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PICTURE PERFECT ON LOCATION IN A LONDON TERRACE **HOME & AWAY** SYDNEY DIGS FOR A GLOBAL TRAVELLER **FRENCH REVOLUTION** REVISITING A RISK-TAKING RESIDENCE

Interior designer Ruth Levine loves the "crushed-card" look of the Diesel with Foscarini 'Rock' lamps **(this page)**. Derryn likes the "boldness" of Gloria Petyarre's *Untitled (Leaves)*, which hangs above the lounge. **(Opposite page, top right)** Derryn in front of her own recently painted *Forest Glow*.

Derryn Tal is passionate about her art. So intrinsic is it to her way of life that she has woven it into the very heart of her new family home in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. She's chosen the colours, placed the furniture and even designed the layout of the living areas around her own artwork and select pieces from her personal collection.

The warm yet minimalist home Derryn has built with her husband, Yosi, and three children, Alon, 20, Rami, 17, and Shani, 14, is a study in creative balance. There's a considered but delicate tension between the artist's colourful works and the clean, light-filled living space that's been specially designed to fit around the art while doing sound duty as a functional family area.

"I just love colour," says the contemporary artist, whose bold, textural creations are inspired by experiments mixing different media, such as oil and wax or acrylic paint on photographic emulsion paper. "I believe that, in order to let something stand out, you need quiet around it."

A collaborative effort between the Tal family, Sydney architect Conrad Lowry and interior designer Ruth Levine, the four-bedroom house is the result of a rare opportunity to build in Sydney's established suburb of Rose Bay. When Derryn and her husband found the land – the site of a former school – they asked their builder, Cameron Rosen, for advice. He dropped by to investigate and promptly bought the block of land next door.

A keen advocate of sustainable building practices, Cameron went on to build four houses in the subdivision as part of his 'Eco Challenge'. The Tals' home, which took three years to complete, features sustainable materials, such as Ritek walls and Kingspan insulated roofing.

"I was so excited when we found the land," remembers Derryn. "It was a blank canvas for me, and such an exciting prospect to create something new."

At the start of the project, Ruth and Conrad were given six key pieces of art to design around. The works included Derryn's own paintings and pieces she had gathered over the years, such as a striking, sculptural money roll from the Solomon Islands, made from ruby-coloured bird feathers – once part of her father's collection of primitive art. →

The only other direction, says Derryn, was to include the colour red. "It was obvious from the works we'd given them that red would be the highlight colour," she says. "I guess maybe it reflects the passion I have for my art."

Although spontaneous and energetic, there's a certain sense of control about Derryn's artworks – perhaps a nod to her background as a graphic designer and illustrator – which is reflected in the minimal, pared-back house design. "I like the home to be a vessel for things that have personal meaning, whether I've made them myself or collected them," Derryn says, casting a satisfied eye over her home. "I like clean lines, white backgrounds and lots of light – the illusion of space, even when you don't have much."

The house is a mere eight metres wide, so creating a sense of roominess was a priority for the family. Conrad's use of visual tricks, such as including slightly wider hallways, mirrors, floor-to-ceiling windows and doors and high ceilings enhances the flow of space. Conrad also employed the Japanese concept of courtyards and ponds to create indoor-outdoor flow and fill the house with light.

The resulting modern two-level home features an open-plan living area, incorporating kitchen, dining and two living rooms running the length of the ground floor with four bedrooms, a bathroom and ensuite upstairs.

"I really love open plan; I always have," says Derryn. "I don't like the idea of shutting your kids out. I always like to know that, wherever we are in the house, we can chat and still see what each other is doing. As a result, we all have a really lovely communicative relationship."

This sense of openness is particularly evident in Derryn's favourite room – a formal lounge area on the ground floor, which sits nestled underneath a dramatically suspended staircase and overlooks a small bamboo-filled courtyard. It's also one of Ruth's favourite spaces in the home. "It's an internal room yet it's light and connects visually with the outside," she says. "There's a balance of texture and colour – bold red against the white wall; the high gloss of the coffee table reflecting the textures of timber stairs and the 'Napoleon' rug. What I love about the house is the sense of exploration. Conrad has achieved great connectivity with the architecture and the balance of a Japanese aesthetic, which we have continued through to the furnishings."

What's striking about the home is not just the clean, minimal lines and all-white surrounds of what is essentially a functional family space – which Derryn insists is easier to keep clean than darker colours – but the fact that absolutely everything feels so new. And that's because it is.

"We donated all our old furniture to charity," explains Derryn. "The only things we kept were two bedside tables for the boys' rooms, which looked new, anyway. If we'd brought our old furniture into this house, it would have killed the architecture, rather than enhance it. We feel like we have been rejuvenated with a totally new start – new suburb, new school, new house, new furniture. It's very exciting." ✣

The home's angular beauty **(this page)** is perfectly at ease in its setting. **(Opposite page, top)** A mirrored door leads to the guest bathroom and laundry. **(Opposite page, bottom)** Derryn working on *Dawn to Dusk* in her studio.