

PERFECT MATCH

Interiors author, former magazine editor and real estate matchmaker Karen McCartney revisits an old friend in mid-century classic the Jack House.

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In the dining room of the iconic Jack House, Wahroonga, **OPPOSITE**, the vintage Danish rosewood shelves house many of owner Annalisa Capurro's favourite finds, from a Danish ice bucket by Jen Quistgaard for Dansk to pieces by Skelton and Georg Jensen. **THIS PAGE:** a playroom/bedroom is simply furnished with a Danish daybed, a French 1960s poster by Jean Colin, and a wool and silk rug from Designer Rugs. The classic Scandinavian wall light was an existing fitting. Details, last pages.



LEFT: the deck running along the bedroom wing was influenced by traditional Japanese design. Capurro had the louvres reopened so that air flows through the house. The vintage Hardoy 'Butterfly' chairs came with the house. **OPPOSITE:** Capurro has been a collector of vintage furniture for years and found it all fitted naturally into the Jack House. The rectilinear structure of the '20s French Madagascar ebony sofa from The Country Trader balances the curves and colour of the green wool chair, circa early '60s, by Norwegian architects Rastad & Relling.

SOME HOUSES MEANDER in and out of your life and the Jack House, in Sydney's northern suburb of Wahroonga, is, for me, one such house. I first came across it in 2006 when researching a book on mid-century Australian architect-designed houses. Russell Jack, the remarkable architect and original owner, had built the house with his wife Pamela in 1957. It had won the prestigious Sulman Award for architecture, giving a boost to his then fledgling firm Allen, Jack + Cottier. The house defied many notions of the day in terms of structure and siting, and not everyone applauded his radical approach. One disgruntled member of the public wrote to the press complaining that it looked like "a series of hen coops on sticks".

One forgets now the many council rules that prevailed in the 1950s, with designs for flat-roofed houses often knocked back and strict regulations on materials and floor plans. "The land was the last undeveloped block on the street," Jack once told me. "They just couldn't sell it because of the steepness of the site and the creek running through it diagonally."

The house in itself is economical: a simple L-shape, with family spaces – living/kitchen/dining – to the left and bathroom and bedrooms to the right. There is not a great deal of internal division, with spaces flowing into one another and internal walls non-structural so that the house could morph as the family grew. Ever practical, Jack had remarked of the dining room: "It is only used for an hour a day so it makes sense to use it as a thoroughfare."

By turning its back to the street, it is the bush that the house embraces. "We tried to make it as psychologically big as possible – the free-flowing plan and the floor-to-ceiling glass meant the rooms were never boxes," said Jack. "There is privacy to the street and the rooms themselves are open to the bush." The exposed post and beam framing, the unpainted woodwork speak of the honesty of the building and, for Jack, it is the "expression of the structure that is important."

Jack was a Modernist and greatly respected Frank Lloyd Wright's philosophy of integrating building and site. He admired the work of Alvar Aalto and the aesthetic of traditional Japanese houses – all of which can be seen at play in the Jack House. He had travelled to England and caught *The Festival of Britain* in 1951, an exhibition promoting the country's contribution to technology and the arts, where he witnessed Modernism and decoration working together. The original wallpaper in the dining area and study is testimony to the influence of that trip.

Jack lived in the house for nearly 50 years and when it was time to sell he called me to tell me of his decision. At the time I was editor of *Inside Out* magazine and had a page called Editor's Choice, where I could mention books, art or exhibitions that had piqued my interest. Onto this page it went, with a small photograph and the heading "Want to own an iconic Australian house?" It was there the present owner and long-term Jack-ophile, Annalisa Capurro, saw it. I had played the role of a real estate Cupid.





LEFT: original residents Russell and Pamela Jack introduced various wallpapers of classic '50s pedigree. Shown here is the original Palladio 'Colonnade' wallpaper, designed by Robert Nicholson and now in London's Victoria & Albert Museum archives. **OPPOSITE:** the kitchen is spare and functional in its design and, as with the rest of the house, has a generous window. All fittings are original and the Queensland maple cupboards with brass handles are by Jack.





The study, **LEFT**, remains in its original state, with a Palladio '50s cogwheel-design wallpaper. The built-in desk was designed by Jack and Capurro has added an Eames Aluminium Group chair and a lamp bought in Palm Springs. The bedhead, **OPPOSITE**, came with the house and Capurro has integrated the antique into an essentially mid-century house by painting the wall black and leaving the orange hanging lights as a bolt of colour, skilfully blending eras. An Italian linen bedcover by Bemboka, from Planet, and a reindeer skin from Great Dane Furniture completes the look. Details, last pages.

Capurro, an interior decorator and lecturer, first encountered the house in 1995 while researching a book on the architects who had been Sulman Award winners from 1932 to 1996. She never forgot it. Capurro is passionate about mid-century architecture and considers herself a custodian of the Jack House, rather than its owner, frequently opening it up to the architectural profession and the public alike. She likes to take her students and clients through it to show how Jack's humanist architectural principles translate directly to a beautiful living space. Her interest is such that she has undertaken a master's degree on the work of Jack in which she hopes to document his career and explore, among other things, his close working relationship with his wife. A book is scheduled to follow.

Jack could not have hoped for a more enthusiastic successor – Capurro's appreciation of the house is absolute. She points to the visual access the house provides (she can see her nine-year-old daughter from most areas), the simplicity of the materials and the fully integrated relationship between inside and outside. "Russell is surprised at how little I have done to the house," says Capurro. "I painted one bedroom wall black and restored the wall of shutters that looks onto the deck – apart from that I just moved my furniture in."

Jack gave Capurro his bedhead, his beloved Rietveld-style chair (made for him by his students when he stopped teaching) and his impressive collection of *Architectural Review* magazines dating from the 1950s. Yet Capurro points out: "Russell has given me so much more than this extraordinary house. He has given me a project I am passionate about and he is with me every step of the way; sourcing archive material, helping me with access to his houses and providing an oral history of his career." They are clearly a match made in architectural heaven. **VL**

