

THE WEEKLY REVIEW

MAY 26 - JUNE 1, 2010

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STYLE *by* DESIGN

A beautiful art-deco apartment in Elwood highlights interior designer Charlotte Coote's principles of design – comfort, opulence and pared-back simplicity, writes FRANCESCA CARTER.



Above: Interior designer Charlotte Coote.

Top: The lounge room at Charlotte Coote's Elwood apartment.

With plenty of sunlight flooding the room, Charlotte Coote's new interior-design project – a two-bedroom art-deco apartment in Elwood – comes to life. "When Amelia (Charlotte's sister) first bought the property, the interior was hideous. It had these bright, mustard-coloured sofas and it had a very funny smell," Charlotte says. "We really wanted to add to it by creating an interior which complemented the original architecture."

Amelia and Charlotte, who are both creative in their own right, spent time stripping the apartment back to highlight its original art-deco fittings. These included the intricate period detail of the cornices, ornate ceilings, the leadlight windows and the freestanding columns.

The apartment is a true reflection of Charlotte's innate style. It has classic furniture pieces that she designed herself, including her porcelain cockatoo lights, her 1930's dining-room chairs and her uniquely shaped bedside tables.

Charlotte started her own eponymous design company when she returned from Ireland in 2007. While overseas, Charlotte worked as a project manager for Future Laboratory in London, one of the world's top trend-forecasting agencies. "It was awesome experience. There were just 10 of us in the beginning, working in the basement of a house in East London, and all of the normal rules of the office just didn't apply. You were allowed to drink and smoke so long as you got your work done. It is a very forward-thinking, cutting-edge company."

In London, Charlotte missed the open spaces. When her father, international designer John Coote, rang her from Ireland to offer her a job in his business Coote & Co, it was an offer she couldn't refuse.

"Dad rang and said he was starting up his own product business to run beside his existing interior design business. Its design focus was creating classic contemporary bespoke range of lighting, porcelain,

"WE REALLY WANTED TO ADD TO IT (THE APARTMENT) BY CREATING AN INTERIOR WHICH COMPLEMENTED THE ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURE."

furniture, textiles, glassware and interior-design objects and accessories."

In Ireland, Charlotte and her father worked on designing and creating products for Coote & Co that were handmade, exclusive and designed with an understanding of proportion and scale, such as bespoke porcelain imported from Sri Lanka and hand-knotted rugs from India.

Charlotte also worked on the restoration of her father's 18th-century house by revamping the floors, the high, vaulted ceilings and the garden. Located in the Bellamont Forest Estate, the house was designed in 1729 by architect Sir Edward Lovett Pearce and is regarded as one of Ireland's treasures.

In her Melbourne interiors showroom in Armadale, Charlotte draws from her international experience in classical design to create her interiors business, which ranges from everything from her own Irish bed linen and cashmere range to exclusive textiles and accessories for interiors and design consultation. \

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Charlotte Coote Melbourne interior showroom, Shop 7, Kings Arcade, 974-978 High Street, Armadale. Open Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm.

The apartment, at 3/39 Shelley Street, Elwood, is open for inspection on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Chisholm and Gamon will auction the property on June 5 at noon.



Now we're cooking: The kitchen at the Elwood apartment.



Kick off your shoes: The lounge room at the Elwood apartment is an inviting place to relax.

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COLOUR

Colour lays the foundation for the styling success of every room – it is a vital part of the first impression. Charlotte recommends selecting muted tones, as this will allow potential buyers the chance to connect with your home. “You want to keep it quite neutral; you are trying to make the property available to as many people as possible and you might think that a fluorescent-pink shag-pile rug is fabulous in the living room, but a recently retired couple looking for a quiet apartment may not.” If you are deciding to change the colour of your rooms, Charlotte believes that one of the key inspirations should be the outside environment. “I think the important thing is to look outside and see what is going on out there.”

- Keep walls, objects, upholstery and curtains in soft and neutral tones but introduce texture.
- Compliment the natural environment in which you live.
- Continue the theme of colour in each room, as this provides flow and continuity.
- Add colour with photo frames, paintings and flowers.
- Colour co-ordinate your bookshelf.



COMFORT

Comfort reflects lifestyle. “It is very important to know how people use the room, how they use a space, how they entertain ... we always ask.” Charlotte believes one of the main problems with contemporary design is that it does not cater for practicality. She suggests that simple pieces such as the living-room couch need to have a familiar, comfortable appeal. “A square, rigid, hard-cornered sofa might look interesting, but when you come home from work you really want a beautiful, comfortable, hand-sprung sofa, one that you can relax on.”

- Show off your space as a place for relaxation, entertainment and conversation.
- Make your home look inviting by turning on lights.
- Prepare the home for different temperatures of the day – light fires, turn on air-conditioning.
- Buy new towels for the bathroom.
- Stock kitchen with food, e.g. delicious pastries on a cake stand, tea in a pot.
- Set the dining-room table.
- Bake muffins before the open for inspection so the house has a homely smell.

FOUR KEY ELEMENTS

“When selling your property, it is important that it looks its best,” says Charlotte, who has worked on renovating houses to sell in the past. “Eliminate over-the-top, bold and risky design ideas as they will frighten away your potential buyers, who may not be able to see beyond what they see at an open-for-inspection day.” Charlotte suggests keeping your house fresh, clean and simple. “Try to appeal to a broader buying market by creating a pared-back look, aimed to help potential buyers access their own creative process within the space.”



PROPORTION

When buyers inspect your home, you want each room to have balance and unity – this is achieved in the relationship between objects and space. When she was styling her own apartment, Charlotte designed a lot of the furniture to complement the art-deco features – the plaster ceilings and the fireplace. “I saw a picture of Marlene Dietrich lounging on a 1930s directors chair and I thought that would be fabulous for our apartment, so I adapted them and did it in white so it was nice and fresh. It was choosing a classical idea and putting a contemporary edge on it.” In the lounge room, Charlotte put up an earthy-coloured Robert Doble painting so that it would complement the 18th-century French oak table that also highlights the original fireplace. She then added a large rug for more texture.

- Assess where is the focal point of your room and have furniture align with it.
- Ensure that the natural features of the room are not hidden.
- Look at the size and scale of your room and select furniture accordingly.
- Always consider the view and space of the room at the door's entrance.
- Make sure you choose the right-sized artwork for the wall.



SPACE

Space is the most important aspect to a room because it is how colour, proportion, harmony, balance and texture all relate to each other. “It is about looking at a property's best features, understanding them and then going about enhancing them. Same goes for understanding your property's worst features, understand them then go about improving them,” says Charlotte. In her own apartment, she describes how she put in a large mirror that appeared to double the room in size and created extra natural light.

1. Belmont Forest drawing room, with 12 Robert Doble prints, and two-person armchairs.
2. The basement kitchen at Belmont Forest.
3. The Belmont Forest facade with John Coote's 1950s Bentley.
4. The master bedroom at Belmont Forest with Vintage Louis Vuitton suitcases.
5. Amelia and Charlotte Coote's bedroom at Belmont Forest. (RENE KRAMER)

- Where height may be an issue, install vertical-striped curtains as they provides an illusion of height.
- Re-grout bathroom tiles.
- If you want to disguise floors, choose a fabulous mat, or lime wash or paint your floorboards.
- Add mirrors, as this creates an illusion of more space and also enhances light in otherwise smaller spaces.
- Depersonalise your space by removing notices, bills, photos, and other evidence of your daily life.
- Decluttering will maximise spaciousness.
- Make sure everything is clean – remove stains, paint chips and cobwebs.



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