of Scottish terriers, the subject of many amusing tales. One of them is this. Early one morning George was walking in Centennial Park with his former Scottie, Duncan. They met a large boxer accompanied by 'a robust woman' in a tweed cape. Duncan walked towards the boxer, then skirted around it in a large circle, causing the woman to remark, 'Discretion is the better part of Fala', a reference to Franklin D. Roosevelt's Scottish terrier of that name. George relishes that story. 'Such wit at 6.30 am!' His dogs are all he'd attempt to save if a bushfire raged across East Sydney or engulfed his weekender, a stone cottage near Milton on the south coast.

After walking the dogs each morning, George shops for fruit salad and dog food in Queen Street, Woollahra, goes home for breakfast, showers, dresses for business and descends to the office where his partner, Ralph Rembel, and their staff help him bring about the pristine interiors for which he is known and more off-beat projects, such as sets for the Sydney Dance Company. Most days, the team goes for lunch at Uno Uno in Liverpool Street to commune over a pizza or a plate of spaghetti.

A couple of shelves of cookbooks in the hall indicate a foodie in the house. George is indeed a fine cook, of mainly French and Italian dishes, and he hosts good dinner parties. He chose formidable tutors for his culinary 'learning process', starting with Alice B. Toklas and progressing through exponents such as Julia Child, Edouard de Pomiane, Elizabeth David, Marcella Hazan and Jane Grigson, to Giuliano Bugialli, Paul Bocuse and even Martha Stewart. His kitchen is old-fashioned ('a slum!'), an anachronism in contemporary terms, but it works. He recalls that once, when 'I was moaning about whether I should renovate it, a friend said, "Is the food going to change?"', and I said, "No". She said, "Well, why bother?"'