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Beautiful spaces and their inspiring creators



The Plantation Style Home of Alanna Smit

Photography: Simon Whitbread
Words: Bly Carpenter

Located on an enviable green, palm fringed street on Sydney's northern beaches, Alanna's home represents a true labour of love. She and husband Mike, a master builder, lived in the original weatherboard cottage for four years with their two young daughters, Marie and Penelope, before embarking on an extensive extension and renovation, coinciding with the birth of their child, Sam. Together, the couple designed the new home which Mike built, the family of five living in just two rooms for 18 months during the renovation process.

"What I love most about our home is that fact that Mike built every inch of it for us. It took us three years to settle on our plans but I don't regret for a second the level of detail we put into the design process.

"This is our forever home and a sense of timelessness and the potential for the home to evolve were our paramount concerns. We needed a space that our family could function in and enjoy now, yet grow with."

The single story home is perched above a deceptively large four-car garage (we needed to have plenty of storage for Mike's construction business). Greenery abounds and the facade of the home is a study in layers and contrasts – the stonework and concrete offset by weatherboard, timber decking and oversized pots. A concrete staircase, flanked on one side by an exquisite handmade stone wall, leads to the front door – and that entrance.



The living room spills out onto the tropical gardens and deck and oozes Bahamian style – jute floor coverings, oversized white sofas, unique cabinets and rattan coffee table and side tables.

"I do draw inspiration from the Bahamas – India Hicks is my tropical goddess of style and the Hamptons provides great references for combining luxury with comfort. I'm also influenced by the architecture and design of France – Bobby does heavy and detail like the French. With this room, as with the rest of the house, defining how 'tropical' or 'tropical' I wanted it to be was tough. Ultimately, I decided to risk it and do the Aussie thing and combine a few styles. The home is very much British Colonial / Plantation yet has elements of French regency, American Hamptons, Moroccan exotic and Australian country style."



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Part 2 of Alanna Smit's Plantation Style Home



What are the five key pieces you'd recommend for readers wanting to replicate your living room?

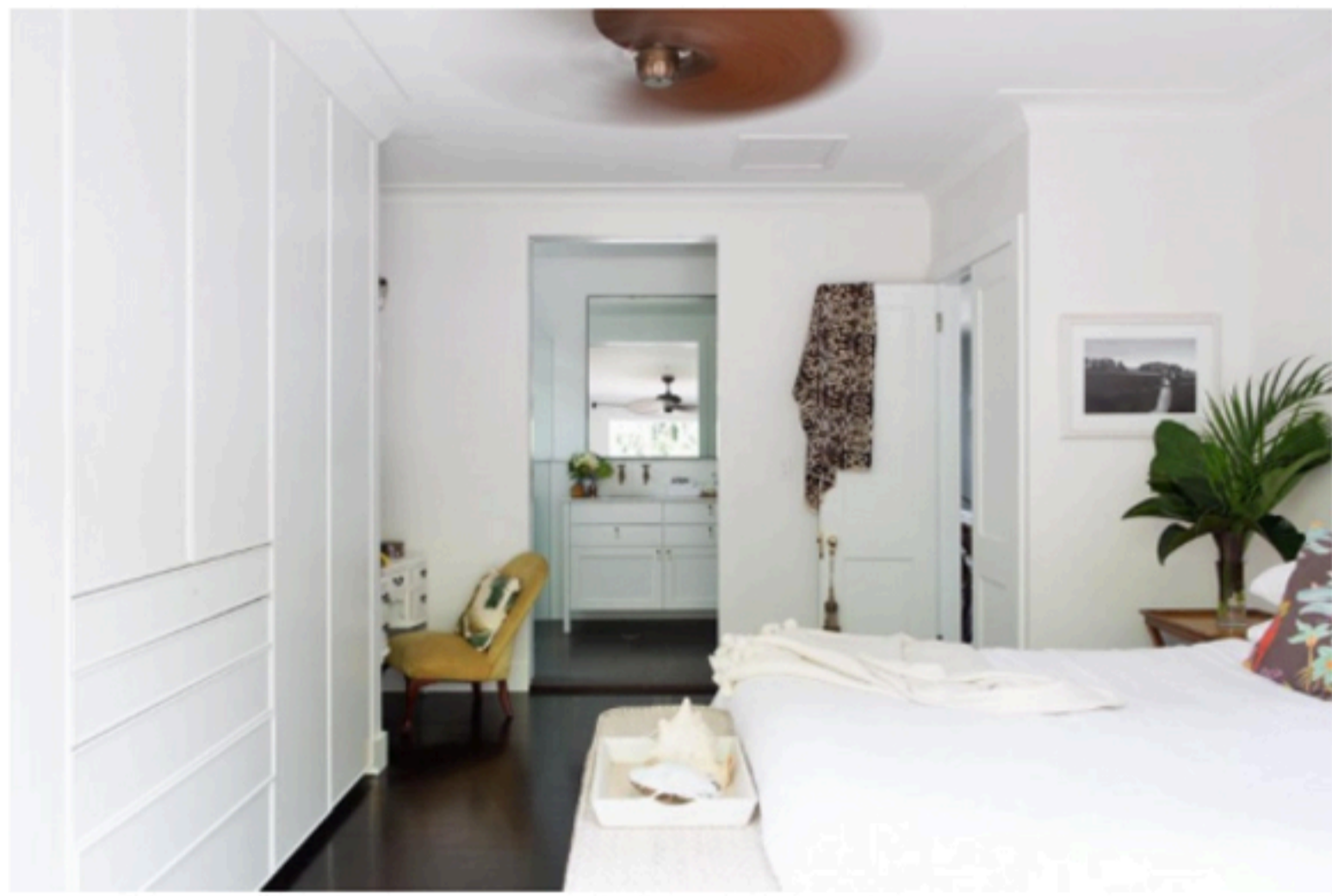
Juxtaposition is key to achieving this look. Don't try to be too matchy-machy and instead vary your textures. Linen sofas are beautifully contrasted by a more austere leather armchair, while jute floor coverings and a few rattan pieces add more layers and lend to the beachy, relaxed feel.

Unframed pieces work best with this plantation, Bahamian style of living area. If you have an old sideboard that's been gathering dust in a bedroom dust it off and reinvent it as a console. Likewise old trunks, suitcases and chests can be repurposed as side tables or coffee tables.

Furniture scale is important – it's all about comfortable extravagance – so always err on the side of oversized rather than undersized. Plush, oversized linen sofas that beg to be lounged in, preferably with washable covers, soften the heavier pieces in the room.

Add something **unique, personal and special** that is not necessarily on trend. This look should be timeless – not 'of the minute'. Source an opulent crystal chandelier or fish out Nana's tapestry from your attic. It's these special pieces that add that layer of intrigue and homeiness and make a room feel less 'showroom' and more 'lounge room'.

Finally, think about your **finings**. Ceiling fans or other tropical keys such as wall paneling, wall sconces and textured wallpaper are all beautiful elements of plantation style, along with greenery, lots of it – a must!



What's your weakness when it comes to interior objects – what can you simply not resist?

Vintage coral, seashells, silver and crystal. Fresh flowers and greenery. I'd rather eat vegemite sandwiches for a month than not have flowers in my home.



What are your five top tips for creating a beautifully curated, clutter-free home?

It all starts with your **structure**. If you have particular pieces of art or furniture you wish to have or keep then you have to design the right spaces for them. Every piece needs its own home within your home.

Don't fall into the trap of replicating what 'looks good' in magazine pictures. **Function is as important as form** – if your room looks good but isn't functional and practical it will constantly be covered in clutter and you won't appreciate how good looking it is. Balance the practical with the aesthetic and you will notice the difference.

Work out where your clutter generates from. Is it school bags, work equipment, toys? Once you've identified this, identify the best **storage solution** for your budget, space, space, space. Implement this, pronto! Even temporary solutions like rattan baskets that can slide under coffee tables, hooks in the laundry or bedrooms for school bags and oversized rattan baskets with lids (ids are great) for storing toys make a huge difference.

Be cut throat. If it doesn't work or you don't use it, don't keep it. Sell it, give it away. Same applies to shopping. If you're not sure exactly where a piece will go or what function will have DO NOT BUY IT. It will simply become clutter.

Make places for **display** and for your favourite pieces. This creates area of interest that you will want to mix up and rearrange, and helps to keep your home interesting, ever evolving yet tidy and orderly.



At a time when Australia's interpretation of plantation, hamptons and coastal style interiors has become (and we say it's rather predictable and tame), it's refreshing to step into the understated elegance of Alanna Smit's tropical hideaway on Sydney's northern beaches...

Have you ever found yourself in a space that ticked so many of your own 'dream home' boxes – floor plan, finishes, furnishing – that you wished you could just move right on in?

One of the perks (or is it a pitfall) of our work on *The Rhapsody* is having many an 'oh – I wish this were mine' moment when photographing the properties of our profile personalities. Case in point – the home of Alanna Smit. This colour-infused, plantation style residence is truly a home with heart, an enviable showcase of the design prowess that has earned Alanna quite the following in interior design and construction circles.

"I have always loved homes that feel like homes – eclectic and warm with collections that tell a story about the people that live there. To me, American and British colonial style interiors achieve this beautifully, but when you combine these approaches with a touch of our laid back coastal style! That's when you achieve an Australian interpretation of plantation – the style of home I wanted for my family," explains Alanna.



"I love my foyer and entrance. It's a beautiful structure, provides light, cross ventilation and the illusion of space as guests enter the relatively small house. But most of all, I love this space because it's so practical. I have hidden storage for shoes and school bags, an oversized front door and thoroughfare to cater for bursts of guests and walk loads of groceries. My foyer light, from the Shum Dekau, is one of the few true indulgences I splurged on in the house and I'm so pleased I did."

Impressive light fittings are not limited to the foyer. A standout feature of the kitchen, a showcase of Alanna's flair for joinery design, is the stunning Genoa's Circo pendant, an oversized dome that literally cocoons Alanna, her family and guests beneath its hand-woven perimeter. The pared back, tribal elegance of this feature is elegantly offset by black louvered doors leading to an impressive butler's pantry, white joinery featuring Alanna's favoured Newport doors, Casarstone benchtops in snow and a butlers sink crowned with the Astra Walker ron tap in aged brass. Recycled French louvered doors from the original cottage conceal appliances. The kitchen is as functional as it is practical, too.



"I love cooking and entertaining so I'm in the kitchen more often than not. The fact that I can see the backyard, the front door, the living areas... every mother can appreciate the benefits of this scope from what is undoubtedly the heart of our home. My pantry allows me to store a lot and be organised – I call it my 'miraculous little rectangle of hope!'"

Between the foyer and the kitchen is the impressive dining room, flanked by a compelling Mangya Home 12-seater Timorese dining table. "It's commanding, dominant and steadfast and I love the way everyone feels the need to be so gentle with it when it took 16 men – literally – to get it in here!" The mirror, originally intended to be a bedhead, is an antique Indian window frame, also from Mangya Home.



Opposite the dining room, the inviting sitting room showcases the simplicity of the fireplace, juxtaposed by a Hamptons-inspired library unit displaying a collection of books, antique-store finds and family memorabilia. The elegant white sofa and white timber chairs from Setto's Designs allow the exquisite ottoman, which Alanna unearthed at an antique shop on the south coast to take centre stage.



Next week... we reveal the master bedroom, ensuite, guest accommodation and bathroom.

All photographs are taken by Simon Whitbread Photography www.simonwhitbread.com.au

Q&A with Alanna Smit

Photography: Simon Whitbread
Words: Bly Carpenter

What would be your ultimate design project?

We live very close to the Newport Arms, recently acquired by the Hemmes group. This property is one in a million – an entertainer's paradise surrounded by tropical gardens with world-class views over Pinetree and a private jetty. I dream about reimagining this space – on a Hemmes budget!



Whose style do you admire?

My mother in law has fabulous style. Her ability to elegantly unite unique artwork, antiques, Persian rugs and photographs of grandkids is simply awe-inspiring.

India Hicks is my tropical goddess. Her children, her husband – family – is clearly the most important aspect of her life and this resonates through every thing she does and through every room of her beautiful home.

All of the women and friends in my life – some creative, and some less so – are all so assured of who they are and that makes anyone stylish in my opinion.

Bunny Williams – the doyenne of New York interior design. Maybe because I love her name, and her style and colourful tastes remind me of my mother's special room. Growing up, I lived in a small, regional coastal town. My mum decorated a special room that had pink velvet lounges, pink carpet with matching drapery, cushions and lampshades. It was glorious! Like mum, Bunny was bold, confident and pioneering at a time when most chose simply to conform. She still smashes out new ideas!

I love Stone Cold Fox and find it very hard to bypass anything by Camilla. I love fashion, shoes and make up but haven't had many opportunities to experiment with new styles over the past seven or so years, which have been defined by suitable attire for painting and renovating.

