

# UNCROWDED HOUSE

ROCK STAR NEIL FINN'S SPACIOUS FAMILY HOME



**N**eil and Sharon Finn have recently completed work on their home in Melbourne. Because of the success of Neil's band, Crowded House, it was planned as a comfortable, stable base for themselves and their sons, Liam and Elroy.

Their life, as a part of the international music scene, means living out of suitcases for many months at a time on overseas tours and travelling with the band in buses big enough to have their own kitchens and living areas.

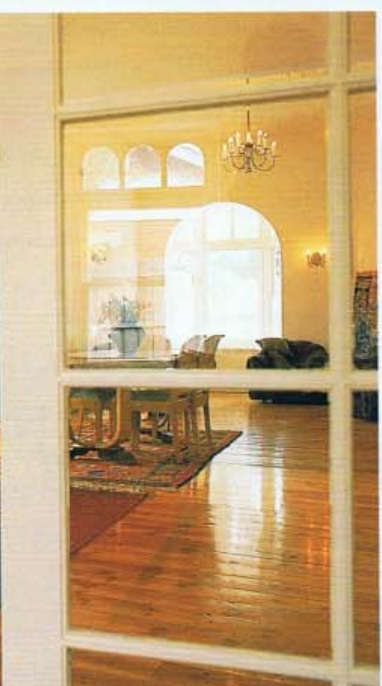
*Deco detailing and classical mosaics are a compatible mix of styles. Sandblasted doors from the 1930s, **above** and **opposite, far right**, are complemented by mosaic floors designed by Sharon and laid by The Melbourne Mural Studio. The informal sitting room, **left**, is for family living; the formal area seen from the study, **opposite, below left**, gives one of a few clues to Neil's profession. The thirties-style dining furniture, **opposite top**, was bought in Prahran seven years ago.*

So there is nothing like coming home to your own bed – and the Finns' beds are in a lovely environment, in the kind of house that inspires children's book illustrators to depict home. It even has its own turret.

"This is the place that we look forward to coming back to," Sharon says. "It's the biggest home that we've lived in, but we really need the space and we like to share it. Our families come and stay, and there are often friends in the guest rooms. There is nothing better than a house full of people all making use of it. We're lucky to have it."

Surprisingly, because the house itself is so grand, the primary attraction for them was the size of the land. Originally from New Zealand, the Finns are used to big 'sections', as they call the blocks of land there. Here, average suburban blocks are a lot smaller.







“We loved the large garden instantly,” they say, and indeed its size is extraordinary for a house so near the centre of Melbourne. It is not visible from the street and the tennis court disappears into a corner of the block. Looking out of the kitchen window, you feel as though the house is set deep in the country. Pigeons flap around in the grove of ancient palm trees – which Neil, even with an important recording session ahead, enjoyed tidying up, just on the off-chance that it might be photographed.

*Sharon says they spend a lot of time in the kitchen, top left, so she took care it was truly functional, and that it only takes “two steps to get anywhere”. The mosaic theme that unifies the house is carried through into the kitchen, left; the design, from a manual of Italian mosaic styles, was found at Alan Patrick Ltd. In the bathroom, top right, Sally-Anne Mill’s blind, and, opposite, a standard lamp – one of the Finns’ favourite antique finds – converted into a towel holder.*

The house, built in 1901, was as sound as a fortress when the Finns bought it. There had been some additions made over the years, but the previous owner had lived with her pigeon in one room, while the house yellowed around her.

So it required a lot of work, and the Finns commissioned architects Michael Sandberg and Jean-Henri Marin to design new work in sympathy with the original exterior. The interior is timeless, comfortably incorporating any earlier changes. In fact, it has that indefinable substance that European houses have: shiny, reflective floors, plain walls and very spacious rooms.

Overall, the Finn compound is idyllic. It made me regret not taking up the guitar. For a house like this, it would have been worth the practice. □ ZINTA JURJANS



