

Handmade house

MINIMAL doesn't necessarily mean less – or denigrating the idea of more. Here, as DAVID HARRISON suggests, it is simply asking us to live a life with more quality.

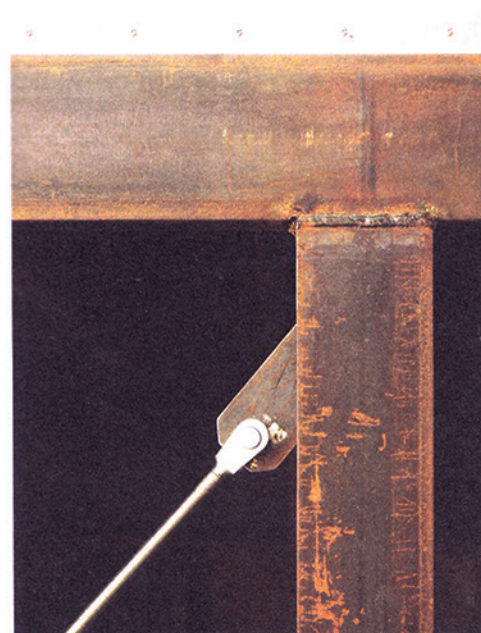
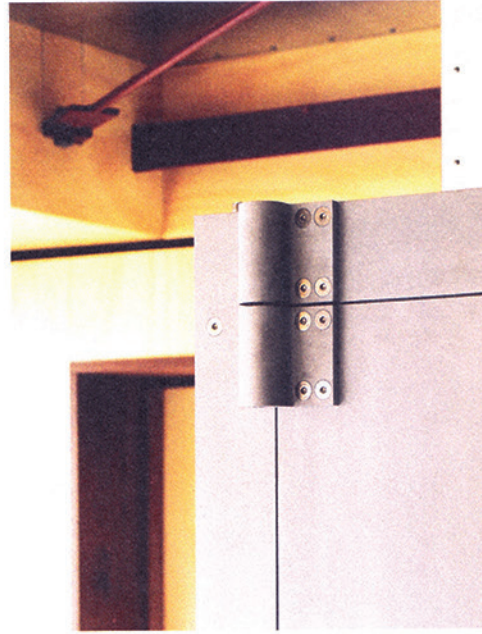
TEXT & STYLING DAVID HARRISON | PHOTOGRAPHY CRAIG WALL

The home of architect Alex VanderFroëchk of Studio Ventana, is an example of the magic that can happen when two highly talented and uncompromising people collaborate on a project that resonates strongly. While the expression 'a labour of love' is horribly overused, it is in this case an absolutely accurate description. VanderFroëchk returned to Sydney in 2000 after nearly 22 years working in New York on projects as varied as film scenography, museums and residential housing. The apartment, situated on the top floor of a bijoux three storey development near Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney's inner west suburb of Camperdown, had once been a research laboratory connected to Sydney University. VanderFroëchk remembers it being full of strange piping and medical research machinery. Three years ago this was all removed and with the help of Sydney-based furniture designer and master joiner, Gary Galego and master builders Telgri, the transformation from lab to luxury home took place. Over a twelve-month period a highly individual apartment with all the majestic beauty of post-war passenger aircraft was created.

Alex VanderFroëchk designed the apartment over an intense six-months but the refinement of the details, fabrication and installation of the extensive joinery and wall linings took an additional year to complete. "I brought a lot of ideas to this project that I had been thinking about for a very long time. It was a distillation of many years of experience and I was determined to come away with a space that was totally true to its materials. I didn't want things coated or tricked up in any way. Everything had to be presented honestly and it had to be exceptionally well built" says VanderFroëchk. Luckily VanderFroëchk had met Galego, a graduate of Canberra

School of Art (ANU) and the two went about refining the concept with Galego's eye for detail and intimate understanding of materials. The finished project reveals in the minimal material palette of hoop pine plywood, Cambia Ash (a chocolate coloured thermally modified form of European ash) aluminium and two types of stone – marble and finely granulated black granite. The constant use of contrasting dark and light tones and the reduction of everything to extremely simple forms, gives the apartment a feeling of serenity, while in close up it exhibits a fanatical level of detail. The finished 3mm aluminium sheet ceiling was installed in such a way as to resemble the pop riveted fuselages of post-war airliners and were purposefully installed to give a slightly imperfect surface to catch the light. Wardrobes were made from shot blasted 10mm plate aluminium to provide massive but visually soft storage that is lined with camphor laurel timber to prevent moths and create a beautiful fragrance – just as was routinely done centuries ago. Standard building staples such as plasterboard and MDF were banished from the build, replaced by plywood and solid timbers. Obsolete hinges from decades ago were found and imported, door handles were custom made – nothing was ordinary or second rate. This type of custom work does not come cheap but such was VanderFroëchk's passion to deliver an apartment that would last a hundred years, no expense was spared in the construction and finishing.

"I wanted the materials to reflect the person who made it. I wanted it to be evident that everything was lovingly put together," says VanderFroëchk.





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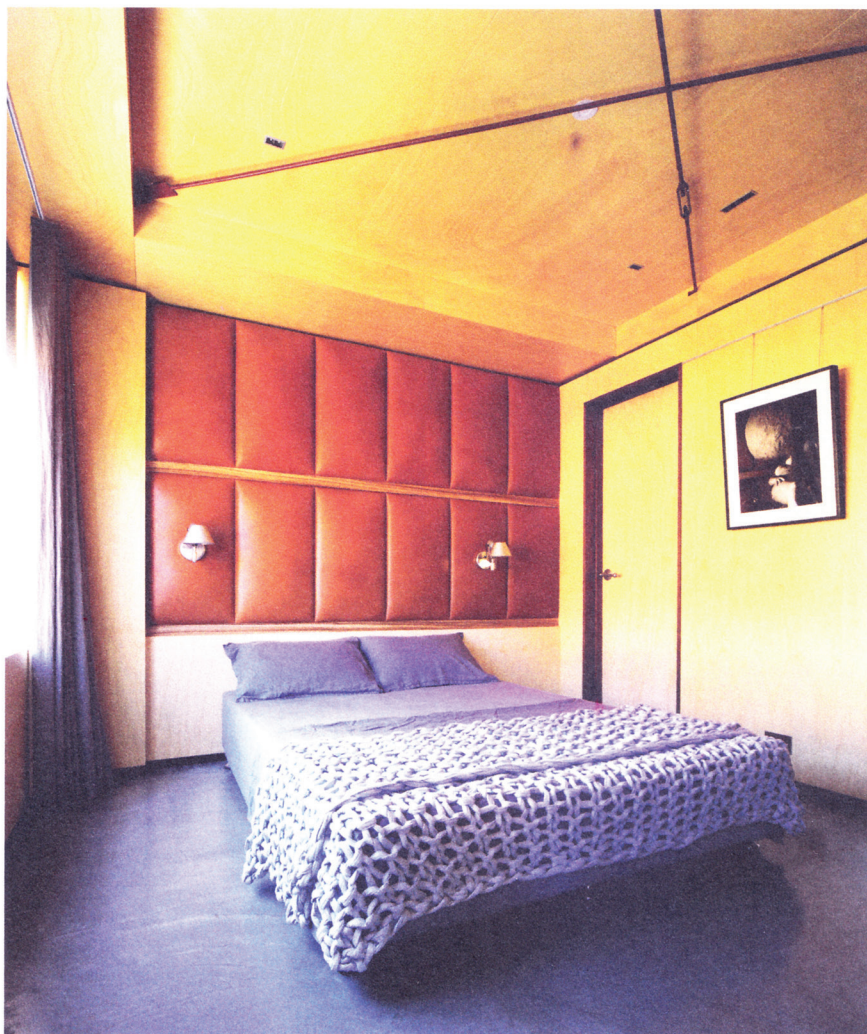


PREVIOUS TOP | THE GUEST BATHROOM CONTINUES THE MATERIAL THEME WITH CARRARA MARBLE HOOP PINE PLYWOOD AND CAMBIA ASH. ROUND WINDOWS AND MIRRORS ECHO THE CIRCULAR CUT-OUTS USED IN THE STAIRCASE. PREVIOUS BOT TOM | A SMALL ROOM WAS DEDICATED TO THIS AMAZING WASHBASIN BY GARY GALEGO WITH ITS TRIPLE CURVED FRONT IN CAMBIA ASH AND THE TOP IN BLACK GRANITE. ABOVE | LOOKING FROM THE OPEN PLAN DINING ROOM INTO THE KITCHEN AREA, A TILED TERRACE OPENS UP TO THE LEFT WHILE THE STAIRS LEAD TO A MEZZANINE GUEST BEDROOM THAT DOUBLES AT OTHER TIMES AS A CASUAL LOUNGE FOR WATCHING TV.



ABOVE | THE LIBRARY HAS THE DARK SOMBRE FEEL SO APPROPRIATE FOR A PROPER LIBRARY AND IS HEAVILY LADEN WITH LARGE ARCHITECTURE, ART AND DESIGN BOOKS.
OPPOSITE | GALEGO CREATED A HEAVILY PADDED LEATHER WALL USING A WAXED LEATHER CALLED MARRAKESH, FROM NSW LEATHERS IN COMBINATION WITH HORIZONTAL STRIPS OF SOLID ZEBRANO WOOD AS PER THE OWNER AND ARCHITECT'S BRIEF TO ADD A BIT OF LUXURY.

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DROP BOX

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