

Alex Zabotto-Bentley in the foyer of his apartment in Sydney's Potts Point. Armadillo&Co rug. Flowers by Mr Cook.



creative licence

ALEX ZABOTTO-BENTLEY's forté has long been styling events and interiors. His magnum opus? His new Art Deco home.

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STYLED BY MAGDALENE LIACOPOULOS



The antique horse ornament on the side table in the living room was found at an antique market in Indonesia—to its right is a still life by photographer Derek Henderson.

BELOW: Zabotto-Bentley in the lounge room. RIGHT: A Marnie Haddad photograph sits among a selection of coffee-table books and like-coloured objects. The ceramic pirate ship is one of many Zabotto-Bentley has amassed over the years. OPPOSITE: The dining room is anchored by a '40s table; the artwork here includes "Cloud Hunter" by Peter Mack (on the back wall), a James Dodd piece (on the cabinet, far right) and "Firestorm #3" by Dion Horstmans (on the right wall). GROOMING: KATRINA RAFTERY.



Bar—a pop-up restaurant that he design directed—rolled out on the rooftop of Crown in Melbourne.

To say he's in demand is an understatement but that's been an advantage in setting up his three-bedroom apartment. Though it gives the appearance he's lived there for several years, Zabotto-Bentley only moved in in June. With no time to waste, he settled in at breakneck speed. "I was determined," he says. "And I knew where everything was meant to be."

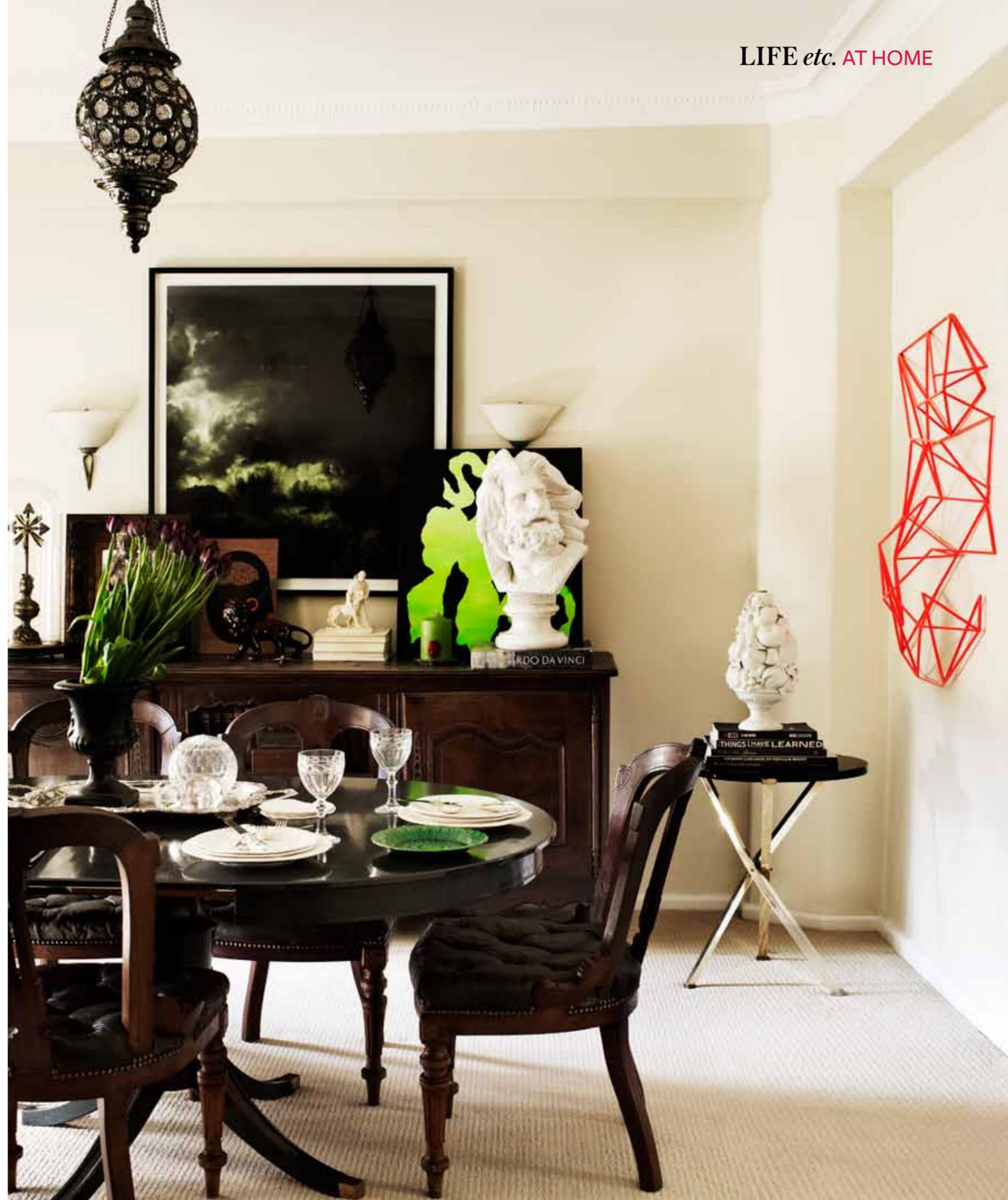
It helps that he has the art of moving down pat. Since relocating to Sydney some 16 years ago, the self-confessed "gypsy" has lived at more addresses than he cares to remember. "I've bought and sold, I've rented, I've bought [again]," he says. "I'm not the sort of person who would find a home and stay there 30 years...but I've always found exquisite homes and turned them into a showcase of my interior-design ethos."

During his time in Sydney, Zabotto-Bentley has lived mostly in and around his "soulful hood", inner-city Potts Point. "I was here when it was just old, crumbly buildings and no-one really cared about it. Now it's like the most popular place in the world." His current abode—one of the neighbourhood's iconic 1936 Wyldefel Gardens apartments—had "always been on my radar and when I discovered that it was available, I jumped at the chance".

For the charismatic creative, it offers timely respite from his hectic lifestyle. "It's like a sort of sanctuary. At this point, where I sit in my world, I just need to have a moment, breathing space," he says.

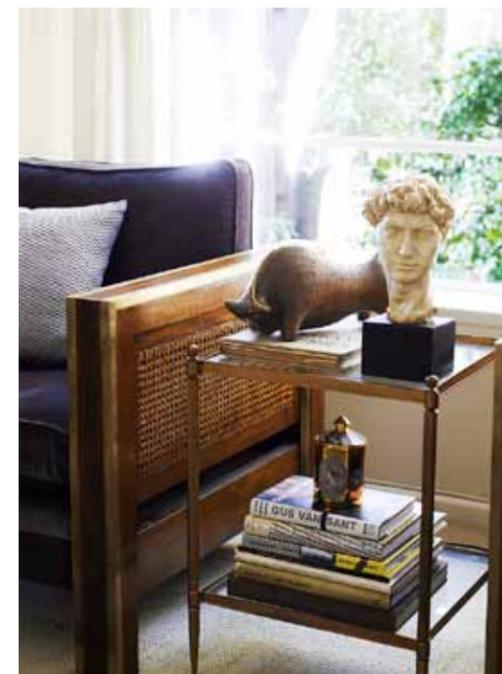
For the first time, Alex Zabotto-Bentley is living on his own. "I've spent my entire life sharing with friends and they've endured me clustering [objects] and interior styling," he says. But the former Melburnian hasn't yet enjoyed the spoils of solitude. "I actually have a friend staying for two months," he says, hastening to add, "but it isn't a permanent guest!"

Zabotto-Bentley, who is now in his forties, can't help but be the life of the party. A former designer for his now-defunct label FashionAssassin, he launched AZBcreative five years ago and has garnered a reputation for creating spectacular events for the likes of Waterford Crystal and the Sydney Theatre Company. But he also specialises in interior styling and for that, he travels extensively; requests for his "discerning eye" have been made from as far afield as Buenos Aires, Bali and Malta, where he has worked on a hotel, restaurant and private gallery respectively. This month, he's been to Japan, while MasterChef Dining &





BELOW: A '60s ceramic-and-brass bull is positioned atop a side table next to a bust of David. RIGHT: An ornamental elephant watches over the lounge, which is also decorated with an artwork by Bernadette Trela. OPPOSITE: On the bedroom walls hang "Jewelled Beetle" by Garth Knight and a sconce used in *The Great Gatsby*. Zabotto-Bentley has owned the Louis Vuitton duffel bag for 18 years: "It's my babe!"



"I want to come back from my various trips throughout the year and enter this pristine, beautiful, bespoke space."

Drawn to the unit's "Deco, masculine" feel, with the exception of unpacking his belongings, he hasn't made any changes to the apartment itself. It has what he believes are original features—namely the kitchen cabinetry, the curved windows (which remind him of a cruise liner) and the cream wallpaper that envelopes most of the rooms. "When I sit in this space, it resonates. There's history, beauty and craftsmanship."

Zabotto-Bentley has cautiously applied his "boy chic" aesthetic to the space. "As a guy, having a stack of books and funny Wedgwood things, it could get a bit feminine," he says. He keeps the interiors masculine by adhering to a palette of muted purples, blues and greens and cream, with occasional bursts of bright colour. "But there's lots of cool boy things, too: pirate ships and busts and a big [artwork of] Leo the Lion wearing a crown. It's rockin'."

While his Instagram bio reads "hunter and gatherer of unreal things", it isn't just guff—Zabotto-Bentley admits he owns a warehouse filled with paintings and *objets d'art* collected over the decades, both here and on his travels. In Wyldefel Gardens, he has applied a pared-back approach to showcasing these wares. "I didn't want to overdose on elements. I wanted less art, more exposed walls because the interior already has all of this beautiful detailing." Instead, he has curated a selection of "really special pieces", which includes original artworks by famed New York graffiti artist Keith Haring and Australian artists Bernadette

Trela, Mulga and Aaron Kinnane—all of which feature in his favourite room, the living area. "It's almost like a gallery," he says.

The furniture, too, is similarly edited. Zabotto-Bentley singles out two '74 German timber occasional chairs with inlaid brass as favourites ("I've never seen anything like them—they're like Tom Ford or Halston. I had them covered in a beautiful French velvet"), as well as an antique bamboo Italianate cabinet he picked up at auction.

The sometime stylist admits his work influences his home "heavily" and as a result, it's never quite finished. "It's in a state I'm exceptionally happy with," he says. "But there's always another thing to add to it, another thing to remove. By the sheer nature of what I do as a profession, there'll be a night when I come home and rearrange elements."

Enamoured as he is, Zabotto-Bentley admits he's already on the lookout for his next home. "You go in and have a moment, a love affair with a location. You spend a year or two years, then go somewhere else."

His romances with his interiors and homes might be fleeting but Zabotto-Bentley's friendships prove an entirely different proposition, with some spanning as many as 30 years. "I'm a great lover of beautiful, enduring relationships," he says. "I make sure I'm the go-to when my amazing friends come from Melbourne to Sydney. It's 100 per cent guaranteed that I will a) have them stay with me, b) get a *present* and c) have a dinner date." He laughs. "So it all works out." ■