



# BABETTE'S NEST

The rich, private domain of interior designer, journalist and educator Babette Hayes reflects a lifetime of creative pursuits.

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## BABETTE HAYES

The ability to teach good design through visual impact is the talent that sets Babette Hayes in a special field of her own in Australia. She arrived here several years ago from London, where she had been working as an interior designer for various decorating magazines as well as conducting a food column for *Queen* magazine and the *London Daily Telegraph's* *Weekend Magazine*. She was an expert director for specialist photography and lighting experienced in the creation of simulated room settings in a studio background.

She found she was breaking completely new ground in Australia. No magazine in the mass circulation popular press had ever attempted anything as daring as mocking up a set to display furniture or fabrics, except one – the *Australian Home Journal* – one of the oldest surviving women's magazines in Australia. First published in the nineteenth century and originally subscribed to by women in colonial areas, it has recently shed its old-fashioned format for a modern

A treasured portrait of Babette's stepfather and his brother, painted in Vienna in 1913 by John Quincy Adams, has pride of place in her living room. Norwegian snowscape, unknown artist. The felted shield on the wall is by Babette's granddaughter, Hannah Gotlieb. *Chair with Arms* is by Tasmanian sculptor Peter Taylor. On top of the bureau is a bas relief head by John Mills, a box collage by Lewis Morley and an African sculpture from Lewis Morley Collection African Art. **BEHIND** the sofa is a bust of Babette by Sydney Harpley. **OPPOSITE**. Babette's archived files are a trove of goodies, including a pic of her taken in 1958.





It's nothing personal, but few people are invited into the private world of Babette Hayes. "I never bring clients to my home because I don't want them to think this is the look I will create for them," she says. "From my point of view, an interior must be very honest and truly express the client; who they are, their personality, their needs and the way they live and want to live. This is the essence of what I do."

Babette's apartment, on Sydney's North Shore, is at the rear of an original stone house built in the 1880s, and has been her home for 20 years. It is a treasure trove of personal effects, collected over a lifetime. "I don't have anything I don't love. It is my haven," she says. "I am a collector and I'm passionate about art and books, I have them everywhere." Her three children and two grandchildren come and go with friends, always close by. "We have a large creative family and are all involved in the arts. We love cooking, food, a good cup of coffee and appreciate that sense of gathering and eating together," she says. "I often have large dinners, with people gravitating to the kitchen with its old Italian table. We all plonk down and everyone helps with the cooking. I am gregarious and like to have family and friends around me." >



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**ABOVE** The lines of the 1978 Italian dining table work beautifully with the Italian rush chairs, both from Arredorama. Artworks above fireplace are *Country Australia* by Max Watters (right) and *Detritus* by Arabella Hayes. **LEFT** "I painted the kitchen ceiling sky blue between the beams so when you look up you can imagine the sky," says Babette. Artworks are *Head of Man* by Lewis Morley (rear wall, top) and a still life by Babette. **OPPOSITE** The cosy living room has pops of colours in the form of an orange rug from Seneca Textiles and an armchair from Design Warehouse. The coffee table is a reworked baby's cot from Afghanistan. The sculptural head on the side table is by John Mills. For Where to Buy, see page 228.

◀ Born to French parents and educated in England, Babette has enjoyed a prolific career in publishing and interiors spanning four decades. She moved to Sydney in the mid-1960s to become the design stylist for *Australian Home Journal* magazine, and would become one of Australia's design doyennes. Later roles as design consultant for *Belle*, interior design editor for the *Australian Women's Weekly* and cookery editor at *Australian House & Garden* ensured she would remain in Australia. "I had a wonderful introduction from Condé Nast in London, arriving with a portfolio of work from English titles such as *Ideal Home*, *Good Housekeeping*, *UK House & Garden*, *Queen* magazine and the *Telegraph*," she says. "Everything fell into place for me at a time when Australia was ready for a fresh new look."

Sydney, with its clear, clean light and abundance of colours, had a huge impact on Babette. "Friends found us a flat right on Sirius Cove on Sydney Harbour when we arrived," she says. "We had no furniture, just a couple of camp beds and the most basic things in the kitchen. I remember walking to the window overlooking the Cove and there was an Italian fisherman in his boat with all the brilliant blues and turquoise. It was a revelation. I had just come from London's fog and cold, with its subdued palette, to Sydney with the lions roaring from the zoo and this completely different colour language. It was magic."

Babette produced 14 books on design, interior decoration and cooking while running her successful interior design practice, sharing her love of the new, the bold and the unconventional. "One by one these amazing opportunities came along and it was a wonderful way of spreading the word on good design and being part of an emerging life here," she says. "I believe a sense of humour in interiors is important; adding something that's a little offbeat. The element of surprise in a home is important."

Over the years Babette has honed an honest and practical approach to interiors. "I listen a lot and want to make sure that a place is interesting and has a heart. Colour is essential; even a minimal home should have personality. I always tell people they shouldn't have anything they don't love. My home is who I am. It is a personal statement that is quite revealing and that is precisely what I believe a home should be." ▶



"I wanted a blue backdrop for the large painting and the huge collection of artworks. Part of my history is on this wall," says Babette. Sofa by Justin Puddick Upholstery. English dressing table from Stanley Lipscombe antiques. Photograph on side table by Sholto Hayes. For artwork credits and Where to Buy, see page 228.



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**ABOVE** The coloured throw is an old Vietnamese cloth from Water Tiger. Bedlinen, Bed Bath N' Table. Coloured pillows, Ikea. Artwork is *Girl with Hat*, artist unknown. **ABOVE RIGHT** An embroidered Afghani pocket, a Mexican tin mirror, a row of Mexican cut-outs and painted wooden dolls and an old glass bead necklace are gathered together on the wall. The 1880s chair has a Hungarian matyo cushion cover slung over the back. **RIGHT** Old Manchurian village doors from Water Tiger enhance the eclectic feel in the backyard. Bench seat from Orient House. Tables from Parterre. **OPPOSITE** A quiet spot in the garden framed by monstera. For Where to Buy, see page 228. >



# Inside story

A home must have heart, says **Babette Hayes**, who shares these tips for personable rooms.

*'For a light-filled effect go for a white. Old or new, it feels good. With the shade decided, paint woodwork in same, and ceiling a shade paler.'*

**'Creating a home is about having fun, enjoying the process of putting things together, and, above all, surrounding yourself with things you love. Couples should talk big decisions through. No one wants to live with something they hate to look at every time they come home.'**

**'Buying artefacts while travelling is tricky. It's nice to have mementoes but sometimes you're limited by the weight or size of the object in your luggage. Minor auction rooms can turn up all sorts of treasures: an African carving, large planter pots, an unusual chair that will look great painted black... If you love fabrics, start collecting designs, printed, woven, or old woven pieces that can be framed or made into cushions or throws.'**

**'Have your family photos enlarged then frame them and hang them closely together on a wall. A large pinboard covered in colourful fabric, that works in with the furnishings in the family or children's room, looks great. Children's artwork looks fantastic framed and hung with other items or specially placed, again close together.'**

*'Mirrors are important. Large, small, long, narrow, round, they add something to a room. They can bring light into a dark area, reflect scenery, sky, other parts of the room. They bring life to a space.'*

**'Flowers, leaves and things that are alive are important. Whether it's a single flower in a great vase or a bunch of glossy green leaves from the garden, these personal touches will make a huge difference to the feel of a home.'**



**'You will find that you'll gradually pick up touches of colour as you go along. It might be black; frames, a TV screen, an oven door, vase or photographs. Notice how things repeat themselves. It's like putting together a piece of music; the notes can be loud or quiet, just make sure you set up a rhythm.'**

**'Make sure that your eye falls on something that makes you feel good each time you arrive home. Depending on the space available, work with what you have to create a welcoming entry into your home.'**

**'Lighting will instantly enhance or kill the mood or look you want to create. Think floor lamps, table lamps and attractive pendant lights. Always choose warm, longlife light bulbs. A cold light is deadly.'**

**Babette is presenting The Evolution of Trends seminar at the Decorating+Design trade fair in Sydney, February 5-7.**  
[www.decoratedesign.com.au](http://www.decoratedesign.com.au)



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