



Raked ceilings and exposed brick walls are a reminder of the building's industrial past.

# A space that's just their cup of tea

Decorating a home in a historic building set this designer on a new career path, writes **Jennifer Veerhuis**

## PROJECT

### Owners

Peter Neave and  
Deanne Castronini

### Designer

Ross Fairhurst,  
rossfairhurstdesign.com

### The problem

A newly created apartment in an iconic former industrial building that wasn't a home

### The site

An off-the-plan inner city apartment in Sydney's historic Griffiths Teas building

### Design solution

A sophisticated sanctuary that is functional and stylish

### How long did it take

Two years

It's not every day that you walk into a beauty salon and walk out with a new interior designer. But that's what happened to Deanne Castronini when she stepped into Ross Fairhurst's business.

She and Peter Neave had bought two apartments off the plan in the historic Griffiths Teas building in Surry Hills with the plan to turn them into one home. But they had no idea where to start.

While Deanne was at the salon, she admired its interior renovations and asked who had done the work.

After discovering owner Ross Fairhurst was responsible, Deanne invited him to take a look at their project.

Ross had an interest in interior design and had some industry contacts but he readily admits it wasn't his area of expertise. After accepting the challenge, he made it a priority to understand how the couple lived.

"They were coming from a very large apartment in Cremorne to a very inner city apartment that has no external areas," Ross says. "I didn't want the interior to compete with the views, and most importantly I wanted it to be peaceful and calm."

### Optimising opportunities

Ross says PopovBass Architects provided a beautiful canvas for the new Surry Hills apartments, with European oak timber floors and marble benchtops.

The circa 1915 building had rustic bricks that were left exposed, beautiful large windows and stunning raked ceilings.

Ross says the northeast aspect of Peter and Deanne's sixth-floor apartment was a bonus, providing ample light and city views.

But he wanted to alter the two-bedroom floorplan so he contacted the architects.



Designer Ross Fairhurst got the job after Deanne visited his salon.

While Deanne and Peter's floorplan included an L-shaped living space, with sliding doors providing the opportunity to close off part of the room, Ross was concerned.

"Deanne wanted a room where she could do her own private pilates workouts on her own equipment," Ross says.

"I convinced them to lose the doors and I created a wall with joinery and the apartment became three bedrooms, with one of those rooms dedicated to pilates."

Ross was also concerned about the kitchen, given Deanne and Peter are keen entertainers.

"I felt the kitchen was inadequate for the demands that would be made on it for entertaining," he says. "I redesigned aspects of it and managed to include a walk-in, 2m-wide pantry, a 900mm oven, a steam oven and I doubled the fridge space."

### New York state of mind

Ross says he felt a responsibility when it came to the heritage of the building.

"I wanted to honour the building — all those beautiful big white-washed beams, the central columns," he says.

"When you're in that building, you get the sense you are truly in a New York-style warehouse because even when you walk the hallways, there's reference to the way the Griffiths Teas building was used in the past. It's got industrial elements to it and that's why I used quite a bit of metal, along with fabrics like velvets and silks," he says. "It wasn't about pretending the building didn't exist."

### Made to measure

Ross had a number of pieces custom made, including the sofa, ottoman, dining room table, towel rail in the bathroom, console table and joinery, with each piece made to the millimetre to fit perfectly.

The dining table seats four on a daily basis but can be extended to seat 10, and a number of the pieces in the apartment serve a dual purpose. The size of the lift meant the sofa had to be specially made in two pieces.

The living room also wasn't an easy shape to work with — it goes into a wedge on the northeast corner — so fitting furniture wasn't straightforward, plus the large windows meant there wasn't a lot of wall space available.

But by including the third bedroom for the pilates equipment, a wall was created which allowed for a large section of joinery in the living room, and it now houses the pop-up television and a floor-to-ceiling china cabinet.

The owners love their new home. While Ross is continuing with his salon work, now he's also working on new interiors projects.

**Pictures** John Fotiadis