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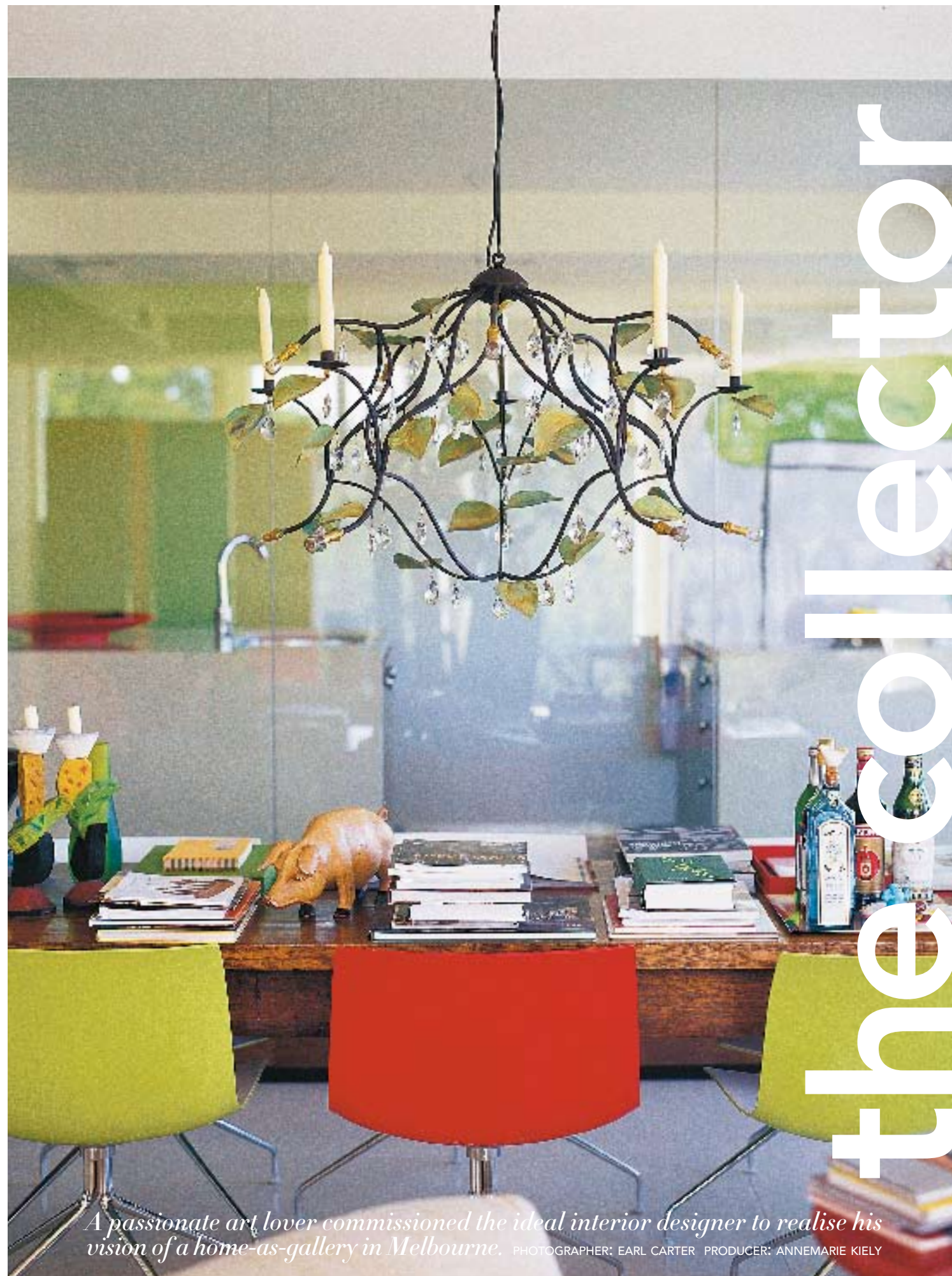
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the collector

A passionate art lover commissioned the ideal interior designer to realise his vision of a home-as-gallery in Melbourne. PHOTOGRAPHER: EARL CARTER PRODUCER: ANNEMARIE KIELY



THIS PAGE: the informal living wing is dominated by Robert Klippel's floor-to-ceiling sculpture *No. 708*. The formal entertaining zone is through the timber-lined doorway. Deferring to the strength of the original '60s architecture and his client's formidable collection of contemporary art, interior designer, Russell Grainger pared this apartment back and gave it a cool Milanese vibe. **OPPOSITE:** at the heart of the informal living zone is a stretch of French oak table that serves as both dining and reading surface. The 'Catifa' chairs by Arper take their colour cues from the space's surrounding artworks. Details, last pages.

The informal living area's B&B sofas and the Gae Aulenti glass coffee table (all from the client's former home) were set on an angle to allow for a greater appreciation of the garden view. Vera Möller's installation *Things Under The Seaisits* in front of a Rick Amor painting, *The Visitor*. The folding bookshelf is the 'Nuvola Rossa' designed by Vico Magistretti for Cassina, available from Space. The chandelier features different adornments for the changing seasons.



RUSSELL GRAINGER is well versed in the conventions of domestic design but no longer wants to create around them. So intent is he on turning and twisting proprieties that his interiors have slipped into that stream of refined anarchy which many – bar the Italian aristocracy – seem unable to navigate: you know, that fabulous cocktail of modern masters, Murano chandeliers, regal brocades, terrazzo floors and Memphis kitsch all stirred into brutalist architecture of the 1960's or shaken up in palazzos of the late 19th century.

This Melbourne-based interior designer has earned the right to kick the rule book to the curb – Grainger translated the fresh-faced modernism of the Country Road brand into retail fit-outs of equal ease and edge after helping to hone a 'Modern Australian' style at Nexus Designs – but before conceding that the successful assemblage of seemingly indiscriminate “bits”, in this iconic South Yarra apartment (designed in 1961 by the Sidney Myer Music Bowl's architects – Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths & Simpson) hinged on his design maturity, he handballs all credit to his client.

“I don't have to teach or convince him. He's there almost at the same time you are and if he's not, he got there before you – his appreciation of art, his understanding of horticulture, the whole thing about textiles and craft.” He motions to the surface of a French farmhouse bench barely visible under a mountain-range of magazines that scale subjects as diverse as photography, travel, food, wine, architecture and design. “Most of the time I see the kitchen table looking like this. He has an amazing collection of art and furniture that breaks many of the bounds, which is why we decided to push all the furniture off the square and twist it on an angle – so that he can fully appreciate the greatest work of art there is....” Grainger turns his back on a theatrical, raised kitchen whose prosaic parts are hidden in two island cubes and gestures to a west-end wall of glass framing a painterly panorama of the Royal Botanic Gardens, “not bad, is it?”

In deference to this verdant strip of nature defining one inner edge of this upper level 'Structuralist' style building, and the frenetically coloured creations of an international who's who of contemporary art defining the rest (a newly arrived Bill Viola installation vies for attention), Grainger has judiciously pared back the apartment (mostly untouched since the 1960s) to a white-walled setting and exploited the architectural strengths of the building.

THAT FABULOUS COCKTAIL OF MURANO CHANDELIERS, REGAL BROCADES, TERRAZZO FLOORS AND MEMPHIS KITSCH



THIS PAGE: the client requested a kitchen “that looked like a gallery”, but could also serve the needs of catering staff when he entertained. The cook top is concealed behind concertina doors, *above*, while the two stone-clad island cubes, *right*, “further dissolve the kitchen cliché”. Grainger sealed the raised space with an open-ended wall of glass to ensure an uninterrupted appreciation of— the verdant parklands beyond.





LEFT: the soft neon glow of the entry hall's feature work by Swiss-born, New York-based artist Ugo Rondinone, gives the bullseye signal to visitors that they are in the space of a passionate art collector. **ABOVE:** view of the living room from the informal dining area. **BELOW LEFT:** the apartment's pre-existing maze of five bedrooms was whittled down to two luxury master suites, one for summer and one for winter. The summery south-east wing takes its colour cues from Angela Brennan's abstract painting *Breezing Glances On a Par*. The settee is slip-covered in stripes from 'Ici et La' and the bed is dressed in a Rae Ganim bedspread. **BELOW RIGHT:** a feature of the French oak bedside table is the sculpture 'Love', by Peter Cole.



THIS MELBOURNE INTERIOR DESIGNER HAS EARNED THE RIGHT TO KICK THE RULE BOOK TO THE CURB



In the formal living zone a shallow, vaulted ceiling was installed to conceal new ductwork and wiring. The space plays host to a mixed marriage of styles – reproduction Louis, farmhouse French, industrial Italian – all set in front of a Dale Frank painting, (at right), and Tony Tucson's *Abstraction*, (above).



In the apartment's north-facing library, the book spines set the decorative agenda. Works on paper by artists Joe Furlonger, Fred Williams, John Olsen and Sarah Faulkner break up the rigorous geometry. The turquoise 'Nona' chaise by Arteform travelled from the client's former home.



THIS PAGE LEFT: a section of the library is set with a mix of design icons including Philippe Starck's 'Rosy Angelis' standard lamp and 'Costes' chair. **ABOVE:** a carved totem from the Tiwi Islands presides over the formal living zone. Details, last pages.

"NO SURFACE IS SAFE," LAUGHS GRAINGER, DELIGHTING IN A TABLETOP ARRANGEMENT OF HIS CLIENT'S OWN MAKING

Room-defining doors were removed and a stone floor introduced. It sounds simple enough. "Well, it wasn't," assures the interior designer who details an inventory of service upgrades – "heating, cooling and wiring for a sophisticated sound system" – that necessitated the widening of walls and the installation of dropped ceilings, one of which curves into a barely discernible arc. "A really shallow, shallow vault," corrects Grainger wincing at the memory of the living-room ceiling being craned over the upper-level balcony. "It introduces a design element where I couldn't introduce anything else because the architecture was so strong. You do walk into lovely old apartments in Italy and such details lend atmosphere."

This subtle 'Itali-cising' of space extended to new stone floors (tiles shipped in from Italy), lavish brocade settees (that slip cover into sharp linen suits for summer) and Murano chandeliers (one of which has bronze rococo branches designed to be fitted with patinated buds in spring, copper leaves in autumn and crystal droplets in winter). "It must be the proximity to those magnificent gardens that has led to such a seasonal adjustment of internal style," muses the designer who turned the five "tortured little" back bedrooms of an apartment planned around a central lift core, into the decadent sleeping choice of a south-east corner suite in summer or a north-east alternative in winter.

"The client knew he wanted two bedrooms, both with their own bathroom and dressing room. People now spend much more time in bedrooms and bathrooms, my client does – in his bathroom he listens to the news, shaves, does a lot of thinking, [so it] had to take in relaxation and thought provocation", which is why the spaces were first up wired for sound and treated for the display of art.

"No surface is safe from curator's consideration," laughs Grainger suddenly delighting in a provocative tabletop arrangement of his client's own making. "Before he moved in to his new home we did an inventory of furniture and artwork then assessed what was going to fit in and what was going to go for sale. Mentally I could see where the large paintings were going to go but ultimately all I could do was to keep the scheme as light and white as possible without making it too arctic. Neutrality was the key so that that the art could speak for itself." And speak it does, volumes about the late 20th century's outgrowth of modernism and the 21st century's new found fondness for stark, intellectual abstractions, new colour field investigations and multi-media experiments. "Even the kitchen was briefed as gallery with a sink," Grainger sighs. "Art for art's sake".

ANNEMARIE KIELY

The furnishings in the south-west sitting corner – B&B Italia sofas and Toshiyuki Kita's 'Wink' chair – are rendered in neutrals so as not to distract from a Tony Bevan painting, *Head On*, and the major Robert Klippel work. Details, last pages.

