

# modern FAMILY

An unconventional collaboration between a sister and brother results in a sophisticated open-plan home for a young family  
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BLUE CUSHION, VINTAGE BOWL & OLIVE CUSHION, LUKE FURNITURE, LUKE.COM.AU, RUST CUSHION, ABODE LIVING, ABODELIVING.COM, VASE, DINOSAUR DESIGNS, DINOSAURDESIGNS.COM.AU, HK LIVING COPPER VESSELS, HOUSE OF ORANGE, HOUSEOFORANGE.COM.AU, ARTWORK, CONVERGENCE BY MARTINE EMDUR, SCOTT LIVESY GALLERIES, SCOTTLIVESYGALLERIES.COM, AND OLSEN IRWIN GALLERY, TIMOLSENGALLERY.COM

**LIVING AREA** Homeowner Romy's favourite room showcases her home's contemporary look, furnished with simple yet standout pieces like Jordan's 'Empire' modular sofa and a 'Jade' coffee table from Zuster. →

## home truths

**Who lives here:** Custom publisher and documentary film producer Romy Sormann; her husband; their children, Joey, 15, Sonny, 13, and Mia, 9; and their Bernese mountain dog, Miekeo.  
**Style of home:** Built in 1903, this two-storey, four-bedroom house was renovated to embody the glamour and fun of the Case Study Houses.





**LIVING AREA (above left)** Santa & Cole 'TMM' lights from ECC and Billiani 'Pop' chairs add a warm simplicity to the area. "When we're in this space, it's really just about conversation," says Romy with daughter Mia and dog Mieko. **DINING AREA (above right)** Curved birch Artek 'Lento' chairs from Anibou surround Romy's beloved Cassina 'La Barca' dining table, making the most of this open corner. Glass doors slide out to allow the outdoors in.



**MODERN CLASSICS** With their clean lines, these pieces work well in a contemporary setting. **1. Artek 'Lento' chair**, \$515, Anibou, [anibou.com.au](http://anibou.com.au). **2. 'Lean' lamp**, \$950, Douglas + Bec, [douglasandbec.co.nz](http://douglasandbec.co.nz). **3. 'Jade JAD330' lamp table**, \$750, Zuster, [zuster.com.au](http://zuster.com.au).

**W**hen Romy Sormann and her husband bought their Federation house 10 years ago, she was apprehensive. "It was a crumbling share house and every room was a bedroom," she recalls. "It was in complete disarray." Just to make it livable, the couple undertook a complete refurbishment the following year, re-stumping, re-rendering, re-plastering and re-glazing throughout.

Utterly overwhelmed, they even briefly considered moving away from Melbourne's bayside suburb of Elwood. "But we've lived in this area for 18 years and, ultimately, decided that we couldn't imagine living far from the water," says Romy. "The beach is at one end of the street and our lively local shops at the other – it's a bit like a resort town in the summer."

The property would eventually require a second-stage renovation and the time finally came 18 months ago. Instinctively, Romy enlisted the expertise of her architect brother, Jamie Sormann, and his business partner, Jo Foong, of boutique architectural practice Foong + Sormann. "Working with Jamie was always the plan," explains Romy. "It was a beautiful collaboration – I had a lot of fun."

**Romy, what was your design inspiration?** Jamie and I grew up in a modernist house with lots of glass. We have a similar design sensibility and really like the spirit of the Case Study Houses, which were often great entertaining homes that blended the indoors with the outdoors. I also found myself referring to the book *Poolside With Slim Aarons*.

**What brief did you give Jamie?** We wanted a pool, but apart from that, we left the brief pretty open. Jamie knows us and our style so well that when we told him we →

OUTDOOR CHAIRS, LUKE FURNITURE, LUKECOMAU



### decorating with black

Use black to highlight simple forms and create dramatic contrast. "We chose this veneer for the kitchen cupboards because black, more than any other colour, helps them look like a monolithic block and brings extra life to surrounding elements, such as the marble benchtop and foliage through the window," says Jamie.



“THE OPEN-PLAN LIVING AREA IS BEAUTIFUL AT ALL TIMES OF THE DAY AND IN ALL TYPES OF WEATHER”



THROW (TOP LEFT) LUKE FURNITURE, LUKE.COM.AU; RUG, LOOMRUGS.COM.AU; ARTWORK (OPPOSITE) OMA MAAS' FRUIT, YEAR BY MARISE MAAS; (ABOVE RIGHT) PORTRAIT OF BRETT WHITELEY PRINT BY JOHN OLSON

**DINING AREA (opposite)** Faceted B&B Italia 'Joker' vases from Space reflect the soft grey walls and the dining setting. **LOUNGE ROOM (above left)** An Andrew Taylor painting and Objekto 'Kaeko' table from Hub Furniture sets the tone in this contemplative zone – “this is where we read, listen to music and Mia practices piano,” says Romy. **STUDY (above right)** Romy's architect, her brother Jamie, hangs out with Mieke in the home office.

just wanted the house to suit our relaxed lifestyle with the kids, he implicitly understood what we meant. Our builders, ProvanBuilt, also made the process very smooth.

**Did you ever consider using another architect?** Never. It was a given that as soon as Jamie launched his practice he would do our house. I have a lot of faith in him. He's also very easygoing and open to other ideas – he never dismissed our input. He really listens, which made us feel confident and comfortable.

**What was it like working with family?** A lot of research, care and discussion went into every decision. It could be frustrating at times, because it tended to slow things down, but ultimately we ended up with the best possible result. Knowing that our architect cared about the outcome just as much as we did was very comforting.

**Jamie:** We're all warned of the perils of working with family. And while daily half-hour conversations are not typically part of the deal, our working relationship had an openness and sense of fun that overrode the challenges. I also get to revisit the house all the time.

**What were your considerations when you decorated the house?** Romy: My husband and I are drawn to earthy tones and natural finishes, such as wood and limed oak floorboards. I wanted a pared-back palette that wouldn't date. Neutrality is foolproof and brings a strong sense of timelessness. Splashes of colour are introduced through paintings, books, homewares and flowers. I don't like clutter!

**Which room is your favourite?** The ground floor open-plan living, dining and kitchen, because it's purpose-built for our family. It's beautiful at all times of the day and in all →

3 great finds

1

2

3

**TACTILE TOUCHES**

- 1. 'Supernova' bowl**, \$275, Georg Jensen, [georgjensen.com](http://georgjensen.com).
- 2. Danish Art Weaving 'Plaiden' baby alpaca wool throw**, \$285, Bo Butik, [bobutik.com.au](http://bobutik.com.au).
- 3. Missoni Home 'Libertad #159' pouf**, \$702, Spence & Lyda, [spenceandlyda.com.au](http://spenceandlyda.com.au).



“DURING THE RENOVATION, WE DIDN’T PURCHASE A THING WITHOUT SHOWING JAMIE FIRST - HE HAS A GREAT EYE”

**POWDER ROOM (above left)** Corian cabinets keep things in order in this bathroom. “The brief was to ensure that there was ample storage,” says Romy. **LOUNGE ROOM (above centre)** This Julia Ritson artwork, entitled *Grace 1/1001*, is a favourite of Romy’s. **OUTDOORS (opposite)** “We wanted the outdoor shower for more than just a post-pool rinse,” says architect Jamie. “We positioned it to pick up some morning sun with a degree of privacy.”

3 great finds

**MATERIAL MIX 1.** ‘Supernatural Designs’ engineered stone in London Grey, \$550/sqm, [Caesarstone, caesarstone.com.au](#).  
**2.** ‘Palazzo’ timber flooring in Limed Grey Oak Matt, \$125/sqm, [Quick-Step, quick-step.com](#).  
**3.** ‘Concrete Shale Lunar’ concrete, from \$275/sqm, [Axolotl, axolotl.com.au](#).

types of weather. When it’s hot, we leave the doors wide open and there are kids everywhere. And even in winter, I’ve been known to turn the fireplace on and open all the windows, which we can do, even when it’s raining, because of the roof overhang. It’s very casual and relaxed, with no television, which is great. So when we’re in this space, it’s really just about conversation. We play a lot of music here, too. **Jamie:** The attributes we’re proudest of are the connection to the outdoors, and how well suited the house is to entertaining.

**What do you think have been your best buys?** Romy: I don’t buy a lot of homewares as I’m always too focused on furniture. During the renovation, we didn’t purchase a thing without showing Jamie first – he has a great eye. Some pieces we already had, like the Cassina ‘La Barca’ table in the dining area. It’s my favourite. To me, it’s the most beautiful, functional piece of furniture. My mum’s had hers since 1968. Slowly, bit-by-bit, we’re accumulating some significant pieces.

**How was the backyard transformed?** The orientation of the extension had to be addressed because it’s a very wide block, and the positioning of the pool wasn’t necessarily obvious. We added an outdoor shower, so the kids can rinse off when they come back from the beach – it’s one of the best things about the house. We also added a north-facing barbecue deck leading to a small citrus grove, where we grow mint and lemon, lime and grapefruit trees. They’re especially good for tea and cocktails. ✨

*For more information on Jamie’s architecture firm Foong + Sormann, visit [foomann.com.au](#). For details on ProvanBuilt, the builders behind the project, go to [provanbuilt.com.au](#).*

MISSONI BEACH TOWEL, SAFARI LIVING, SAFARILIVING.COM



how to merge the inside and outside

- \* Keep continuity of form, material, colour and levels for a seamless look.
- \* Use large, full-height glass doors that disappear so you enjoy the view outdoors.
- \* Recess frames and tracks, and focus on clean lines for supporting beams and structures.