



SALLY  
CROXTON

# Till the wows come home

Entering this shimmering apartment is an earthy experience of walking on water. Facing north overlooking Newcastle Harbour and the coastline the apartment is located at a level which gives the optical illusion of floating, an impression heightened by the use of light reflective floor tiles throughout and the floor-to-ceiling double height wall of glass facing the water.

Until late last year the about four-year-old Becton Breakwater apartment was the home of prominent real estate proprietor Ray Robinson and his wife Roz who moved on to split their time between Merewether and Corlette, taking their furniture with them.

It provided a blank canvas for new owners, business couple Kerry and Stephen Thomas, who wanted to make a clean uncluttered sweep with their own style.

No strangers to Newcastle city living, they moved from a very large five-bedroom suburban house at Kotara South five years ago to the Essington Apartments facing the ocean near the former Royal Newcastle Hospital buildings.

Their friends had misgivings at the time but Kerry says they love the inner city lifestyle and she appreciates the security of apartment living when her husband is away.

While their Essington apartment was large, they were after something bigger still when they found the fifth-level penthouse with three bedrooms and three bathrooms. "We walked in and we thought 'wow' it's wonderful," Kerry says. As a yacht glided silently past she adds: "And it's so quiet. We hear absolutely no noise on that [the harbour] side."

Kerry wanted to get a comprehensive fresh look to go with their new apartment and decided to start from scratch using an interior designer.

Rather than going to Sydney they visited the Habitat store at Adamstown and gave its young owners, Kim and Michael McFayden, and more particularly in-house designer Melissa Webster, the opportunity to showcase their talents on what is one of the city's best apartments.

The decision has paid off handsomely in the relaxed finished look which has the natural feel of a modern Scandinavian home.

Kerry says they began with a clear idea of what they did and didn't want. "My husband said right away: 'no glass, no chrome'," she says. "We like natural colours and finishes. We told Mel we wanted a bit of colour in the place so we left it in her hands basically."

Melissa showed them a plan and samples of fabrics and furniture which they approved before she went ahead with ordering and commissioning the comprehensive



**A PERFECTLY NATURAL:** Designer Melissa Webster has employed earthy colours and finishes to produce a unique look that the owners love. — Picture by Anita Jones

scheme, which included everything from furniture down to bed linen and decorative accessory pieces such as cushions, pots and paintings.

Melissa says: "They came to us and said we want a really unique apartment. We don't want to see the same furniture elsewhere."

She made it individual to suit their laid-back lifestyle but elegant at the same time in natural colours with an earthy ambience punctuated by burnt orange to add zest and "oomph" plus lime green which is introduced in the commissioned abstract art works by Newcastle artist Cheryl Cusik.

The timber furniture is Australian, made from recycled teak taken from old buildings in Indonesia re-milled to leave imperfections to give it authenticity and toned to create two different moods.

Family and visitors alike gravitate to the casual meals area in the open plan living room, the nearest spot to the water views and adjacent to the off-white CaesarStone

kitchen fitted with Miele appliances plus a built-in coffee maker and an ice maker on the side-by-side freezer/fridge.

The raw finish teak breakfast table and benches sit alongside two wall-mounted recycled teak doors, a legacy from the previous owners which suits the casual mood.

More formal dining is accommodated behind the seating area with a 10-seater teak table stained what Mel describes as a "luscious" darker colour to match the nearby buffet and the legs on the comfortable upholstered dining chairs. These were custom made and come in neutral apart from two burnt orange upholstered carvers.

Furniture is carefully selected and placed so nothing obstructs the view. The buffet near the lounge has a cut-out between top and bottom so people seated can still see through to the water.

A fabric-covered timber day bed is placed closest to the glass wall of windows and doors so there are views over it to the water. One couch was ordered with only one arm to provide for better circulation space and outlook.

Outside the wrap-around water-facing deck returns around the corner, providing a deep enough space for a large timber outdoor setting as well as the barbecue.

There is another smaller setting on the main deck which faces out across the harbour to the former State Dockyard and beyond to Nobbys Head and the coast.

"Most of the [State Dockyard] buildings will be going and it will be nice to see mega yachts there", Kerry says.

Off this main living area is a media room which can be closed off to make a fourth bedroom if necessary.

The generously sized master bedroom shares the marvellous views and has a custom-made burnt orange bedhead that extends the width of the room.

The en suite has a shower looking straight on to the water and a choice of shower heads, one huge for a real drenching and the other for water-saving.

Custom-made bed-heads and furniture enhance the other two generously sized bedrooms, one with its own en-suite and the other adjacent to the family-sized bathroom.