



The dark side

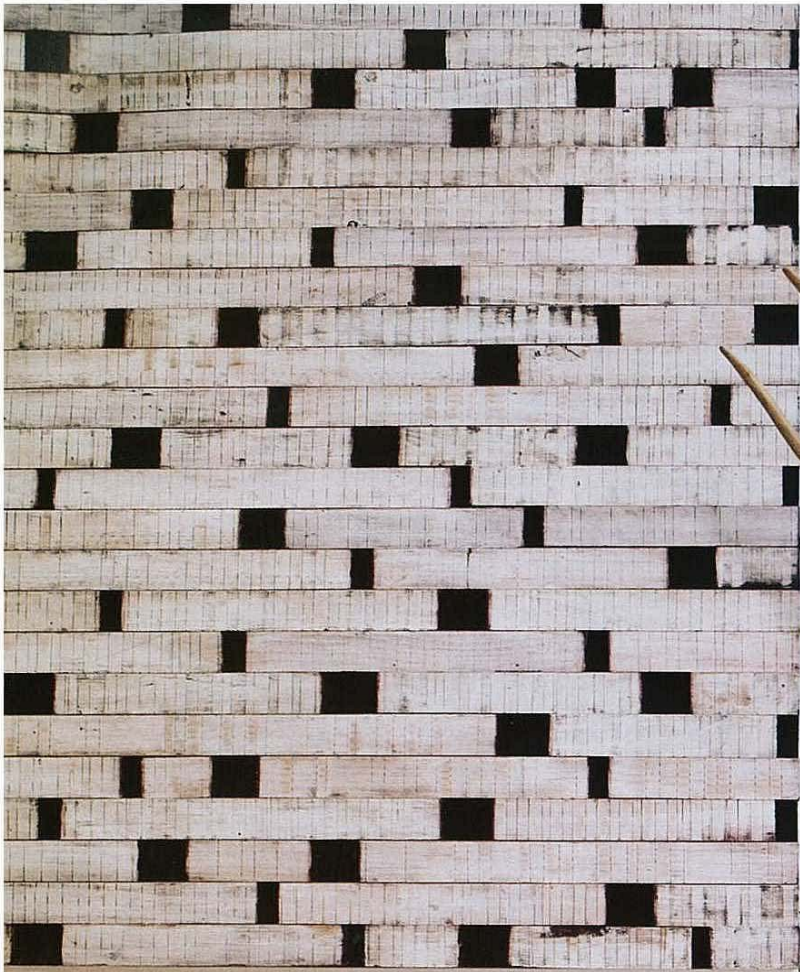
Bold, dramatic and effortlessly elegant, a coat of black paint can transform any space. But before you take the plunge, remember to:

1. Ensure walls are well prepared. Black, especially in a gloss or semi-gloss paint, shows all impressions.
2. Leave ceilings white or pale to let the room breathe.
3. Accent with metallic or light-coloured furnishings.
4. Paint one wall at a time – a single feature wall may be all you need.

living

madison

HOMES • FOOD • WINE • TRAVEL



MINIMAL EFFORT

A MODERNIST APPROACH AND A BLACK
AND WHITE PALETTE CREATE A HIP URBAN
OASIS FOR A YOUNG MELBOURNE FAMILY

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STYLING KAREN COTTON





POP ART

A bright yellow painting by David Band sits above a two-sided fireplace and pops against the dining room's black feature wall, while perspex Philippe Starck Louis Ghost chairs add lightness.

FAMILY MATTERS

The kitchen's island bench in which Jane, Henry (left), and Tom are seated – with Matt dashing past – doubles as an eating space and work surface.

over.” While Matt designed the home, he knew exactly what Jane liked. “I incorporated both our styles,” he says.

The pair is accustomed to second-guessing each other's design sensibilities after being chosen from thousands of couples in 2004 to star in the second series of Channel Nine's reality TV show *The Block*. The program pitted four design-savvy duos against one another by asking them to remodel flats in Sydney's Manly. “We were relocated from Melbourne to Sydney for 14 weeks,” says Matt. And while the couple didn't win, they relished working together.

From the street, the Martino home looks like a single-storey black box (Matt is a fan of the flat-roofed style of the 1950s and '60s), but open the front door and a sleek three-level house is revealed, constructed on a subtle eight-metre gradient. With Matt's 15 years experience as an architectural designer coupled with Jane's love of fashion and design, it's no wonder they have created a house that serves as both a family home and a shrine to modernist design.

No detail is left to chance. From the playroom to the walk-in wardrobe, the sitting room to the artist's studio, everything has the couple's unique stamp on it – although Matt is quick to point out he's not above borrowing a



little inspiration from a few of his favourite hotels and designers. He cites New York's The Mercer hotel as a favourite – a hipper-than-thou locale designed by Christian Liaigre. The French designer is famed for his pioneering use of dark woods and grey walls, and creates clutter-free worlds in which symmetry and precision reign. One look around the Martino's home and it's easy to see the similarities. Yet where the two diverge is with the couple's bold use of colour.

“I wanted to bring the seasonal colours from outside in,” says Matt of the sunshine-yellow chairs and apple-green →

“We wanted to create a stylish retreat, a family home and a place to entertain,” says 39-year-old architect, designer and artist, Matt Martino, of the multi-level contemporary house he designed and built from scratch in Melbourne's Glen Iris.

“It had to be modern but not cold; lived-in without looking tired or unstyled and never, ever was it to look like a display home,” he adds. That's a tall order, but the result is a stunning house that combines modernist architecture with a boutique hotel-style interior.

Overlooking colourful rooftops and towering trees, Matt shares the three-bedroom house with his wife of six years, Jane, 32, who owns and runs Undertow Media, as well as their three boys, Tom, four, Henry, three, and Sonny, two.

When Jane found the spot in mid-2008 it was “basically just a block of land”, Matt explains. “Then my imagination took

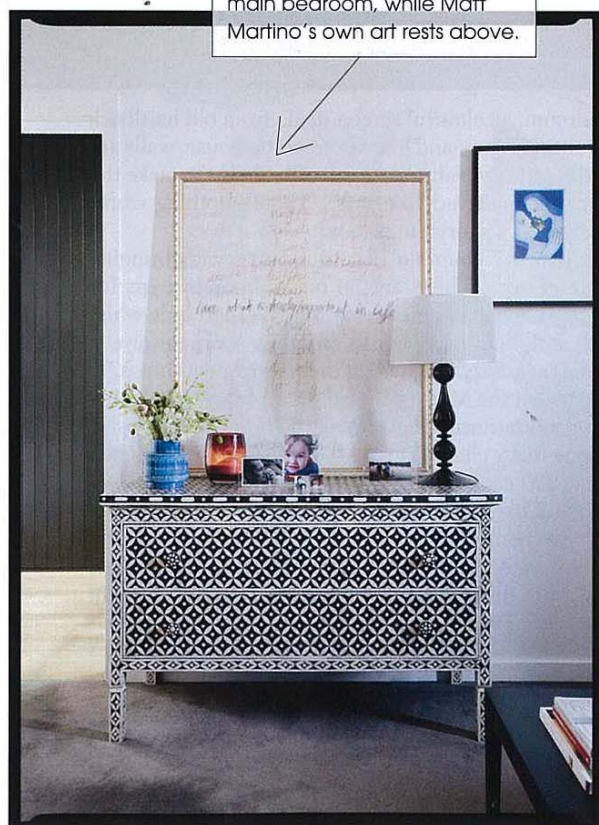
GREEN OUTLOOK

The grass-green carpet and matching velvet Zuster chairs in the sitting room complement the colourful screen (right), fashioned from old hardback novels.



EAST MEETS WEST

A mosaic-style chest adds an exotic touch to the main bedroom, while Matt Martino's own art rests above.



"I WANTED TO BRING SEASONAL COLOURS FROM OUTSIDE IN"



Matt Martino's "inspiration wall" in his studio.

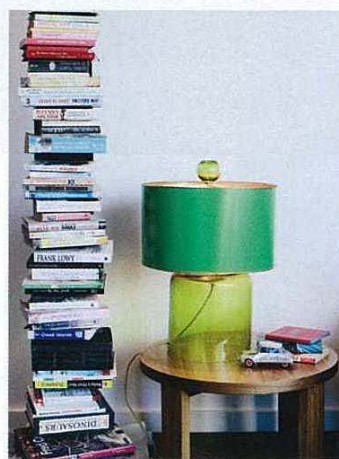
"ART HELPS MAKE
THE HOUSE APPEAR
LESS CONTRIVED"



lamp and rug which burst against the white walls. And then of course there's the designer furniture: eight Philippe Starck Louis Ghost chairs; a black Zuster dining table, a mosaic-tiled chest from Ruby Star Traders and piles of striped Missoni bath towels.

Only two paint shades are used on the walls: black and white. The exterior walls are jet black (so that the house "recedes into the lush green environment") and the interior is mostly white – with the exception of a few black feature walls. While *noir* may seem like a tricky colour to master – especially in the home – the Martino's prove that, when used in moderation and with the right contrasts, it can be both harmonious and stylish. "It's very hard to convince a client to use black, that's why I did it on my own house," says Matt. "Annoyingly, the same people who balk at it as a concept love it when it's done."

With Matt moonlighting as an artist, it's not surprising the home is adorned with show-stopping works of art, along with a few of his own pieces. A yellow painting by Scottish-born artist David Band hangs behind the dining table, while an austere Charles Blackman print rests in the bedroom. There is a whimsical illustration by Jane Reiseger on the wall in the



HOMEGROWN ART

Matt Martino's abstract artwork has pride of place in the family's spacious, modernist lounge room.

children's bedroom, a colourful screen made from old hardback covers in the sitting room, and elsewhere in the house, walls are peppered with Matt's own abstract works. "Art helps to make the house appear less contrived," he says. "There's nothing worse than a matching set of everything."

So how do they couple a beautiful home with bringing up three young boys? "There are no out-of-bounds areas for the kids," says Matt. "It's their house too. We had kids when we designed and built this house, so they were always a consideration. It's just about teaching them to respect things."

Another talent the Martino's have is the ability to combine designer and generic furnishings. "We have a mix of expensive pieces and some really cheap ones," Matt explains. "The kitchen stools cost just \$30 each and I painted them yellow because I couldn't find any I liked or the right colour."

As for entertaining, it's clear that the Martinos love the opportunity to show off their remarkable dwelling. "We have an open-door policy in this house," says Matt. "We always entertain – I love to cook." The island bar in the kitchen is used for impromptu dinners, while larger, party-style entertaining takes place in the spacious sitting room. "In cold weather, it's intimate; in summer it opens up and overlooks the pool below." Sounds like a little slice of modernist paradise to us. **m**

WALL SCRAWL

Melbourne illustrator Jane Reiseger let loose in the boys' bedroom.



CUSHION, \$40, at Little Living, 02 6166 2065, littliliving.com.au.



PLAY MAT, \$150, at Little Living, 02 6166 2065, littliliving.com.au.

PLATES, \$199, by Kate Spade at Royal Doulton, 1800 252 034, royaldoulton.com.au.



GET THE LOOK

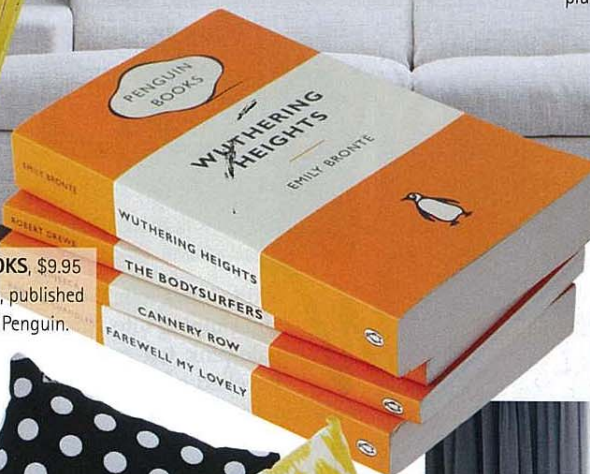
VASES, \$60 each, both by Have You Met Miss Jones, 02 8339 0777, haveyoumetmissjones.com.au.



SOFA, \$1499, by Plush, 03 9271 5833, plush.com.au.



BOOKS, \$9.95 each, published by Penguin.



WINDOW DRESSING

Satin drapes at the head of the bed frame floor-to-ceiling windows.



STOOLS, \$340 (top), and \$210 (bottom), both by Philippe Starck at Kartell, 02 9369 3711, kartell.it.



CUSHION, \$306, by Missoni at Top3 By Design, 1300 867 333, top3.com.au.



CUSHION, \$90, by Table Tonic, 0414 508 473, tabletonic.com.au.

OTTOMAN, \$549, by Freedom, 1300 135 588, freedom.com.au.