

WHITE CHRISTMAS

AFTER FIVE YEARS IN LOS ANGELES, RONEL AND GARY BROUGHT BACK A TASTE FOR HOLLYWOOD GLAMOUR - AND A BIGGER AND BETTER SET OF FESTIVE TRADITIONS FOR THEIR SYDNEY HOME

STORY SHELLEY TUSTIN STYLING STEPHANIE POWELL PHOTOGRAPHY SIMON WHITBREAD

MERRY AND BRIGHT Ronel and Gary's renovated home in Sydney's eastern suburbs reflects the joyousness of this time of year. Ronel's interior style, particularly her preferred profusion of white, is a perfect match for the Australian aesthetic, with the neutral hues bouncing sunlight throughout the living room and touches of pale blue, through cushions from The General Trading Company, provide a subtle nod to the nearby ocean. All new architraves, installed to give the modern home a touch of classic charm, beautifully frame the leafy view from the balcony. Ronel's ideal Christmas decor is an extension of this soothing scheme - classic decorations from The Country Trader and Ruby Star Traders are delightful additions and create an elegant tree. >



Through all their years of ex-pat living – from their native South Africa to their final, forever home in Sydney’s eastern beaches – Ronel, Gary and their two adult children, Mathew and Chanel, have celebrated Christmas on nearly every continent. But nowhere has influenced their Yuletide celebrations more than America, particularly Los Angeles, where they most recently spent five years. “Americans really know how to do Christmas,” says Ronel.

Genuinely crazy about the festive season herself, Ronel was happy to get into the holiday spirit, LA style, and equally happy to bring that spirit of excess back to their home in Australia. “Christmas has definitely gotten bigger in our home,” says Ronel. “I have fresh trees, garlands and wreaths delivered, which I use to decorate the mantles and the staircase. We have a small tree in the hallway and two big trees, one upstairs and one downstairs. I also have huge pots with gorgeous hydrangeas at the front door and in the garden.”

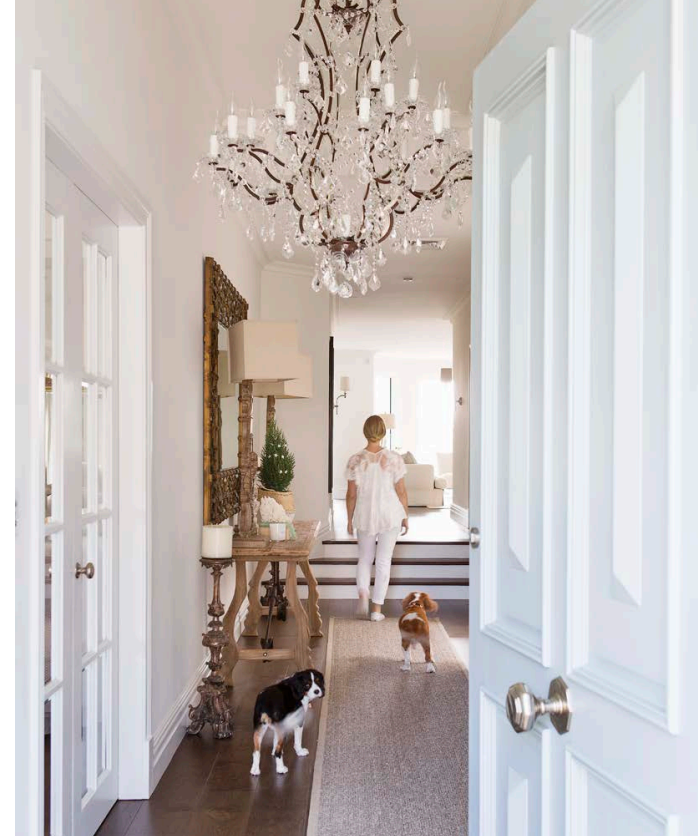
“WE HANG *lights* IN ALL THE TREES AROUND THE BACK GARDEN. AND WE ALL HAVE CHRISTMAS *pajamas*, INCLUDING THE PETS!” ~ RONEL

Decorating the home this Christmas is a particular joy; while Ronel has become skilled at creating a home wherever they may be, this home is the first one that truly reflects her personal style, thanks to a recent renovation on this former ugly duckling.

Though the pre-renovation home had many appealing characteristics, its interior design was not among them. With modern square-set ceilings, small skirtings and a questionable palette of black-veined marble, yellow walls and terracotta tiles, the home was a million miles from Ronel’s own refined, traditional taste. “My style is more French provincial, kind of dreamy and romantic,” she says. When they returned from LA, the home was tenanted and they had no real desire to move back in. The original plan was to fix up the bathrooms and kitchens to prepare the home for sale but, as often happens, the renovation soon took on a life of its own. “We got so carried away and ended up gutting the whole home,” says Ronel.

While Ronel had a strong sense of what she wanted, interior designer Sarah-Jayne Marriott was brought in to bring Ronel’s vision to life. “The home was really dark and cold – it didn’t have any heart,” says Sarah-Jayne. “We started off by trying to bring lots of warmth into the home, lightening the walls, adding more windows where we could and bringing in beautiful flooring.” The project was unique in that Ronel already had a full home of furniture, collected in the US.

The end result is a home that feels calm and welcoming. “There’s a harmonious feeling throughout the rooms – there’s different elements, but also a beautiful thread running through,” says Sarah-Jayne. And so, with this abode, the family has finally found their permanent home and an antidote to their wanderlust. “There’s nothing better than Sydney on a glorious day – it’s breathtaking,” says Ronel. “I’m not moving again.” And that’s the best Christmas present the family could ask for.



HALLWAY Her time in America heavily influenced Ronel’s interior style, with many of her cherished pieces boasting a grand sense of scale. “Everything is bigger and better in America,” she says. A Coco Republic console table (above & top) is teamed with an enormous mirror and oversized lamps from US company Currey & Co. Festive cheer welcomes guests via a festive garland from Papier D’Amour, a ‘Christmas’ Palm Beach candle and a tiny real tree from Bunnings. >

WRAPPING PAPER (OPPOSITE) 'IMPRESSION' IN EGGSHELL BLUE VANDOROS FINE PACKAGING



“I LOVE THAT THE KITCHEN LIGHT IS *solid*, BUT YOU CAN SEE THROUGH IT, SO IT DOESN'T *restrict* THE VIEW” ~ RONEL

KITCHEN

With its Shaker-style cabinetry and Carrara marble counters, the kitchen (left) embodies a graceful Hamptons-style – but with a few bold twists. Classic knobs and drawer pulls from Mother Of Pearl & Sons Trading are contrasted with long, ornate handles (below left) bought from a store in L.A. “They do all the really over-the-top stuff there and I wanted something special,” says Ronel (pictured). An enormous cage light from Imagine This adds drama and echoes the dark metal cabinetry. “I wanted something special, but I thought a chandelier would be too much, then I saw this and it was perfect,” says Ronel. On the practical side, the kitchen is well equipped for entertaining; the adjoining laundry was moved to make way for a walk-in pantry, as well as an ensuite for son Mathew’s room. A large freestanding oven is big enough to cook for a crowd, while the comfy bar stools from Canalside Interiors are perfect for family meals and more casual gatherings.

FORMAL DINING

Located on the home’s lower level, the dining area’s distance from the kitchen is more than compensated for by the direct access to the outdoors, the stunning view of the pool and the leafy embrace of the trees. This is where the couple do all their entertaining (opposite) and it’s a space well suited to the task, with the grand dimensions of a table from Restoration Hardware and chairs from Giannetti Home (all from the US), as well as the nearby convenience of a powder room and bar.



WE LOVE...
cocktail hour

The fully equipped and plumbed bar was a clever use of an unused kitchenette. Ronel chose the marble tiles from Di Lorenzo to tie in with the rest of the home and requested mirrored cabinets for displaying her crystal. Designer Sarah-Jayne created the beautiful powder-coated aluminium joinery, which provides a masculine contrast to the dominant palette of white and soft grey. >

ENSUITE Marble and Hollywood glamour are the themes linking all the bathrooms in the home, with Ronel and designer Sarah-Jayne raiding tile merchants for marble and stone tiles in a wide range of different shapes, several of which were used in the main ensuite (this page & opposite, bottom left). "It was important the bathroom designs were cohesive but individually had a special character, so we spent many days sourcing interesting tiles," says Sarah-Jayne. "My favourite feature in the home was the mother-of-pearl penny rounds behind the bath in the main ensuite. The end result was so beautiful and set the stone bath off perfectly." The previous poky, high window was lowered and enlarged, letting sunlight sparkle off the room's other elegant features: a Moda freestanding bath from ACS Bathrooms, a marble vanity top, pieces from Ronel's collection of antique silver (found at flea markets in the US), Citta Design 'Jacquard' towels from Maison Et Jardin and, the dramatic centrepiece, a chandelier from Weylands.



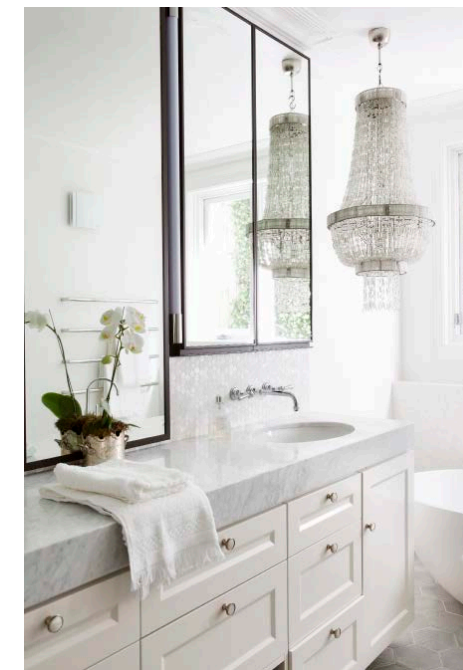
TILES
 'Climacotto' volcanic rock tiles in Grigio Cielo, \$280/sqm, Di Lorenzo.

"WE WENT WITH A LOT OF WHITE ON WHITE, TO showcase ALL RONEL'S BEAUTIFUL treasures"

~ SARAH-JAYNE, DESIGNER

MAIN BEDROOM

Now a palatial master suite, with sliding doors that open to take in the adjoining sitting room, it's hard to believe this room (right) almost prompted the couple to sell the home. "It had just one window and was half the size," says Ronel. Reclaiming the walk-in wardrobe - which was moved to the adjoining subterranean storage space - dramatically expanded the size of the room, while the bespoke sliding doors create a shifting boundary, either flooding the room with light or making a cosy enclave. Explains designer Sarah-Jayne: "We were trying to create a sort of secret entry where the doors could be shut and hide the bedroom when they're entertaining. And when they're not, they can have the doors open and the sitting room becomes an extension of their bedroom." Beautiful bronze mirrors were sourced from the US and shipped to Marrickville Joinery to be turned into solid doors, which were then painted a lovely wash to match the antique patina of Ronel's favourite furnishings, including the bed from Eloquence and oversized Layla Grayce lamps, all from LA.



OFFICE & MEDIA ROOM

"This was meant to be the formal living and dining, but we never used it," says Ronel. Turning the room into an office (left) and media room for the kids made much more sense for the way the family lived. Joiner Ian Wu constructed a neat desk space with plenty of storage at one end of the room - to be used as Ronel's work space during the day - accompanied by an elegant chair from Restoration Hardware (try Temple & Webster for similar). Floaty linen drapes add a touch of romance, while filtering the light and allowing for privacy. >

PATIO
 Though the tall trees surrounding the property enticed, the backyard was a far cry from the lush and leafy oasis it is today. Landscaping it was the first task the couple took on seven years ago, taking the opportunity to put in a pool at the same time. The space is now the centre of summer entertaining and the family's Christmas Day celebrations, with the Restoration Hardware table and chairs generous enough to host a crowd. Ronel's collection of glassware and silver are all that's needed to turn a casual barbecue into an occasion.



FURNITURE
 Get the look with 'Darwin' outdoor armchairs, \$595 each, Coco Republic.



SOURCE BOOK

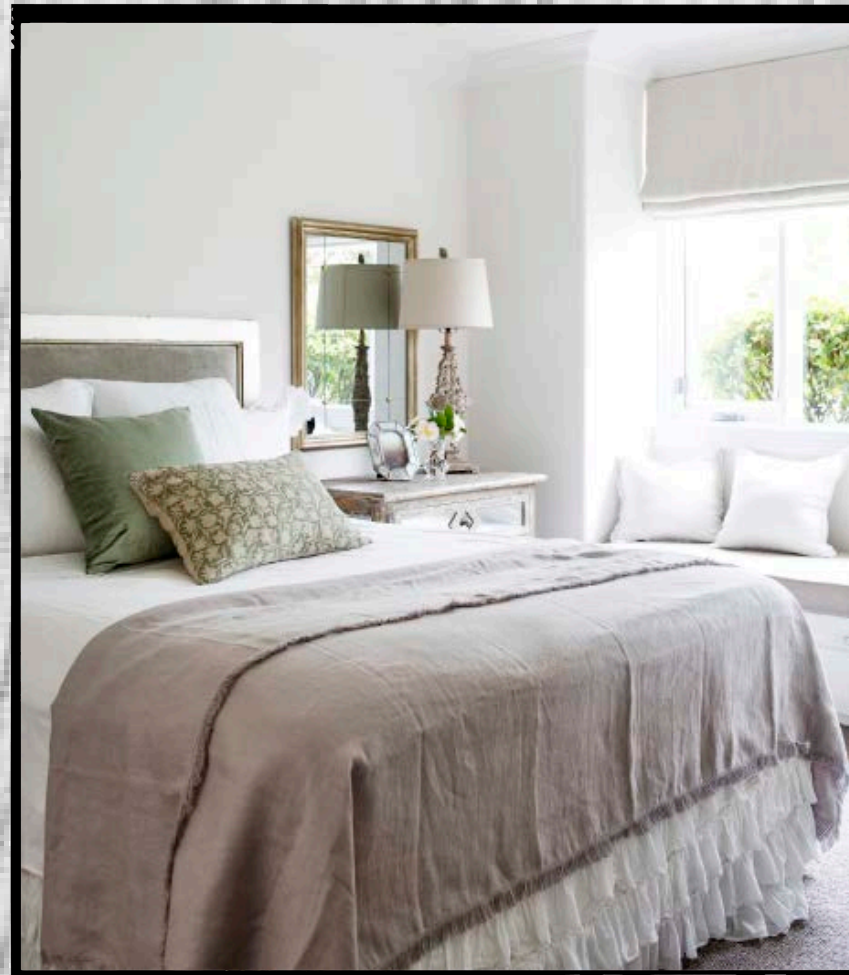
INSIDE STORY RONEL AND GARY'S HOME

Who lives here?
 Ronel and Gary; their children, Mathew, 24, and Chanel, 20 (all pictured opposite); and two cavalier King Charles spaniels, Charlie and Sydney.

How do you style up the Christmas table?
 Ronel: "I do something different every year. We have a more formal Christmas Eve, so I use all the gorgeous silver and crystal with lots of candles and beautiful white flowers."

What's your best Christmas styling tip?
 "Mix real and faux greenery and flowers, if you can't find all fresh. And don't be afraid to mix gold and silver decorations with beautiful burlap ribbons."

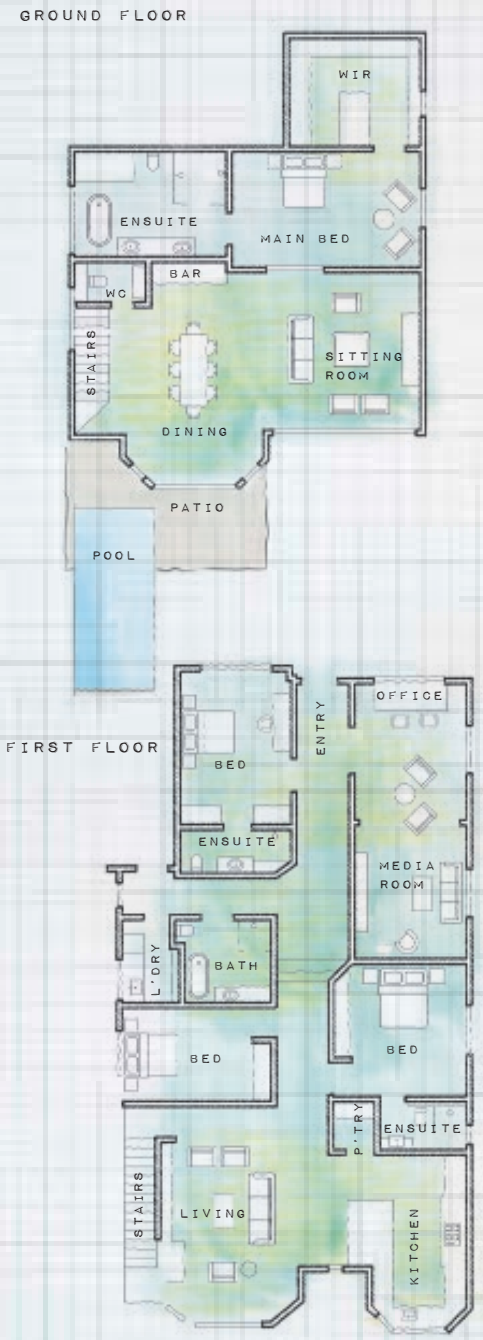
Let's talk trees – real or quality fake?
 "It has to be a real tree. It makes the home smell like Christmas."



ENTRANCE
 Chanel adds the final Christmas touch with a pine wreath from Rogue Home on the front door (top). Once an ugly glass door, the newly renovated home needed a new model, which Ronel chose based on a trip to Paris. "We went to the Picasso museum and all the doors there were blue," she recalls. Porter's Paints Newport Blue evoked just the look she remembered.

CHANEL'S ROOM
 The room at the front of the home for Chanel's bedroom (above) needed only cosmetic improvements but Ronel also had a window seat put in, with storage underneath. A linen throw from Busatti and pretty bedlinen from Pom Pom At Home complete the newly renovated picture. "I love it because it's all white and a bit more feminine," says Ronel.

PLANS



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