



Tower of inspiration

From derelict cottage to desirable den, this renovation also includes a charming space fit for royalty

When Brisbane fashion designer Julie Tengdahl bought her Highgate Hill home – a five-bedroom, four bathroom dwelling overlooking the city – five years ago, it was little more than a derelict cottage. Fortunately, it's heritage listed, and the original structure had been maintained. A hearty dose of TLC and clever architecture saw the home restored to its former glory with new spaces and sleek, modern touches that work with the old.

"It had a beautiful soul and I knew we could do something wonderful with it," says Julie, 45, who started the Tengdahl label in 1997.

"We've kept the old and blended it with the new. We brought in local architect Sue Driver, and she came up with an amazing plan that utilises the view from every room of the house. It was a complete overhaul."

The home, which Julie shares with husband Brett and daughters Bridgette, 16, Jemma, 13, and Anders, 7, is testament to the skill involved. Julie sought to combine the tranquillity and freedom of contemporary decor with the warmth of functionality of a true family home, and insisted the space "feed off the elements".

The kitchen, with a bench carved from quartz, leads to a back deck, which takes in city views and the treetops. The deck paves the way to the pool; perched high in the backyard it looks as though it's about to careen down the side of the hill.

"I didn't want it to close us off from the environment around us," says Julie. "Being at home during a rainstorm is a magical experience."

The interior is contemporary, but the modern elements work well with original timbers and classic cottage eccentricities. The walls are stark and clean, and the wooden floorboards have been polished and painted with Japan Black – a thin glossy black coating used on historic locks, handles, bolts, hinges and tin as a protective layer that gives an aged look and feel.

A favourite feature of the home is the princess tower – where the master bedroom, which has two spacious home offices, an open-plan bathroom and a private

deck are found. Julie and her husband designed it as a retreat and a place to take in the expansive views.

"We call it the princess tower because – being up so high, with the city lights dancing in the distance – it's enchanting," says Julie. "I love going up there with a glass of wine and my sketchpad, and watching the lights. It's an incredibly creative, inspiring space."

The home is full of treasures from travels to faraway places – the most precious is an antique Buddha from Thailand – and books, which serve as inspiration for Julie when she is working.

"I have [a] Scandinavian background and when I was young I was given a beautiful old book about Scandinavian light architecture. It listed Louis Poulsen's artichoke design as the 'light of the century'," says Julie, whose Tengdahl label was formed on the philosophy that a garment's true beauty lies in simplicity of form and function.

"I fell in love with it [Poulsen's artichoke design] and after dreaming of owning one for more than 20 years I finally have one in my home."

She still has the book, which she says reminds her that a truly thoughtful design transcends the decades to be an object of desire for many generations.

LOVE IT

"At the moment this Heather Blacklock [an emerging indigenous artist] painting is my favourite. After seeing her porcupine quill technique at a National Trust exhibition, I asked her to paint something for our lounge room. Heather's work is being recognised for merging the old with the new, which I feel epitomises the home itself. The painting tells the story of a female porcupine being followed around an ant's nest," says Julie.





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NEW LIFE ... by weaving old and modern qualities, Julie Tengdahl has created a liveable space. **Photographs** // Richard Waugh