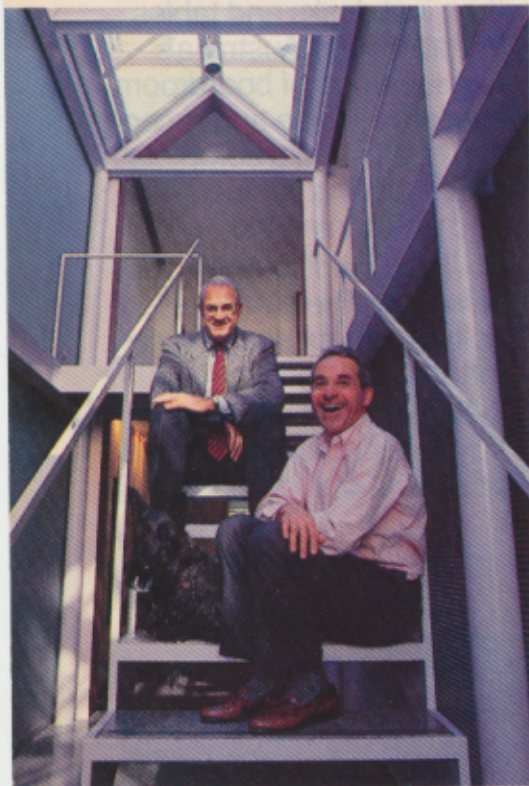


# The men behind the black bathrooms of the State Bank

There's plenty of colour and class, even in the loos, when Marsh and Freedman get together. MEG STEWART reports.



Neville Marsh (with glasses) and George Henry Freedman

**M**ARSH Freedman Associates are interior designers. They have been embellishing interiors with Mies van der Rohe replica chairs and colouring Sydney inside and out with a palette, reminiscent of fruit tingles and rainbow balls, for 15 years.

The pink and soaring blue chapel at Kinselas Brasserie, with its elongated mirrors, is probably their most seen

work. Before, the chapel was a "nicotine colour with a mural of Calvary at one end," says Neville Marsh.

The biggest project to date of Neville Marsh and George Henry Freedman is the 35th and 36th floors, the top management levels, of the new State Bank in Martin Place, Sydney. Black marble loos are rumoured to be part of the State's luxuriousness.

Marsh Freedman were also responsible for Monahan Dayman Adams' slick advertising agency offices in North Sydney. The reception area has built-in television sets so the agency can monitor all three commercial channels at once. More recently they designed a showroom for Pymont-based fabric and wallpaper importers Order Imports. Here, swatches of material which hang from the ceiling resemble Gibson Girls.

Sometimes they just paint. Like the house in Potts Point they made mauve. Or Stratford Hall, an old Darling Point rooming house converted into swanky apartments by architects Allen Jack and Cottier. With panels of colour, and by outlining the veranda, Marsh Freedman transformed an ordinary cream facade into an exotic eastern palace. It looks even more like a palace when lit up at night.

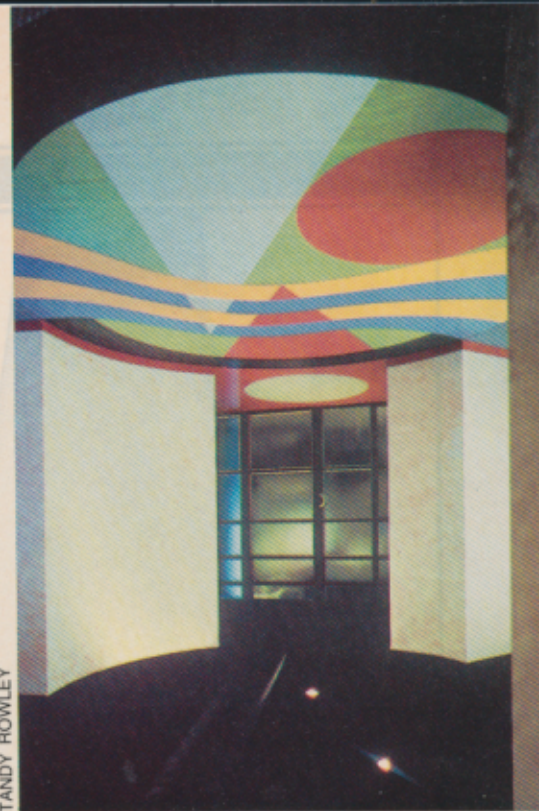
For some clients Marsh Freedman takes charge and does everything. "Furniture, table napkins, towels, linen, art, ashtrays, flowers, hire the housekeeper," Freedman kids. "The more money a client has to spend, the more fun it is." George Henry Freedman is New York born and bred. The Henry is optional but he likes it used. Freedman has a ceaseless Woody Allen wit and ready giggle. Neville Marsh, older and quieter, is more reserved, at least in the face of Freedman's antics.

Eleven people work behind the company's deceptively modest yellow office exterior in Bourke Street, Woolloomooloo. The premises were derelict before they moved in five years ago. Architect Glen Murcutt renovated them. "Working very closely with us,"

SUSAN WINDMILLER

TANDY ROWLEY





TANDY ROWLEY

TANDY ROWLEY

**At Order Imports showroom:**  
*left, the reception area;*  
*top, the vestibule; and,*  
*above, the conference room*

Marsh and Freedman add hastily. Pink waterlilies in a goldfish pond adorn a courtyard just inside the electronically-operated front door.

A hall with a steep-pitched glass roof leads upstairs to the conference room. There's grey carpet throughout and soft green on the hall wall that turns different shades as the light changes. A chrome bug made of American car parts commandeers the top of the stairs.

A painting by Trevor Weekes, a sort of sophisticated working drawing entitled *The Perfect Trojan Horse*, takes up one whole wall of the conference area. Copies of *Architectural Digest* and *Follow Me Gentlemen* are positioned on the circular, cream and gold marble table. The chairs are deep orange leather and chrome. "I must tell the new cleaner not



## State Bank

to push the chairs right in under the table," Marsh frowns. "It scratches the chrome."

A plaster fox terrier, with unmistakable male genitalia, guards Marsh's front office. Duncan, Freedman's black Scottish terrier, is asleep near by. The wide wooden-slatted venetians outside the windows give a perfect perspective of the Matthew Talbot Hostel for Homeless Men.

Freedman is "a trained but never a practising" architect. The pink Brooks Brothers' button-down shirt is a leftover from his university days. (He's also wearing a Mickey Mouse watch.) Fresh from university, Freedman worked for an interior designer in an architectural firm doing in-house visual presentations and plumbing drawings of an airline hangar and terminal.

The interior designer on the project had a heart attack and Freedman was talked into taking over.

After that he ran away. He spent a year with a friend in Spain. Back in New York he built architectural models and painted. "Letters and numbers, coloured calligraphy," he describes his paintings. Quitting New York he went to Holland: "Painted, learnt Dutch and illustrated a book on bulbs."

Tired of being poor he fell into a job with London interior designers, Tandy Halford Mills. "I started to learn how to put things together. I worked with a genius detailer, an architect called Ronald Cuddon, who opened the flower of detail for me."

Next, Freedman took a job with Knoll International in New York. Knoll is the famous interior design and furniture manufacturer who, in the 1940s and 1950s, employed architect-designers

*Above: the boardroom at Leighton House with black granite table and interesting lighting effects.*

*Right: green marble in the executive bathroom at Leighton House.*

*Below: an exterior colour scheme by Marsh Freedman at Potts Point.*

MAX DUPAIN



SUSAN WINDMILLER



MAX DUPAIN

such as Eero Saarinen. Knoll had just landed an Australian contract for the executive level, 27th and 28th floors, of the Bank of New South Wales in Martin Place, next to where the State Bank is now going up.

"I was sent here for five weeks in 1969 and met Neville one night at a dinner party," Freedman says.

After the bank was completed in 1970 Freedman arrived back in Australia and Marsh Freedman Associates began. Its first assignments were for Partnership Pacific Ltd, merchant bankers.

Marsh grew up in Perth, Western

Australia. He was a colour consultant in Sydney and worked for an antique fabric firm in London. Later, he set up his own business, Neville Marsh Interiors, on the corner of Moncur and Queen Streets in Woollahra.

India and Italy, Rome in particular, are his two loves. The richness of Italian Renaissance culture attracts him. "Where else but Rome could you go to a concert and look up at a Raphael or a Caravaggio while listening to Bach?"

Marsh and Freedman own a farm together on the NSW south coast at

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# State Bank

Milton Marsh lives at Redfern in a part-1846 part-1870 house. Freedman has a Potts Point apartment in one of four old blocks of flats, restored by architect Peter Stronach of Allen Jack and Cottier. Marsh Freedman did the outside colours. The dark terracotta exterior has wooden-latticed verandas which look all green, or maybe blue. When you're close up they dissolve, like a Monet painting, into a dozen different shades with sky-blue highlighting.

Freedman's unit is all white when you look south and a burst of 11 colours — including pink, blue, green and mauve — when you look north. "Colour is everything," he says. Freedman chooses the colours. Then he and Marsh spend hours working out details. Leighton House, a lavish interior completed early last year for Leighton Contractors at St Leonards, had 120 different colours, furnishings included.

In the foyer of the building, designed by architects Devine Erby Mazlin, is a pink-grey Sardinian granite floor. Other levels are carpeted in mauve, a Freedman favourite: "a shadow colour like grey; it goes with everything."

The managing director's office has a red and white marble desk-top. The

marble is from north Pisa. The Mies van der Rohe 1926 Brno chair replica was made by Knoll International.

The black granite boardroom table is 1.6 metres by 3.5 metres. "The largest single piece of granite quarried in this country," Freedman says. "It had to be put in before the building was enclosed. It was lifted up the side on a crane and left in a crate while the room was built around it."

Another Marsh Freedman client, Order Imports, moved into its new, dazzling, high-camp fabric showroom in Pymont late last year.

The reception area has a vaulted ceiling with a blue neon tube running down the centre. At each end of the vault, crescent-shaped mirrors make it appear to go on forever. The gold *moiré* wallpaper, with purple flock bees, was printed in France in 1807 by Zuber for Pauline Bonaparte, the sister of Napoleon.

The reception desk has a plastic laminate finish that looks like marble. "The same as a table in a Greek fish-and-chip shop," Freedman says.

The circular vestibule that links reception with various other areas has an inlaid linoleum floor with a flowing abstract design. "It reminds me of Chicago buildings in the 1930s and 1940s," Freedman says. The orange

triangles with a yellow circle lead to the conference room, the blue and yellow swirls to the showroom proper and the grey go to sales.

The passageway between the vestibule and the showroom was designed "as a ruin, or a garden folly. The Gibson Girl swatches of material are like the flowers in the garden . . . must have some fun," Freedman continues.

The showroom was designed just before Marsh and Freedman started work on the State Bank project.

They are reluctant to discuss the State's interiors. They didn't tender but were invited to do the bank's two executive floors.

"We never talk about a job until it's completed," Marsh says primly. The State will be finished by the end of the year. "Four walls and some furniture," Freedman says, poker-faced.

What about the black marble loos? Freedman relents a little. "There are some black ceramic tiles in one toilet," he confesses. "There's nothing new in that."

"In Leighton House we used black ceramic tiles for the men's toilet and pink for the women's. The executive loos at Leighton have green marble walls and a green marble vanity."

Freedman and Marsh refuse to be drawn any further. □



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# THE STATE LEARNS TO LOVE ART DECO

By MARGARET RICE

IT WILL show the "smart arses," according to Nicholas Whitlam, managing director of the State Bank.

"It's art deco 1985 style," Tim Blue, the State Bank's chief information officer, said, describing the State Bank's new art deco branch in Oxford Street, Paddington, Sydney. Three years ago the State Bank pulled down its original art deco headquarters in Martin Place, Sydney. The building at 52 Martin Place was one of the last remaining examples of art deco architecture in Sydney. The architect, Frank William Turner, was an exponent of the style and designed Kinselas funeral parlour at Darlinghurst (now the restaurant) and the Hyde Park War Memorial.

Demolition plans caused a public outcry, including loud shrieks from some of Sydney's leading architects. The loudest of these came from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects which involved itself in demonstrations over a public building for the first time.

But State Bank officials, led by Mr Whitlam, then the newly-appointed managing director of the bank, said it was an unattractive building and a bad example of art deco.

Finally the building went. But now the bank has gone to great pains to create an art deco look for its new branch in Paddington. To add to the irony, Mr Whitlam will be at the official opening of the branch later this month.

According to Mr Whitlam: "We decided to take things a step further than usual in that trendy suburb, where I live. We didn't just enhance, we re-created it.

"In a sense we're showing that trendy community that we know a little more about art deco than many others do.

"We wanted to show those people who were smart arses then just how well art deco can be done," he said.

"We have Italian speakers in our Leichhardt branches and Yugoslav speakers in our South Wollongong branches. In Paddington we've tried to respond to the local style."

But even though Mr Whitlam has no qualms about art deco, others in the bank admitted they were a bit sensitive about the style after all the publicity of the past.

The bank's in-house architects, Bill Brandt and Tony Harvey did not



*The State Bank at Paddington*

actually set out to find a building and turn it into 1985's answer to art deco.

Mr Harvey said that after purchasing the Paddington building they crossed the street and looked above the awning at the facade and realised it was art deco.

"There are only two genuine art deco buildings in the whole of Oxford Street. All the rest are Victorian or Edwardian," Mr Harvey said.

They discussed the revelation with interior designers Marsh Freedman, responsible for the decor of the State Bank's new head office building.

Marsh Freedman helped the architects broach the subject of art deco at head office. The architects and interior designers did not so much split responsibilities as work together from then on. "Marsh Freedman modified the colours we first thought of," Mr Harvey said.

Maybe not so much toned the colours down as livened them up. To the green and oranges of the deco era they added splashes of mauve, which is almost the signature colour of Marsh Freedman.

A classic art deco cubist theme has been used in the ceiling, falling in with the art deco obsession with geometric lines. Neon lights trace the pattern.

The most ostentatious feature is the polished glass front door, "the sort of thing Burley Griffin would have loved," Mr Harvey said. □