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CREATIVE VISION
Style cues from the homes of design insiders

FEATURE PLANTER
BACKYARD
Frangipani
ENTRANCE
Crepe myrtles
Cordylines
Lomandra 'Tanika'
Dichondra micrantha
Ivies or ginger
Poppies

BACKYARD Owner Alanna Soni with her children Evan (4) Maisie, Penelope and Sam. Her husband Mike made the pizza oven. Dining table, Cotswold Furniture Warehouse; chairs, Early Settler. Cushions, Bonsai Rug. Bench top, Bella Stone Interiors. Lights, Beacon Lighting. Planter, for Where to Buy, see page 140.

PROOF POSITIVE
Clever layout, tweaks and a can-do attitude paved the way for the renovation of this Sydney home, the love child of architect Jacqueline Soni and her builder husband.

STORY Vanessa Hedden PHOTOGRAPHY Alana Whitehead

Aside from vision and talent, there are two acknowledged attributes that make for a successful renovator. Patience, forbearance and a positive attitude are essential.

Interior designer Alanna Soni needed plenty of all three when she and husband Mike took reservation of their three-bedroom weatherboard cottage on Sydney's Northern Beaches in 2008.

"I came home from hospital with our newborn, Sam, and the front of the property was dug up," she says. "We had been told Mike would be able to work from home and her two toddlers Maisie and Penelope – two – had to traipse through their neighbour's property to access her home.

Mike, a master builder, had been itching to begin, but Alanna needed time to contemplate her vision for the property, using all their experience to make the most of the cottage and its 'pocket' plot.

The family lived in two rooms while the house was rebuilt around them, enduring six months without a kitchen and what felt like a lifetime of 'renovator' rain. Still, Alanna looked on the bright side. "I never had to do the washing up because I was so sick, and the way it was quite convenient. And I could take the washing to the laundromat."

Their plan was to excavate the hillside the house was perched upon to allow for a four-car garage at the front, with a master suite, study and guest room/granny flat on the lower level. Alanna's dream kitchen was also the focus for the couple's design and construction business.

LIVING Alanna bought the sofa from a friend and had it reupholstered. "The new artwork eight years ago and, yes, it's a nude," she says. Sofa, Bonsai Rug. Artwork, Australian Art Prints. Artisan silverware, Rug, Armadillo & Co. Fireplace, Jamieson Sweet Soap. For similar library unit, try the Flemington three-box bookcase, Early Settler. For where to buy, see page 140.

ENTRANCE Featuring a double-height ceiling and walls of glass, the cleverly planned entrance gives the home a spacious feel. Artwork, Australian Art Prints. Console table, Bonsai Rug. For Lampe Jolivery, Pendant light, Bo Thum Bianco. For Where to Buy, see page 140.

This is the life
For the Sonis, having a family, welcoming home and entertaining friends are a big part of life. "I love an Australian take on glamorous style because it reflects our location and casual lifestyle," says Alanna. "I believe what's outside the home is just as important as inside. I'm always considering what's going on outside a window or how one is greeted at the door."

'I believe what's outside the home is just as important as inside. I'm always considering what's going on outside a window or how one is greeted at the door', Alanna Soni, *nearest interior designer*

THE LAYOUT

LIVING The mirror, originally intended for the bedroom, is made from recycled timber. Sofa, Bonsai Rug. Artwork, Australian Art Prints. Marquee Home. The vintage dining chairs were passed up with new cushions. Rug, Armadillo & Co. Antique chest, Eclectic Finds. Antique mirror, Marquee Home. Kitchen, Cotswold Furniture Warehouse; specifications. The shutter doors to the pantry were salvaged from the existing cottage. Bradenque splashback tiles, Tiles by Kane. Benchtop, Caesarstone 5131 Pure White Concrete. Sink, Abey. Tap, Caroma. Caroma pendant light, Icon kitchen mixer, Astra Walker. Fridge, Fisher&Paykel. The flooring is QV3/21 black japan and walnut strips. Dining table, Bonsai Rug. Chairs, from Edgbaston. Corner flowers. For Where to Buy, see page 140.

Fresh ideas
Trees the oversized hinges that conjures the impression of a more spacious home to a deck that's perfect for dining and lounging. "I love a replace with smart ideas. One of Alanna's favourites, though, is the custom-made sail shade that hangs over the deck and can be let in winter, not just poles. It's the width of room, so you can work from either the kitchen or dining side and it makes the perfect divide."

THE PALETTE

Dulux White On White

Wattyl Marina Pearl weatherboards

Dulux Midnight Sky trims, doors, fences

BATHROOM The generous shower curtain doubles as a window treatment. Shower/bath, Victoria Albert. Tapware, Caroma. Mirror, Marquee Home. Antique mirror. Floor tiles. Tile by Kane.

GUEST QUARTERS Elegant private guest quarters have been created from the existing garage. Bed, Bonsai Rug. Bedside tables, Markets. Wall light, Early Settler. Art for the artwork. "A beautiful and basic is the one beside the area we'd hoped we might," says Alanna. Rug, Armadillo & Co. Antique chest, Eclectic Finds. Antique mirror she says a standout. The painting seemed fitting.

DRESSING ROOM A dressing nook divides the ensuite from the bedroom. Bed, Bonsai Rug. Bedside tables, Markets. Lamp, salvaged by Alanna's husband Mike's mother. The chair was a roadside find. Light fitting from Eclectic Finds. For Where to Buy, see page 140.

Photos: Alana Whitehead/alanawhitehead.com.au Styling: Jacqueline Soni

• They then extended the house at the front to accommodate a new bathroom and two new bedrooms. This footprint meets their office and a roofing garden on top of the garage. "We work together and talk about the business a lot, so we wanted the office to be somewhere separate from the house, and therefore out of mind," says Alanna.

Internal tweaks were also in order: the couple turned an adjacent bedroom into an ensuite for their bedroom, and transformed another into a music/ playroom. An extra metre is width and pitched roof were added to the rear living area to correct its awkward shape, and the kitchen was moved into the galley kitchen a more spacious proposition. An outdoor entertaining zone was added off the living area, shaped around the existing frangipani, and to top it off, a shed at the rear of the property was converted into a granny flat/guest room.

Time in the trade taught the couple a few tricks that paid off handsomely, the most striking of which is the new 3.30-wide, double-height foyer. With glazing on two sides and a hand-stacked dry-stone wall, this space provides a sense of arrival, "and fantastic cross ventilation and more' importantly, creates the impression of a more spacious house to follow. "In fact, the room sizes are standard," says Alanna.

Aesthetically, it also paves the way for Alanna's preferred style: a fusion of the Hamptons and plantation and Hamptons style. Here, a combination of reworked family heirlooms, garage-sale finds and carefully selected designer pieces are woven into a casual yet sophisticated space. This practical, auspicious approach suits the home's era and enables, rather than circumscribes, daily life for the family of four.

With Sam now four, Penelope, six, and Maisie, seven, and the house humming along nicely, the importance of three early days of planning is apparent. "I love it when the house is filled with people," says Alanna. "I love cooking and I love to entertain, and with a table full of food. Some of our best days are spent that way."

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white approach
Refreshing old furniture with a fish of white paint works wonders in rustic schemes – pieces and features a rustic interior.