

# Urban COLLAGE

With its nostalgic flair, MONICA TRAPAGA's home has become the soul of her modern family.

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A K.Kawai baby grand piano, a first anniversary gift from husband Simon Williams, takes pride of place in the upstairs "studio room". Toni Maticovski skirt. Trapaga's own top and heels. Harlequin Market necklace and bracelet.





Trapaga says she was drawn to the “manly proportions” of an auction-bought gilded gold mirror. One of Williams’ old paint boxes now holds “collected trash”—door knobs, medals, old keys and enamel signs.



An antique Chinese chest and an untitled fused-wood art work by Ian Gent sit next to tapestries based on the work of Joan Miró, one of Trapaga's favourite artists.



A restored linen cupboard now displays her Victorian china collection.

In 2005, when Monica Trapaga and her partner, Simon Williams, found the empty warehouse that they now call home, their hunt to find a place to cohabit permanently was casual rather than obligatory. Although they had both separated from their previous partners several years earlier, they had only been dating for two years. “Not a lot of time!” says Trapaga with a laugh.

The entertainer had just purchased “a little house in Glebe [in Sydney’s inner west], which I was about to do up” and Williams, a lawyer, was living in nearby Pymont. But the moment the pair eyed the 19th-century building, which was not far from Trapaga’s home, their plans changed. “I was totally breathless,” says the former *Play School* and *Better Homes and Gardens* presenter. Williams clearly felt the same. He turned to Trapaga and said, “I’ll only buy this warehouse if you come and live with me.” Her response? “Alright!”

Fast-forward eight years and the couple, married since 2008, have crafted a home that’s now the epicentre of their two families. Between them, Trapaga and Williams have six children from previous marriages so they needed a house “where we could bring the families together and they have their own space”.

A former flourmill and, more recently, an antiques centre, the home spans five levels (three with original parquet flooring) and is dissected by a grand Jarrah-wood staircase. The ground floor houses a garage, a workshop for Williams’ keen oil-painting hobby and a studio bedroom—once a teenagers’ retreat and now Trapaga’s private space to indulge her penchant for collaging and jewellery-making. A “children’s zone” makes up the next level and is occupied by two of Williams’ offspring, Victoria, 24, and Oliver, 17, as well as Trapaga’s youngest, Atticus, 18. Each has their own room opening to a living area and bathroom.

The third floor is the heart of the home: an open-plan living room, dining room and kitchen that lead to a balcony overlooking a small courtyard. The fourth level—an open mezzanine playfully dubbed a “catwalk”—joins the pair’s master bedroom and bathroom and looks over the dining area. “We’ve had parties and people give speeches from up here. It’s a bit of a dictator-on-the-plinth moment,” laughs Trapaga, 48. In an apt nod to the ARIA-nominated jazz performer’s theatrical beginnings, thick, red velvet curtains provide a sense of privacy. “It was such a great way of dividing the space and also providing good acoustics,” she says.



Artworks by dear friend Leonard Rosenfeld adorn the wall. FROM LEFT: "Nina Pura de los Angeles", 2003, "Portrait of a Painter at 77 as a laughing Angel", 2003, "Minnie Mouse in Baghdad", 2005.



A refectory table, reclaimed from the Singer sewing machine factory, features boltholes and original steel legs. Moulded wooden chairs highlight a rectangular cut-out: "I call them the Ned Kellys," quips Trapaga.



TOP: The main living and studio space. Many pieces were salvaged from antiques stores. ABOVE: "I feel like I'm bathing in the theatre," says Trapaga of the bathroom with its chandelier and red velvet curtains. RIGHT: The kitchen includes stools sourced from a school lab. Celeste Tesoriero top. Trapaga's own jeans. Harlequin Market earrings. Tom Gunn brogues. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: ANDREA BLACK.



Trapaga's favourite piece in her bedroom? An untitled "Goya-esque" artwork by Deborah MacMillan above the wrought-iron bed. "It's just so mysterious, dark and moody." Sheridan quilt cover, pillow cases and bed cover.

The final floor is the rooftop, which has views of nearby terrace homes and provides glimpses of the city and Harbour Bridge. "It's important if you're living in the inner city to have lungs for the home," says the avid gardener, who gets by *sans* lawn by adorning her roof, balcony and courtyard with potted plants, most of them gifts from Williams. "Herbs are an absolute must," she says. "I need to have them fresh every day. It's definitely the [Spaniard] in me—literally the spice of life."

Her aesthetic is full of flavour, too. The space lends itself to timeless décor—something Trapaga, as the owner of bespoke vintage homewares and fashion store Reclaim in Sydney's Newtown, excels at. "I hate anything new," she laughs. She's a regular at antique auctions and markets both in Australia and on travels to New York, France and Italy. "I'm not very attracted to anything after the 1950s," she says, although she is quick to point out her pet-hate of the word 'antique'. "There's such a stigma attached to it." Instead, she says, "If a piece has beautiful form, function, if it moves you—that for me is the greatest antique. I love things that I know have had various lives." Pointing to a timber linen press rescued from a chicken coop and purchased at auction,

Trapaga recalls "sanding, scraping and scrubbing it all—colour started coming out of it and it was such a beautiful moment". It now displays her collection of fine Victorian china.

Throughout the home, there are clusters of collector's curios: sculptures, crucifixes, candles, even vintage department store heads. "I'm not a hoarder though," says Trapaga. "A hoarder hoards; a collector increases their collection but lets go of things. I let go of things all the time—that's why I have a store."

Sentimental pieces, however, will never be sold: an enamel pot belonging to her grandmother and classic blue-and-white T.G. Green Cornishware are exempt. Both are displayed in her favourite space in the home: the kitchen and dining area. A twice-published home cook, Trapaga's latest release, *A Bite of the Big Apple* (Lantern, \$40), is a culinary homage to New York and was written with her eldest daughter, Lil.

Family is "everything", she says. So is inclusiveness: the refectory dining table seats 14 and regularly hosts "all the kids and their boyfriends and girlfriends". As Trapaga notes, "It just makes me happy, bringing wonderful food to this table and enjoying our time together as a family. This is where life happens." ■



On the walls are instruments and enamel letters picked up in Manhattan. Wooden machine moulds are clustered on the ground. "I've been collecting them for years. I love their form and function."