

MICHAEL LOVE



# MY *F*AVOURITE ROOM

*Interior designers spend their time creating comfort for others. JUSTINE HARDY asks the professionals what they like about their own homes.*



People ask designers why they do particular things: often there is no reason, no why and wherefore.

### MICHAEL LOVE of Michael Love Interior Design, Darling Point, Sydney

IT IS LIKE SITTING IN ONE OF THOSE enchanting villas in the foothills of Tuscany. Michael Love's dining room feeds out into a courtyard flooded with light and tumbling stephanotis, punctuated with fat-bellied Parisian urns with the authentic leaded green taint.

It is very quiet and he has almost managed to camouflage the neighbours with the profusion of garden.

This is his first garden and he is in the process of taming some lemon trees to cre-

ate a citrus avenue and is urging on the taller trees to obliterate the views of adjoining walls. The glass doors opening on to the courtyard have a large white canvas awning billowing over them. Love has adopted the Mediterranean idea of looping the canvas. It is like a series of sails filtering the light.

The floor is covered in plain rush matting in stark contrast to the elegance of the room. "I didn't want to have the watery effect of a carpet or all of the noise that goes with a hard floor," Love says.

The walls are, well, unusual. "I suppose if you went through all the things that

it isn't," Love says, "you would probably get a clearer picture rather than trying to describe what it is. I mixed the colour and I think I based it on the colour that you find in Italy when they pick out pillars and alcoves and porticos in that stony green. It is such a quiet colour to live with and, unlike some of these muted colours, it softens at night.

"One of the things about being an interior designer is that people are always asking you why you do particular things. In many cases there is no reason, no why and wherefore. It is just a subconscious decision that you make and it happens even more in your own home. You have an idea of what you want to live with and it just happens without being inspired by methodical reasoning."

Three walls are lined with beautifully preserved leather-bound books set in framed cases.

"It is fascinating reading the biographies of some of the early interior designers, someone like Elsie de Woolf who managed to make the starched discomfort of the rooms of the era accessible."

Love has very architectural taste. The furniture is simple and structured with clean, uncomplicated lines. The centre of the room is dominated by a Mark Stanford table with a squared pedestal base and marbled round top. Love has had the table for years, since the look of painted finishes started to reappear. It adds to the Italian feel of the room.

There is a white Victorian bust sitting in front of some of the books: a plump 19th century Englishman translated into loose Roman costume with black, blind eyes and cropped shoulders. This bust will soon be available to all the finest houses. It has been copied by Charlotte O'Neil to ride with the tide of the return to Renaissance.

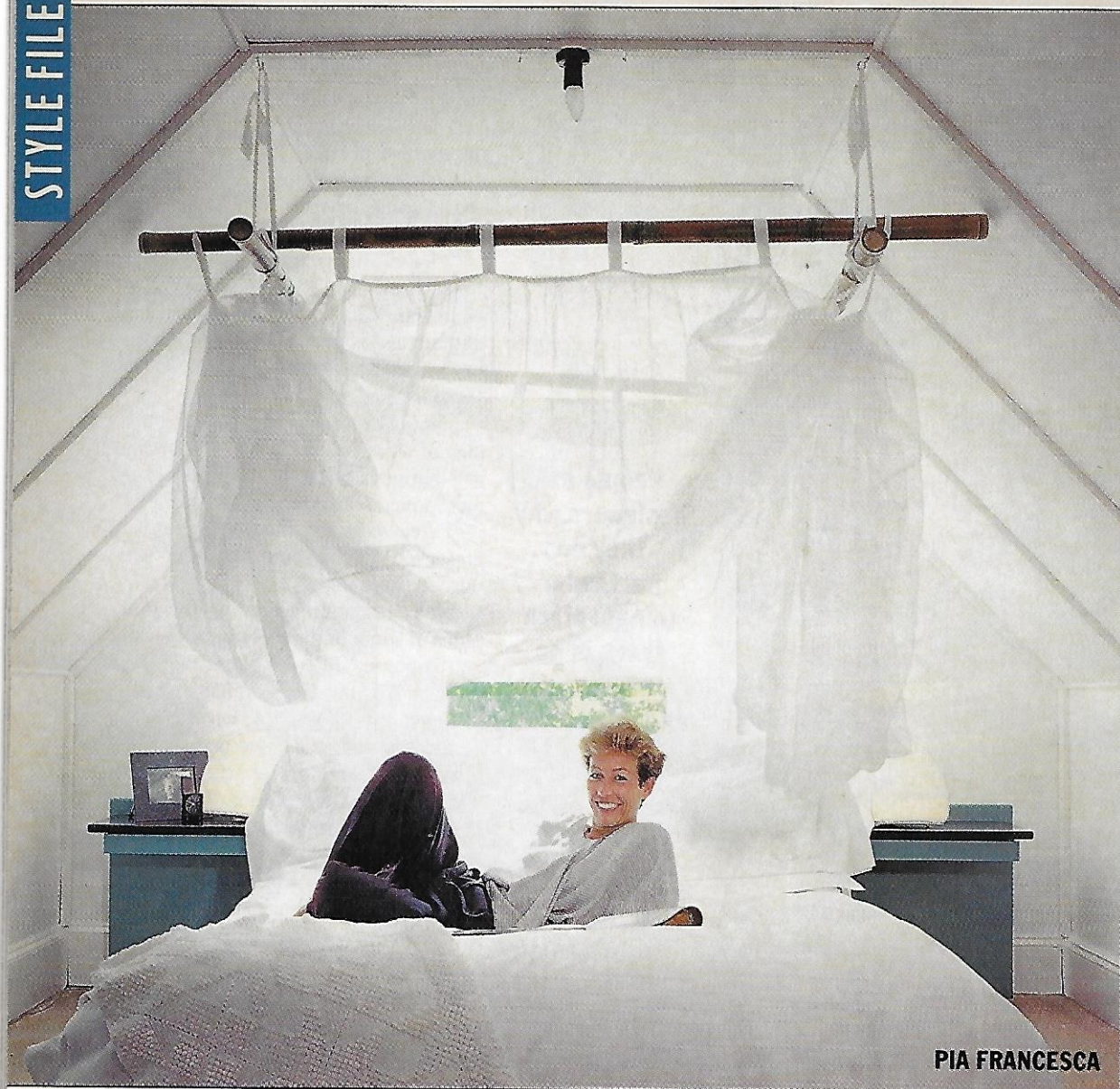
Love works from his Darling Point home, in a downstairs office. "I have the ability to be able to shut the door of the office and just walk away from it without the feeling that I should be in there working every time I pass the door."

Love has run his own company for 15 years. He veers away from commercial work unless it is, in his words, "of the very best".

He is in the process of creating some offices and a restaurant in Sydney's Blich Street with an extravagance of black granite. He is also doing a series of apartments on the Sunshine Coast.

"I have been running my own show since 1973 and the time has just gone," Love says. "That's 15 years that have just sped past. I must be happy in my work."

He looks out into his newly blossoming courtyard with pride.



PIA FRANCESCA

ANDREW RANKIN

●  
**A bedroom  
 should be a  
 sanctuary —  
 and a place  
 of calm.**  
 ●

#### ◀ PIA FRANCESCA of Pia Francesca Design, Woollahra, Sydney

THE GROCERIES ARE ON THE FRONT DOORSTEP and Uschi, the strawberry-blond cocker spaniel, rushes to greet the visitor. While many decorators' houses feel like extended showrooms, Pia Francesca's home is warm and welcoming. "The house is rented, so I have not been able to do a lot of the things here that I would have liked to have done," she says as we walk upstairs. "That is why I have chosen my bedroom as my favourite room because it is a place that is really my own." She opens the door and light floods out.

Her bedroom is an attic with an angled ceiling and just one window. Francesca has taken what could have been a dark and oppressive room and made it reminiscent of one of those 1930s colonial movies. Soft, focused light backed by the starkness of pure white, billowing demask and muted shapes. "I love white," Francesca says. "A

bedroom should be a sanctuary, a place of calm — somewhere you can spend time, whether with the luxury of being on your own or with somebody. I made it white where the ceiling flows into the walls to give it more of a feeling of space. Also, I probably made it feminine as opposed to neutral because it is an attic so lends itself to being a hideaway — my hideaway."

There are no cupboards, though a small dressing room off the bedroom has solved the problem of clothes storage. The centerpiece of the room is the bed, shrouded in a mosquito net suspended on a rectangular frame of thick bamboo. The frame removes the usual tent effect of most nets and gives a much airier look.

"It is partly practical and partly atmospheric. We all know what the mosquitoes are like in the middle of summer," Francesca says. "It is also just lovely to lie under the canopy."

The few pieces of furniture around the room are low and simple. "It is all like that

to avoid any feeling of claustrophobia. I had these pieces already so I made do. I would have loved to have used an old timber door as the bedhead, but part of a designer's job is not to discard everything and start all over again, but to have the ability to work with what you have got."

Francesca's use of colour is uncomplicated. She has used it in her bedroom to create space and light, painting the furniture in deep aqua with black surfaces. "Colours become fashionable and everybody jumps on the bandwagon, regardless of whether the colour works for them. Salmon has been flogged to death and so has good safe beige. Purples, blues and aquas are coming very much to the fore. I think designers are all feeling far more confident about using colour, possibly, in some cases, to the extreme.

"As a designer, you have to be so careful with the colours you use.

"Early on in the piece, grey started to be noted as my signature colour and so I ▶

I don't have a style. I like things to look luxurious, rich and wonderful.



ANDREW HANKIN

◁ found myself shying away from it. I now use it as a springboard for other stronger colours.”

Francesca says her room is the perfect retreat: “When I am here with my son, Alexander, maybe reading him a bedtime story, I suppose I feel a little bit removed from the world,” she says.

### PHILLIP SILVER of Phillip Silver Pty Ltd, Sydney and Perth

THE OPULENT CREAM, SILK SOFAS ARE covered with bulging cushions, the pale raw-silk wallpaper is fresh from New York and there is a noticeable lack of natural light. Phillip Silver is standing in his sitting room and he looks at ease in his ivory surroundings. “I love it in here,” he says. “It’s me, it’s my colours. It is elegant but not stuffy. I think that it’s terribly important to be able to feel that you can sit in a room if you want to be comfortable. I know these sofas are cream, but so what if I have to recover them in six months; I would never not have them for that reason.”

The room’s two windows have been bricked up. “This is essentially a nighttime room. I’m never in it during the day

and because of that it does not suffer from the same sort of chaos that goes on in my bedroom, with the continual traffic of packing and unpacking. I can come in here in the evening and control the lighting as I want — quite dramatically.” He stops for a moment and turns a dimmer. The sofas become luminescent as the lighting fades.

“When you think about it, what do we have at night if there is no lighting? Take a city and think what it would be without all the lights; just huge blackness. You can achieve such a lot by just being clever with light.” The look of the room changes again as the photographer turns up the dimmers to test the exposure reading.

The other pieces of furniture in the room are Silver’s work (he started his career in furniture design and his relatively new interior-design company grew out of that). There is a 1930s use of line and form in his furniture, which contrasts with the almost Georgian feel of the rest of the room. “There is no real rhyme or reason in here,” he says. “It’s full of things that I have collected over the years and chosen to house here. There are some of my original pieces, so they have quite a lot of sentimental value. There is something

very comforting about surrounding yourself with things that are familiar to you.

“I don’t want people to be intimidated by my house. If they are in here and don’t want to sit on the sofa with cushions, I want them to feel that they can just throw the cushions on the floor. If they want to lay on the rug I hope they will,” he says, settling himself deeper among the cream silk cushions on the sofa. “I don’t have a style. That would be wrong of me. I like things to look luxurious, rich and wonderful, but that doesn’t mean that you have got to have an unlimited budget to achieve it. Luxury to me is the finer details. The curve on the arms of a chair, the trim on a lamp or a picture frame.

“As a design team, I think that my company is the first in Australia to start giving commercial work a residential feel. Maybe that was one of the reasons for the choice of this company to do Hayman Island. The client has never really told us why they decided to use a company that was just two years old.

“Our problem now is that we have been categorised by Hayman. It might frighten people away because they think we will only do big-budget schemes. If you are not ▷

**Return of the masterpiece of illusion: a suburban fresco on a wall and on a painted screen, from Fresco and Co.**



# FRESCOS

FRESCOS, THE ANCIENT FORM OF INTERIOR DESIGN, IS GOING THROUGH AN UNUSUAL RESURGENCE. THEY ARE BEST CREATED BY APPLYING A PAINTED VISION TO A WET PLASTERED WALL SO THE COLOURS SOAK IN AND DON'T RUB OFF. THIS GIVES THE FRESCO A RICH QUALITY THAT ENDURES. SOME, SUCH AS THE HIEROGLYPHICS FOUND IN EGYPTIAN TOMBS AND THOSE FOUND IN THE RUINS OF POMPEII, ARE STORIES, A SORT OF RUNNING COMMENTARY, DEPICTING THE LIVES OF THE PHARAOKS AND THE ROMAN EMPERORS.

During the Renaissance, frescos became masterpieces of perspective and architectural illusion. It was called the art of *trompe l'oeil* — trick of the eye.

Fresco and Co, a small Melbourne-based company, has recognised the re-

surgence of the fresco. Says Marc Rogerson, one of the company's two directors: "A fresco is a powerful and personal statement. Australians are becoming receptive to this trend, because they are becoming more aware of their own style, more confident and willing to take a risk. They are also becoming less serious in their outlook."

You can sit in your bath gazing at a beach scene and pretend you are paddling in the shallows, with the sand spilling over the edge of the bath. Or, if your fantasy is to live on a Mediterranean island, you can be transported there, as has one of Rogerson's clients who has an elegant Mediterranean view fading into the end of his hallway.

"We have even transformed a very average suburban garden into a lush, Amazonian jungle by painting the back shed," says Daryl Millard, Fresco's other director, an interior designer who spent a year painting Byzantine iconography in churches before starting Fresco.

Frescos can cover a whole wall or ceiling, or both, going into the structure using the corners, cornices and doorways as part of an imaginary world.

"The theme that a client chooses as the subject of the fresco has a lot to do with their personality, taste, style and eccentricities. But the design also has a lot to do with the structure of the room, and the function of the room, taking into account the room's architecture," says Rogerson.

Two of Melbourne's better-known eateries, Peronis and Rosatis, have very large areas which seem even larger because of the three collinated frescos covering all the walls. There is a feeling of infinite space; the areas become three-dimensional.

To copy a traditional fresco such as Raphael's *Adam and Eve* costs about \$1000. A specially designed fresco costs about \$2000; painted screens cost about \$1200. If your home has gyrock walls, the image can be painted on to them or copied on to canvas and glued to the wall.

**ALICE GREENBERGER**



careful with that sort of project, it can turn into one of those swansong pieces.

"I am also trying to get away from this label of being Art Deco. It's crazy, I'm not that at all. I love the 1930s style, the shapes and lines and classic influences.

"If I had to live in another era, I would choose then. I went through a phase when I liked that particular look of things. I don't dislike it now, I have just grown up a bit more and become more aware. I look back

on some of the old photographs and drawings and think, 'My god how did I ever do that?'

"I have never got anything absolutely right, but that is the price you pay for doing something new or for the first time."

It is this attention to detail that has created the mood of the room: the careful placing of lighting, the piping on the cushions, the profusion of creams.

The room feels luxurious.

**GEORGE FREEDMAN of Marsh Freedman and Associates, Redfern, Sydney**

WALKING THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR OF George Freedman's sandstone cottage in inner Sydney is like stepping through a looking glass. There is a blast of colour, a splash of water, and lovely plants. Below you are stripped wooden floors; above you are high ceilings; in front of you are huge polished double doors. George Freedman

◁ does not talk about the rooms in his house — he speaks of a series of spaces. He wants to nominate the park beyond the French windows as his favourite room, but eventually settles on the room in which he is standing. If it had to be titled, it would be the sitting room.

Compared to the rest of the house, this room is cluttered. There are several pictures hung one above the other and the shelves are full of leather-bound books. There is a rumpled knee rug draped across a chair and a selection of well-loved cushions.

"I suppose I could call this the family room because there is a picture of my mother here and the dogs tend to sleep on the chair," Freedman says. "It has my cosy pictures. It is the area of this space that is the most personalised. It has the quality to me of an English 19th century gentleman's collection. All these things have stories to tell rather than just being objects."

A pensive young girl in a painting over the fireplace is glancing sideways in such a way as to be looking out the French windows on to the park.


"It's called *Ingres Vermeer*," Freedman says. "She's by an old friend of mine, George Deem. He takes various elements of the classics and mixes them up."

The picture is a blend of the famous *Ingres* in the Louvre and Vermeer's *Music Lesson*. The pensive young girl in lavender leans against the piano and the original Vermeer is etched into the background as part of the scenery. It is one of three Deem paintings in the room, one of which has Freedman and his two Scottish terriers as part of the composition.

The word "room" is too restrictive for Freedman. He says that each "area" in his house interacts with the next. "I don't identify any of this space as individual areas," he says, his sweeping gesture encompassing the whole house.

"If I announced to myself that they were rooms, I would be saying that they are separate enclosures. They are not; all the spaces flow into each other. The whole thing about my spaces is that the colours are all a very basic sequence. It is just primary colours flowing into secondary. Blue and yellow, then those combine into green, then there is red and mauve. It is so childishly obvious that I just look at it and it makes me giggle."

Humour is an important element in Freedman's work. He wants his interiors to make people smile. Strong Mies van der Mohr pieces are punctured by something that will suddenly make you laugh: perhaps a black pedestal topped with a ceramic torso of a mouthy Californian beach bum in fairground colours. "The thing that ▷

 This space is the antithesis of the way that I think.



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# FABRICS

THERE IS A DISTINCTLY BOHEMIAN LOOK finding its way on to the fabric swathes in interior-design shops. The Romany gypsy style, with rich colours and whirling paisley designs of every shape and form, has a feeling of Laura Ashley all grown-up, a sophisticated version of the simple flower designs that were her trademark.

The colours are strong and earth-based: rust-hued reds and terracottas, olive greens, cobalt blues and ashed blacks. It is a versatile style that can be dressed up to grace the grandest sitting room or dressed down to flatter the simplest of rural settings. The designs, based on the fabrics of Provence in the south of France, are traditional patterns worn and used for centuries.

The problem which arises if you decide on this fabric is that the original cottons are imported only on a limited basis. The last surviving printworks are based near St Remy and their sole importer to Australasia is Les Olivades. The retail outlet is in Sydney's Double Bay, but there are plans for another shop in Melbourne. The printed cottons are \$44 a metre; co-ordinating plains are \$25. Phone (02) 327 6025 to order.

Heavy chintzes are back, with their extravagant swirling flowers, glazed finishes and luxuriant colours. Chintz originated in India with the arrival of the raj. It was used by the corsetted matriarchs to remind them of English gardens. This fabric needs space and a certain classical style to really work.

For smaller or simpler settings, the range of stripes and checks is always increasing. Stripes have survived in one

want to achieve and, of course, what will suit the picture.

Mirrors are also being influenced by Italian, particularly Venetian, designs. Again, the frames are ornate and golden. Some use elaborate glasswork as the frame for the mirror. The intricate facets of the glass throw hundreds of angled reflections so that the mirror adopts the colours of the surrounding room.

The latest style is the convex mirror which gives a fish-eye reflection. If you stand in front of one, your image becomes strangely elongated and the background flattens. Despite this contortion, such mirrors give greater light reflection as they throw light off curved rather than

◁ is central to all the work that we do is that everything has to have a surprise element that will lead you into a world beyond," he says, smiling. "Just a small touch that will take you into a sort of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* situation, something to just tempt you towards fantasy."

He points towards one of the amalgamated Deem paintings as a prop to his comment.

"When I first came here, I resisted hanging anything on the walls for weeks and weeks.

"I shuddered when I first timidly put up a picture because I had suddenly destroyed the innocence of the space." He refers again to his "family" area.

"This space is the antithesis of the way that I think. The way that I have stacked the pictures one on top of the other. Once I had hung one picture, I suppose that I went the other way in here and in doing so I also personalised it."

# FRAMES

AS WITH FURNITURE AND FABRIC, MODERN taste in picture-framing is returning to the classic and Renaissance styles. In contrast to the slim-line look which has been popular for some years, neo-classicism heralds a return to heavier frames with an emphasis on gilding.

There has been a move away from the lighter wooden frames based on German and American mouldings, and new mouldings from Italy offer a choice of pale gold-leafed frames embossed with intertwined fruit or animal motifs.

As with most aspects of interior design and decoration, this is an area subject to trends. It becomes a compromise between the style you like, the look you

width or another through most trends. Finer stripes in nubbled silk and cotton offer a fresh alternative to the smooth sheen of the glazed fabrics and give a softer outline when used for upholstery. The latest version of the stripe seems to be prevalent in various shades of pastel, which can look a little washed out if not offset with stronger colours.

Colefax and Fowler has an elaborate collection of chintzes, stripes, checks, ticking, silks, satins, cottons and glazes. The shop, in Queen Street, Woollahra, Sydney, is bursting with fabrics stamped with the mark of the English drawing room. The chintzes are all about \$100 a metre. Colefax and Fowler products are also sold through Geraldine Cooper at 255 Burwood Road, Hawthorn, Melbourne, and Fabric Suppliers at 170 Goulburn Street, Launceston.

**Provence prints, in paisleys and fine florals, are perfect for cushion covers.**



usual flat, two-dimensional surfaces.

Hand-painted frames are also becoming popular. Some are elegantly marbled and occasionally the duplication of the sinewy stone is so good that only the impossibility of hanging a heavy sculpted rock frame shatters the illusion.

The finer details that graced the paintings of our grandparents' era are also returning to our living-room walls, but there are not many classically trained framers available to satisfy the demand. The waiting lists may be long but the finished product is exquisite. Tony Rees, co-partner of Medici Frames in Sydney, is a framer with classical training. Medici Frames also has a selection of imported ▷



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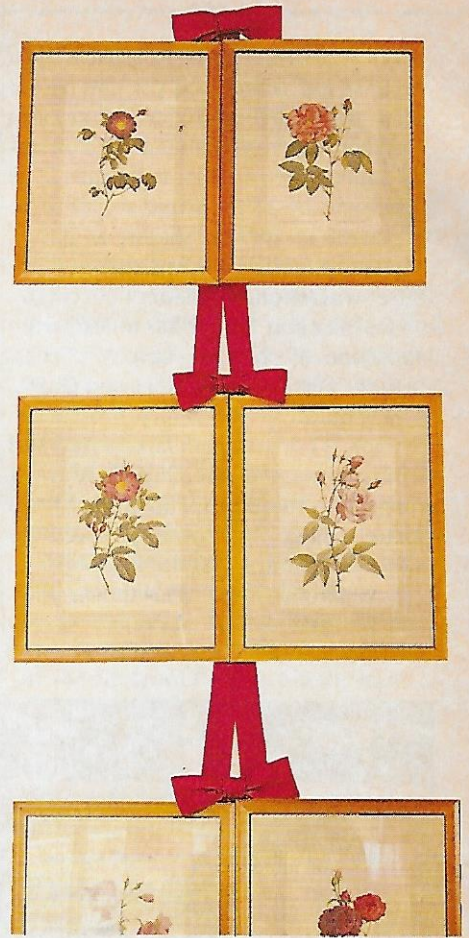
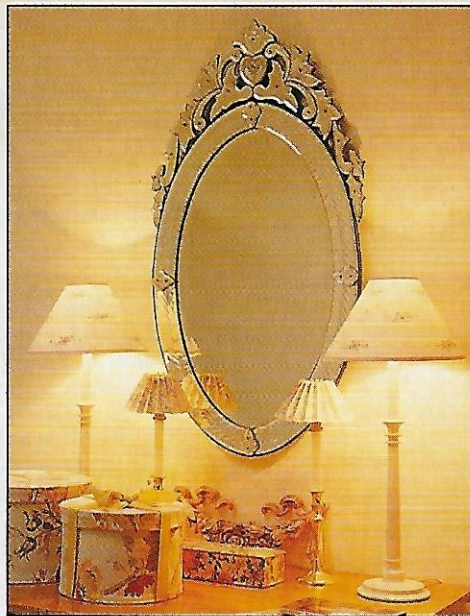
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Below: Gilded frame with Louis XV engraving, \$387. Centre: Venetian mirror, \$1140. Both from Whitehouse, Sydney. Far right: Medici Frames' PJ Redoute French lithographs, \$200.



◁Italian frames and mirrors. Rees makes gilded frames himself and convex mirrors with inlaid wood surrounds. A large rectangular mirror with a heavy gilded frame or one of the convex mirrors cost about \$800. Rees and his partner, Annette Zubani, also sell their work through Items in Perth.

Artstok, also in Sydney, carries an extensive selection of frames from light, pickled wood frames to the weighty gold-

moulded variety. Jarman's in Hawthorn, Melbourne, is renowned for its classical framing. Prices vary greatly but an average-sized watercolour, mounted with washlines and complete with swept corners, is about \$300.

Once you have seen a few carefully chosen frames in place it is hard to imagine a return to the days when the old favourite was clipped behind a blurred sheet of perspex. □

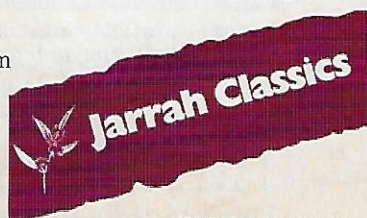
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