



In Thomas Hamel's Melbourne home, **rugs** from Behruz Studio; **fabrics** from Milgate; **Gregorius|Pineo furniture** from Kneedler Fauchere. *Details, last pages.*

A return to elegance

Renowned Sydney-based designer Thomas Hamel reflects on what the notion of elegance means to him, and why it's making a resurgence in our homes right now.

Australians used to be such consummate travellers. Everyone you talked to was always focused on their next big trip and where they were heading, almost as though people lived vicariously through their travels, rather than enjoying their everyday lives. Then the rug was pulled from underneath us. All of a sudden, we needed to start thinking about our daily lives and the quality of that life. It used to be all about the next great hotel or restaurant, but everyone was realising that those experiences might last for a few days when actually, every day should be cherished.

I think that's when everyone looked around and thought, 'Why do we have this kitchen that doesn't really work that well' or 'Why don't we have a private space for our study or gym?'. Dining rooms, kitchens and outdoor entertaining spaces have become so much more important, too.

Everyone still loves to have big family gatherings. But where they might have gone to hotels and resorts, now they're looking for spaces where they can have their whole family together. So my team and I are seeing a lot more beach houses and the country houses — in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, Victoria's Mornington Peninsula and Margaret River in Western Australia — are just booming. We've been asked to add things like roast-pig spits that no one ever dreamt of before, plunge pools, treatment rooms for massages, even nail salons. Clients realise they can have all of these things under their own roof and they no longer have to go overseas to get those all-inclusive experiences.

It's about putting that money into something that's used daily rather than a couple of weeks of the year. Thanks to magazines like this one, everyone has a lot more awareness of these things, so they think, 'Why can't I have them at home instead of Aspen?' It is a reaction to what's going on in the world and who knows how long >>

<< it will last but, for the time being, bringing those experiences into the home is very important for a lot of people.

Australia's approach to elegance has always had a more easygoing, come-as-you-are simplicity to it. Even though it's more casual, people still want to have the best produce, the best plates, the best china — things that have intrinsic value. Rather than everything being cheap and cheerful, they want things that have a bit more substance. A lot of that comes from finding handmade pieces, such as hand-thrown pottery or unique artworks, sculptures and objects. People are also very excited to find things that have been made here in Australia; it just adds to that bespoke quality.

I always say Carla Zampatti was so elegant. It was such a great loss for Australia when she passed because she had that Italian sense of style but in a pared-back Australian way that had this simplicity about it. But truly there are now so many interior designers that are giving the world a taste of this edited Australian lifestyle that appreciates quality things but also that they don't need to be crammed into a house — it's about elegant sufficiency.

Elegance used to be all about soft furnishings and big curtains, whereas now younger people are saying that they'd prefer to have art or objects, rather than putting that budget into window treatments. And lighting would be another crucial one. A lot of people would rather have one special light fitting that means something to them, than installing a hundred downlights in a room that has no ambience.

People are now realising that the only complication with getting all these beautiful things from overseas is the time it's taking; unfortunately, I don't think that's going to get better anytime soon. But they know it's worth the wait to get the bathtub, chair or artwork they really want. And rather than thinking what's going to get the most attention for two minutes on an Instagram post (and being stuck with this thing you're not sure you even like), people are trying to discover things that speak to them. Finding that sense of elegance doesn't have to be costly — it's about choosing things that are a bit more unique and special for you.

But it's also important not to be too concerned with damaging something beautiful, especially to the point of not using and enjoying that item. Simple but beautiful bed linen is a case in point as everyone should have a beautifully made bed every day.

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More than just things, true elegance is about a generosity of spirit that should be applied to everyday life. I make a great effort to be appreciative to those around me, those who make the world a better place for me. Our world is so full of suppliers and craftspeople, and I genuinely try to make these people proud

THIS PAGE in the study of Thomas Hamel's Melbourne home, **artworks** by Jean-Marc Louis.



of their work and contributions. To see a talented painter or wallpaper installer do a beautiful job, they deserve positive acknowledgement. I feel elegance is how we conduct ourselves and the generosity we share, not only with others, but with ourselves. [VL thomashamel.com](http://vl.thomashamel.com)