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VIRTUAL REALITY

Rich textures, subtle layers of colour and classic antiques are all reflected in the mirrored walls of interior designer Cameron Kimber's modest-sized sixties apartment in Sydney's east. The masterful illusion creates a sense of surprising grandeur. PHOTOGRAPHER: LISA COHEN PRODUCER: MATT PAGE



The television room, PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT, with grass paper walls by Schumacher, a sofa by Classic Chairs, Chinoiserie table by Margot Montgomery and a lamp from McLeod's Antiques. RIGHT: beside a painting based on 18th century wallpaper panels is an engraving of a boy and a small watercolour. The lampshade is from Brook Street Trading. THESE PAGES, ABOVE: on the kitchen wall above English Regency chairs, is an 18th century English portrait from Ros Palmer Interiors. OPPOSITE: in the sitting room is a Hepplewhite table from Martyn Cook Antiques, a chair in Mokum Textiles fabric, a cushion in yellow damask from Order Imports and a 19th century Chinoiserie chair from Thomas Hamel.







Behind the bed, OPPOSITE, a mirror reflects a wall in blue strié cotton by Rubelli, and two 18th century oil paintings. The bedhead was custom made in Brunswig & Fils linen, the bed linen is from HouseHold Linens. The side table is an early 19th century Chinese export and the wall light was bought in the United States. THIS PAGE TOP LEFT: the bathroom with mosaic tiles from Pazotti and a stool from The Country Trader. TOP RIGHT: the sitting room leads to the balcony. At one end of the mirrored wall is a wenge panel concealing a structural column; in the foreground sits a Margot Montgomery chair. ABOVE LEFT: an Eero Saarinen table from Mobili with a 19th century Gainsborough chair from HJ Quigley Antiques. ABOVE RIGHT: on a 19th century chest of drawers from Ros Palmer Interiors sits a 1930s lamp with shade from Brook Street Trading.

A painting by Susan O'Doherty, in the sitting room, OPPOSITE, hangs above a sofa slip-covered in Mokum Textiles white cotton canvas. The cushions are in aqua damask from Ascraft & Decortex and Brunschwig & Fils chocolate velvet. Sitting on an 18th century butterfly-leaf Pembroke table from Martyn Cook Antiques is a lamp from Darryl Gordon. The stool facing the sofa is covered in black horsehair from Boyac Decorative Furnishings. The floor is grey Spanish sandstone from Pazotti. Details, last pages.

KIMBER WANTED AIRY, ARCHITECTURAL SPACES AND WITH AN ILLUSIONIST'S HAND PUSHES AND PULLS THE BOUNDARIES TO CREATE A SENSE OF COME AND GO.

"THE MINUTE THE mirrors went in, the flat worked," says interior designer Cameron Kimber. "There was a wall dividing the kitchen from the living room, which made it poky, so I ripped it out and was left with a long narrow room. The mirrors opened the whole thing up and gave a sense of something beyond. The trick with mirror is not only to watch what it's going to reflect, but also to use it in an architectural way." Huge mirrors are a masterly deception. Even when you realise they're there, it's impossible to 'see' them.

Kimber's two-bedroom apartment is in an early 1960s building in the Sydney suburb of Woollahra. "I wanted something from that period because I knew it would be bland," he says "This was an dump when I first saw it, but the plumbing was in the right spot and the location was fantastic, in a very pretty street, and I knew I could do something with it. But it was a major re-do. I demolished a few of the walls, replastered others, raised the doors, square-set the cornices, put in a new kitchen and bathroom – and ended up with logical spaces that I could use." Large structural columns were given a bold treatment and covered with dark wenge timber.

There is no feeling of boxiness in the box-shaped apartment. Kimber wanted airy, architectural spaces, and with an illusionist's hand he pushes and pulls the boundaries to create a sense of come and go, drawing the eye forward with the dark tones, making walls recede with the mirrors. Painted walls are in one of his favourite whites, Dulux 'Chalk USA', and the kitchen cupboards are painted the same shade to 'read' as a wall. The major upholstered pieces of furniture were slip-covered with a washable cotton canvas from Mokum in a similar tone, "to disappear into the wall colour."

"I've always loved collecting antiques and objects and I wanted a simplified backdrop for those things. Antiques can look fantastic in a stark setting." The deep tones of the timber columns are echoed in the sitting room with a magnificent 18th century bookcase, the odd cushion, and a table covered with a velvet cloth whose luscious tone is somewhere between green and brown. "Then I just flicked my favourite colours into the space: yellow and green, chocolate, and a very pale aqua." The colour cues were taken from a 19th century Chinese ceramic figure – since broken.

"I didn't want a typical beige-on-beige apartment. And I wanted a grey floor instead of the usual limestone or parquetry – the colours within the canvas, in fact," he says referring to a diptych by Susan O'Doherty which hangs over the sofa. "The wenge panels are almost a punctuation, like eyebrows on a face." Existing aluminium windows were resprayed to tone with the timber, with venetian blinds to match. "There are no curtains – that would fill it up, and I wanted this to be very alive and breezy. It has windows on three sides, which gives great cross ventilation, and I love the outlook." The apartment tower is set well back from the road and surrounded by lawns and gardens, and the balcony off Kimber's sitting room looks into the branches of mature old trees.

Objects and furniture were chosen carefully – pieces that he loves and of good quality that have been collected over the years, often from the antique dealers he has worked with – and used with restraint. "If you're constantly buying you have to constantly edit," he says. "Often it's what you don't put into a space that makes it better. But I'm not one for just one lamp and one ashtray. Things give personality to a room."

A counterpoint to the prevailing lightness is the television room, in the character of a library with bookcases, small tables at hand, and colours in deeper bronze tones enhanced with a play of textures (grass paper, sisal, linen, silk). A slightly Oriental feeling is inferred with touches of black lacquer, Chinoiserie and a painting based on 18th century wallpaper panels.

He's a dab hand at the subtleties of colour and fabric. "I wanted the colours to flow into each other, with no sharp breaks," he says. "Variations run through the flat, sometimes murky, sometimes clearer." The aqua of the bathroom's tiles, for example, gains strength for the bedroom's walls. "And I like simple fabrics like cotton and canvas, straw and raffia, with bits of velvets and silks, really opulent fabrics, as a contrast. Putting good furniture with Belgian matting stops it looking too formal or overly grand," he adds.

"Understated rooms are easier to live with. But decorating is a fine balance. I definitely like rooms to have glamour. There's nothing more boring than total understatement." BETSY BRENNAN

