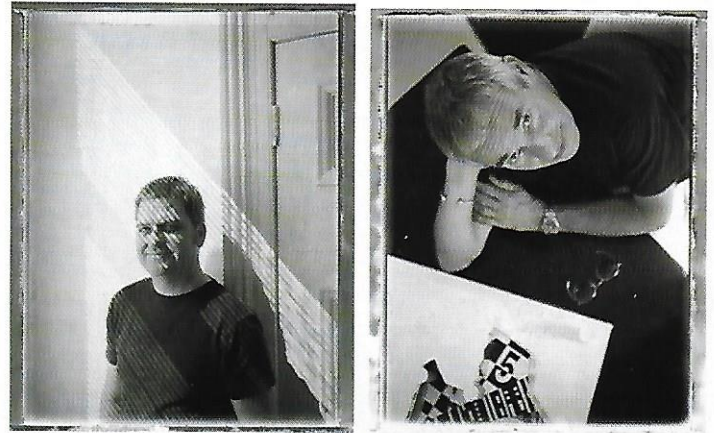


IT SAYS WELCOME."



THE COLOURISTS

RALPH REMBEL AND GEORGE FREEDMAN INVITE YOU INTO A WORLD WHERE DESIGN IS NOT PAINFUL.

TEXT BY LETA KEENS. STYLING BY JEAN WRIGHT. PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHARRIN REES. PORTRAITS BY ANSON SMART.

There's nothing unusual about a brief changing during the planning stage, but in the case of a Sydney apartment designed by Freedman Rembel, that change couldn't have been more dramatic. George Freedman and Ralph Rembel had drawn up a scheme for the client, who was already living in an apartment they'd designed for her in the next building. The longer she was there the more settled she became. The solution – for her to stay put and turn the second apartment into a guesthouse to accommodate 14 family members and, of course, friends.

"Her brief was to make it warm," says Freedman. "We made it welcoming and colourful and immediately accessible."

And so what was initially planned as a library just inside the front door is now a sitting room with a pair of burnt orange B&B Lunar sofa beds covered in pink satin and blue and purple corduroy cushions; two wardrobes contained in a wall unit; spotted Akari floor lamp by Isamu Noguchi in one corner and a wall completely covered in colourful decorative masks from around the world ("a complex piece of ornament", as Freedman describes it).

"You may have been flying for 20 hours, and you walk into this room and it says 'welcome'," says Freedman.

It also gives an idea of the tone of the rest of the two-storey apartment – it's practical, colourful and flexible, it mixes classics with new and not necessarily known pieces, it's not precious. "You've got to have fun," says Freedman. "Serious design can be painful."

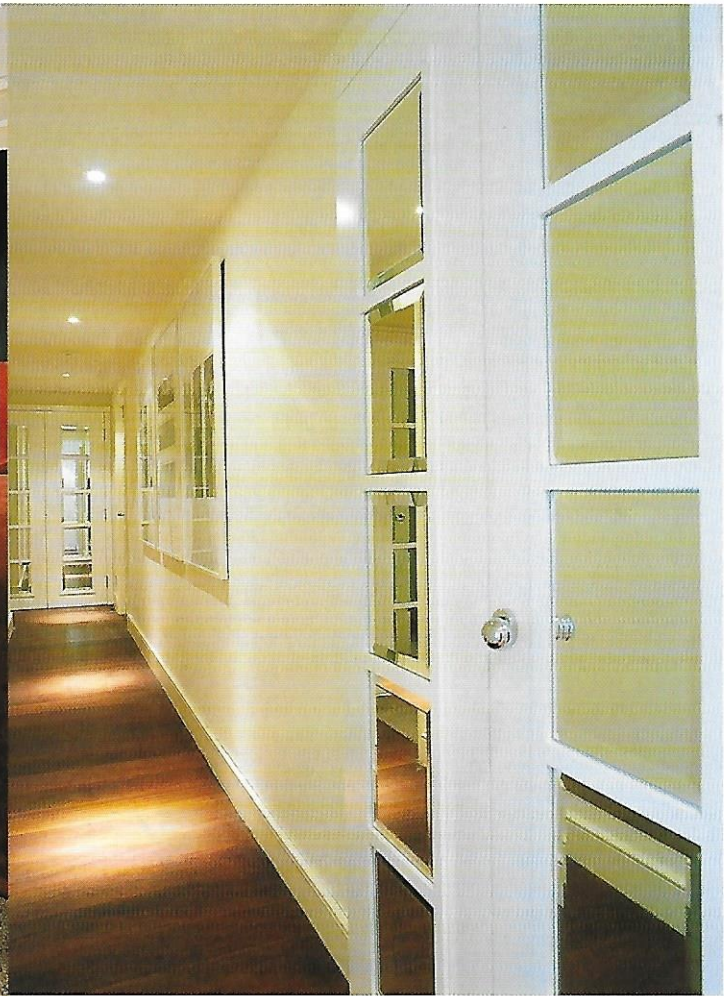
And stand at the top of the curved staircase, reworked with elegant solid balustrade and timber steps, and see the chandelier (*Birds Birds Birds* by German designer Ingo Maurer) exploding out of it in a flock of goosefeather-winged lightbulbs and you're left in no doubt whatsoever that there will be nothing insipid about this particular place.

"Daunting, a mass of nothing," is the way Freedman and Rembel describe the apartment when they first saw it. "We felt amazement that an apartment in this category could be so indifferent – it was bland and vulgar at the same time." Beige carpets and cream walls throughout, flimsy-looking internal doors, a white marble staircase >



THIS PAGE A SLIGHTLY STEPPED WALL OF WHITE OAK IN THE LIVING AREA. IN THE DISTANCE, *BIRDS BIRDS* BY INGO MAURER. **OPPOSITE PAGE** A MARBLE AND MOSAIC TILE "PORTAL" IN THE CORRIDOR BETWEEN THE KITCHEN AND DINING AREA.





with chrome balustrade and timber handrail, a nasty jagged arrangement of walls and doors on the back wall of the living room with doors directly opening to the powder room, electrical cupboards and other service areas. "There was no sense of calm, the room was not at rest," says Freedman, whose company name was recently changed from George Freedman Associates to Freedman Rembel to indicate Ralph Rembel's equal partnership in the business.

And so, apart from getting rid of the boring colour scheme, replacing doors throughout with multi-paned, bevelled-mirrored doors (inspired by a scene from *Dangerous Liaisons*) and installing a keruing timber floor (chosen for its stability), a priority was to give the living room "a back", a slightly stepped wall of American white oak, which from one angle appears to be flat, while from the far corner of the room, that volume breaks into fragments and you can see that the wall incorporates shelving. Service areas best not viewed from the living room are now closed off behind a doorway cut into the wall.

In the original scheme a dining area was to have been at one end of the living room; that now lies beyond the kitchen, in what was planned as a family room. And so the generously proportioned living room has been broken up into three "specifically intimate spaces", where three groups of people can carry on quite separate activities without getting in the way of the others. In the middle of the room, a pair of B&B Italia Sity couches sit opposite each other, with Eames coffee table between. Large enough to sleep on, the couches are upholstered in three bold shades of leather, "partly chosen for their durability - spill and wipe - guests can relax while they're using them". There's nothing wimpy, either, >



OPPOSITE PAGE,
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT EACH GUEST ROOM
HAS ITS OWN ENVIRONMENT
- THE FRANK GEHRY CHAIR
IS A FEATURE; MULTI-PANED,
BEVELLED-MIRRORED
DOORS REPLACED THE
ORIGINALS; THE KERUING
TIMBER FLOOR WAS
CHOSEN FOR ITS STABILITY.
THIS PAGE A POLTRONA
FRAU SOFA BED IN THE
MAIN BEDROOM SUITE
WHICH LEADS TO A
BROAD TERRACE.



about the oversized Mario Fortuny lamp which casts a cool glow over this particular grouping.

In the far corner of the room, rounded off to give a sculptural quality, two “wonderfully adjustable” Dodo chairs by Cassina – “like sitting in first class on a plane” and again upholstered in leather – are almost too comfortable to watch television in. The wall at this end of the room has been painted blue, concealed UV lighting intensifies the colour.

The third grouping, closest to the stairway, is “the cocktail lounge – a nice place to sit and have a bottle of champagne”. A set of curvaceous purple-blue Ribbon chairs designed by Pierre Paulin in 1966 sit around a Saarinen coffee table.

The kitchen, between the living and dining rooms, was not greatly changed – new doors were placed on existing cabinets and, in the corridor leading to the dining room, a portal was constructed of marble and brown micro glass mosaics. One feature, which Freedman and Rembel had never used before but which seems worth repeating, is a cabinet in the pantry marked “Operating Manuals” in letters too big to miss. Here, each room has its own file which answers any question a guest might have.

Two more of Ingo Maurer’s lights hang above the dining table – this time, a pair of *Wo Bist Du, Edison...?*, in which the lightbulb appears as a hologram on the clear shade. “He makes the wittiest lights imaginable,” says Freedman.

Again Freedman Rembel had to close off service areas – before, it would have been possible to sit at the dining table and look straight into the laundry. A doorway now leads from the room to the private wing of the apartment – the bedrooms, which each have their own bathroom. To create a warmer ambience in the private zone, cream, rather than white, paintwork is used as the main wall colour. There’s a consistency to the design of the bedrooms, but each has its own colourway, helping to define the space. Dense matt paint finish is used for a wall panel in each room – not quite reaching to the edges, it gives the impression of being attached to the surface, its solid colour (blue/black or Pepto-Bismol pink, for instance) creating an illusion of depth. In the main bedroom suite, colour features even more strongly – there’s an “underwater lushness” to the jade green of a narrow corridor leading to the suite. A Bolivian wall hanging from novica.com (an organisation which promotes Third World artists) introduces a surprisingly graphic element to the scheme, and is yet one more example of what Freedman means when he sums up the apartment by saying: “As with all our places, there’s a lot going on, there’s more happening than a single idea. In a large space you have to keep it moving otherwise it becomes like an institution.” □

FREEDMAN REMBEL CONTINUES THE TRADITION, STARTED BY MARSH FREEDMAN IN 1970 AND THEN BY GEORGE FREEDMAN ASSOCIATES, OF INTERWEAVING COLOUR AND TEXTURE TO CREATE UNIQUE FORMS AND SPACES.



OPPOSITE PAGE THE SPOTTED SAMU NOGUCHI LAMP AND BURNT ORANGE SOFA BEDS SAY WELCOME, ACCORDING TO FREEDMAN. **THIS PAGE** B&B CITY COUCHES AND LIVING DIVANI ARMCHAIRS MAKE BOLD STATEMENTS IN COLOUR.