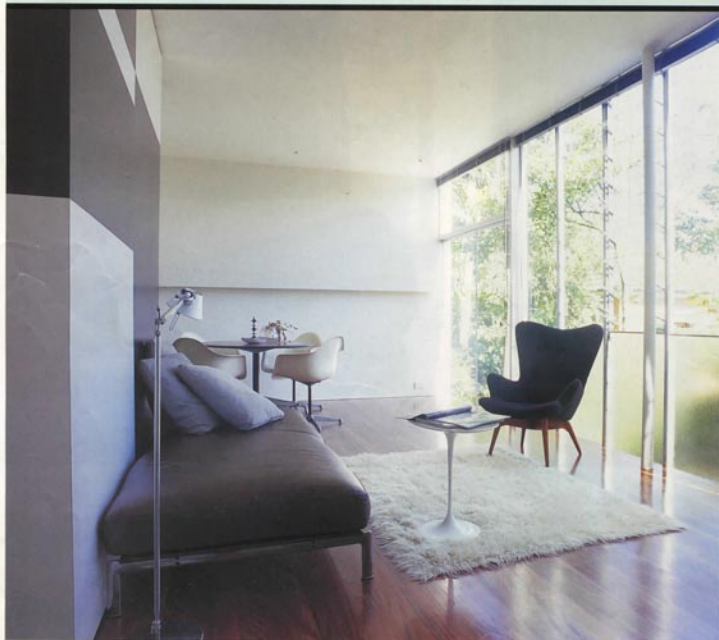


crisp cubism

photography by petrina tinslay

Disciples of vintage modernity rejuvenate an apartment in Montrose, a landmark Sydney block designed by Neville Gruzman in the 1950s. True to the nature of the building's architecture, furnishings and finishes reflect a 'less-is-more abstraction'.

The light and airy living area, [below](#) and [opposite](#), boasts newly laid brushbox floors and a flokati rug. B&B Italia leather bench from Space; Artemide 'Tolomeo' lamp from ECC Lighting; Grant Featherston 'Contour' armchair, Eero Saarinen side table and Charles Eames dining table and chairs all from Form Follows Function. The window-wall looks south to the Harbour Bridge.





Designers Trudi Scrymgeour and Keith Glover faced the outer walls of the bathroom, [above](#), with laminate sheets to create an irregular grid pattern that aligns with the metal framing of the building's north wall. This treatment emphasises the bathroom as a box intruding into the sitting area, although the black and white pattern seems more reminiscent of the sixties than the fifties. Shortly after the apartments were built in 1954, Max Dupain photographed the northern courtyard, [left](#), and its bridges spanning from higher ground to the first-floor units. The gridded glass facade is still considered adventurous today.



Montrose is a Sydney apartment building that has cult status among architecture buffs.

Designed by Neville Gruzman in 1954, it was so technically advanced for Australia that its first open-day is said to have attracted more than a thousand visitors. Set on the Neutral Bay ridge, looking south to the Harbour Bridge, it is a block of six units and two then-rare maisonettes.

One of the units, owned by Linda Kell and Luke Galvin, has just been renovated in fifties-to-nineties style by two designers devoted to post-war modernity, Trudi Scrymgour and Keith Glover of Form Follows Function. While their scheme pays no attention to the tizzy European furnishings installed

by the first owner, they have been inspired by the original architecture, particularly the bold grid framing of Gruzman's glass curtain walls. According to Glover, Montrose set a standard of excellence above the generally shonky construction practices of the decade when it was built.

For architecture fans, the exciting aspect of the building is that it introduced to Sydney an important modernist structural concept – the idea of walls as light curtains draped outside the basic structure. This approach, now conventional for high-rises across the world, is often credited to the Maison Dom-ino designed by Le Corbusier in 1913. But the same principle was applied in 1894 in Chicago, with the



Reliance office building by Charles Atwood of D.H. Burnham & Company, and was talked about in 1850s Europe by a German architect, Gottfried Semper, who claimed that the huts made by primitive humans were 'dressed' with weavings hung from simple frames. It seems ironic that this influential view of prehistory has helped to define 20th century modernity.

Neville Gruzman has confirmed that he was influenced by Le Corbusier's Dom-ino drawing. Montrose also has concrete floors supported by columns and the structure is clad with curtain walls of glass held in clip-together frames that also conduct concealed plumbing and wiring. In effect, the building is wrapped with a coat of glass - patterned, like a cloth,

As well as housing the bathroom, the laminate-faced box intruding into the living room, opposite, conceals the kitchen's pantry and refrigerator. Left: newly installed kitchen storage includes a Bendix laundry machine under the terrazzo counter beside an Oliveri sink and mixer. Above: 1950s and 1960s vases from Form. Below: the kitchen is unobtrusively installed beneath louvred windows along the building's north wall.



The main bedroom, *below*, attracts even light from the window-wall facing south. All the apartments in the block feature two walls of sliding windows and glass louvres. Chenille bedspread from Country Road Homewear; quilt cover and pillowcases from Room Interior Products. On the table are a sixties lamp by Lightmakers, an Italian 'Secticon' clock and a seventies vase from Finland.

with transparent and coloured rectangles.

Inside, the apartments are blessed with two walls of sliding windows and glass louvres, providing controllable cross breezes and a consistent quality of light. The six units (all with two bedrooms) are small but have a psychological sense of clear air and space.

Working to a tight budget, the designers first removed 'invalid' fixtures and finishes, leaving light pelmets, electrical ducts and other original architectural features. They laid a new brush-box floor in the living areas and black carpet in the bedrooms. New cupboards were also installed in the bedrooms (one of which is now an office).

On the north side, the old kitchen and bathroom were thoroughly renovated, using reflective surfaces that include glass mosaic tiles, terrazzo benchtops, laminate cabinets, colour-backed glass sliding doors, mirrors and stainless steel fittings. In the bathroom, the original basin is accompanied by a new swivel mirror on a glamorous chrome stand.

In the living room, the bathroom appears as a cube intruding on the sitting area; walls on this side have been finished with a bold black-and-white geometric pattern inspired by Gruzman's facade grid. According to Scrymgeour: "The weight of the cube provides a foil for the lightness of the building structure, creating an essential whole set in sharp focus."

Furnishings include classic pieces from the fifties, designed by Charles Eames, Grant Featherston and Eero Saarinen, combined with notable designs from later decades that are "in the same family of Bauhaus modernism and less-is-more abstraction" as the building. According to Linda, she and Luke are delighted with the new interior. And when Gruzman was asked what he thought of the apartment after visiting it recently, the maestro himself pronounced general satisfaction.

**WRITER: DAVINA JACKSON PRODUCERS:
TRUDI SCRYMGOUR and KEITH GLOVER**



The exterior of Montrose today, [below left](#), photographed at twilight by Paul Gosney. [Below right](#): beside the front door, the bathroom includes a new vanity bench, with coloured glass doors, that incorporates the original basin. [Bottom right](#): a night view of the dining area, with a table display of forties candlesticks, a fifties ceramic dish and a sixties vase, all from Form Follows Function.

