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# HERITAGE REVIVAL

It's all about personality in this restored and imaginative heritage home designed by Karen Akers, **Rebecca Gross** takes in the bold and diverse art collection on show.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS DALHOFF.





The Abbey is a Gothic revival heritage home in Annandale, Sydney, built by freemason and former Sydney mayor **John Young** in 1881. Architecturally, The Abbey is imaginative and romantic, and now, having been restored and adapted for modern life, its interiors are equally ingenious and fanciful with an art collection that is as exuberant as the home itself.

"The spaces were to be an acknowledgement of their previous life, but homely, and with allowances for the clients' existing art collection," says **Karen Akers**, of Designed by Karen Akers. The designer looked to The Abbey's ornate tiles, patterns, stencilled decoration and stained glass windows to inspire the furnishings and colour palette, and then decided upon the selection and placement of artworks once each room was complete.

"I try to mix styles of art to create more interest and personality in a space," Akers explains. Accordingly, a diverse group of pieces in the sitting room provide what Akers describes as a "cocooning effect," which is appropriate in a room used for "conversation, observation and music." Mao#92, one of **Andy Warhol's** silk-screen prints that address the pop artist's obsession with fame, is flanked by Aboriginal artist **Ross Yuldjirri's** Rainbow Serpent, as well as a variety of character-filled paintings, sculptures and carvings that complement the rich colour palette of the room and its furnishings. Likewise in the pool room, **Laurie Nona's** Kabarr and Sibi paintings are in harmony with the serene and understated palette and exotic personality of the space.

The light-filled kitchen is similarly eclectic with pieces that share a muted colour palette and are balanced in texture, shape and size. A photograph by **Cathy Carter** and painting by **Yala Yala Gibbs** offset each other on the recessed walls while a glass and pumice necklace hangs above the mantelpiece. "There is never a wrong place to hang art," Akers believes. "In fact we need to get more inventive as to where and how to display it."

In any other home this art collection could overwhelm a space; and correspondingly The Abbey could easily overpower a lesser collection. Thus to ensure balance and unity between the art and the architecture, Akers considered the scale of each work and its imagery. In the television room, one of the most used spaces in the house, the high and heavily

decorated ceiling allows for **John Coburn's** large *Samurai 75* to easily adorn the walls. **Patrick Mung Mung's** bold artwork holds its own in the home office, while being in close proximity to a stately and traditional fireplace and dark wooden framed window. "It creates an interesting and creative vibe," says Akers. And in the bedroom, **Colin Lanceley's** warm and romantic *Two in the Bush* softens the heavy architectural features of the space.

"I think the diversity of the art collection reveals something of the personality of the people whom live within the house, and simply adds to the home's exuberant personality," Akers says. "It is a home that is lived in and it emits creative, positive and warm energy."

THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT: **Above the lounge hangs John Coburn's over-scaled Samurai 75 artwork.** THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT: **Artwork by Colin Lanceley takes pride of place in the bedroom.** THIS PAGE, BOTTOM: **Karen Akers presents a homely feel with a stylish use of printed furnishings.** OPPOSITE PAGE: **Patrick Mung Mung's artwork sits above the fireplace.**



"The beautiful warm tones radiate from these highly layered interiors allowing a seamless integration of the clients extensive contemporary art collection."

BRETT MICKAN, DESIGN COUNCIL

