

MODERN HERITAGE



Thames
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CHERISHING AUSTRALIA'S
INTERWAR HOMES: OLD ENGLISH,
SPANISH MISSION & ART DECO

CAMERON
BRUHN

Heritage homes hum with inherent charm and character, filling the void for those seeking more than a modern white box. Australian houses built from the 1920s to the 1940s offer a triumphant meeting of styles, embracing stylistic elements of Old English, Spanish Mission, Art Deco and everything in between. But as delightful as they are, their quirky details and layouts are not always suited to a contemporary lifestyle.

Modern Heritage surveys twenty homes that embody the period's vibrant architectural eclecticism. Weaving cultural context with new insights, this carefully curated volume highlights the privilege that comes with owning a heritage house and the value of research in understanding the architecture's stories and setting. Homeowners and architects share the process of protecting this legacy while giving new life to these cherished homes.

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ISBN 978-1-760-76388-6

UNLEY PARK
RESIDENCE:
CARADOC ASHTON
AND FISHER⁽¹⁹³⁷⁾
WILLIAMS BURTON
LEOPARDI⁽²⁰²¹⁾

Unley Park, South Australia

Unley Park Residence is built
on the land of the Kurna people

[02]



DWELLING TYPE:	ORIGINAL INTERNAL AREA:	BEDROOMS:
Detached house	428 m ²	4
TOTAL SITE AREA:	CURRENT INTERNAL AREA:	BATHROOMS:
2,022 m ²	438 m ²	4

‘WHERE WE DID HAVE TO MAKE A MARKED CHANGE, OUR APPROACH WAS TO FIND WAYS THAT WOULD HONOUR THE ORIGINAL MATERIALITY AND REINTERPRET THAT THROUGH A MORE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.’

– Sophia Leopardi, director of interior design, Williams Burton Leopardi

[LEGACY] The picturesque inner-southern Adelaide suburb of Unley Park has an urban grandness and generosity that reflects its development history. It emerged in the 1870s and is now part of the City of Unley, which was established in 1906 as the third municipality of South Australia.

The exact origin of the name of the suburb is the subject of speculation, but it is usually attributed to Thomas Whistler, a colonial agent who arrived in Adelaide from London in 1840. Whistler was one of the fifteen affluent landholders of the area. Soon after his arrival, he began the process of land subdivision and speculation that eventually created Unley Park’s expansive gardens and flat, wide streets, many of which are now avenues lined with grand old deciduous trees.

The architectural character of Unley Park is similarly commodious. It features many grand houses built in the fashionable styles of their era, from the stylistic confections and eccentricities of the Victorian period through to the earliest experiments with the Functionalist styles of the 1940s.

Unley Park Residence was designed by Caradoc Ashton and Fisher, a partnership formed by architects Edward Caradoc Ashton and Norman Cater Fisher in 1934 (initially known as EC Ashton & Fisher). The firm was responsible for the design of many Art Deco landmarks in Adelaide, including the 1936 Savings Bank of South Australia.

Unley Park Residence, built in 1937, has heritage status as a contributor to the Grand Unley Park Heywood Estate conservation area, which is noted for its intact, coherent and desirable character. This house demonstrates each of these heritage criteria and has been called home by just three families since it was built.

The architectural lineage of this handsome two-storey brick house is the Elizabethan branch of the Old English manner. Inside, there are some charming divergences from its asymmetrical old-world visage. The foyer is framed by a pair of elegantly fluted Doric columns and the staircase displays a curvaceous wrought iron balustrade and buttery terrazzo treads.



[LIFESTYLE] The initial brief delivered to Sophia Leopardi, director of interior design at Williams Burton Leopardi, sought modest updates to the charming Unley Park Residence. The owners wanted help with furniture selection, and possibly the design of a new kitchen, but those plans quickly expanded to scope a significant renovation of the home.

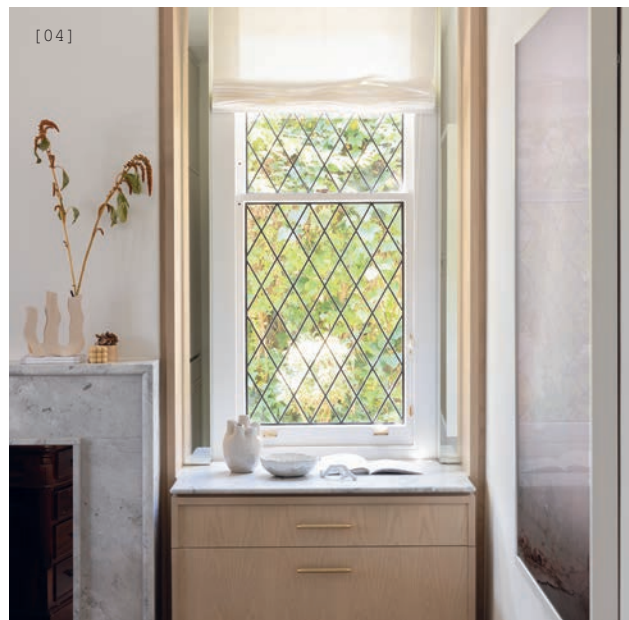
The house was intended to be the family's forever home, but after living in it for 12 years with a growing family, the owners knew it was time to improve the dwelling's functionality. A few years after buying the house, they had engaged Rob Williams, one of the founders of Williams Burton Leopardi, to extend it, adding a large living pavilion and outdoor entertaining area at the rear.

'Working with this [previous renovation] and acknowledging that our processes and approach have changed and evolved, we were able to help the clients reimagine their home in full,' says Leopardi. When approaching the commission, Leopardi was conscious that 'the owners have an enormous sense of pride over their home' but unfortunately 'they weren't really using it to its full potential'.

The thorough reimagining of Unley Park Residence, incorporating both architectural and interior design interventions, takes an inquisitive approach to the building fabric and the family's lifestyle. 'The process itself was an opportunity for us to learn more about the clients and their own sensibilities, to enact a patient response, and to help reveal how special their home could be,' Leopardi says.

The expanded brief aimed to make the house functional for the owners now, and into the future, as both a practical day-to-day home and a special place for family gatherings and celebrations.

'In wanting to make sure that all interventions were fitting, a methodical lens was used to make sure that the result would best serve the family - a relationship that continues now, with continued engagement. By having patience and being open to new processes, we also learnt a lot along the way about how important homes are as a reflection of their custodians.'



[01] With an intricately woven herringbone brick facade, diamond patterned windows and dramatic roofline, Unley Park Residence has a 'storybook' feel that the architects wanted to maintain.

[02] A warm colour palette and soft curves make the original parts of the home feel cosy and inviting.

[03] On the front facade, the numerals 1937 proudly state the year the original home was completed.

[04] Handcrafted joinery insertions speak to the craftsmanship of the heritage home.

[05] Elegantly fluted Doric columns frame the foyer, a divergence from the dwelling's asymmetrical old-world visage.

[06] The addition of a contemporary light fitting adds new energy to the original terrazzo stairs and wrought iron balustrade.

[06]



[07]





[07] The renovation finds a balance between the formality and separation of the original plan and the openness required for contemporary family gatherings.

[08] Curved stone and brass gives the kitchen a playful, yet glamorous, tone.

[09] Large expanses of glazing almost merge the interior spaces with the garden.

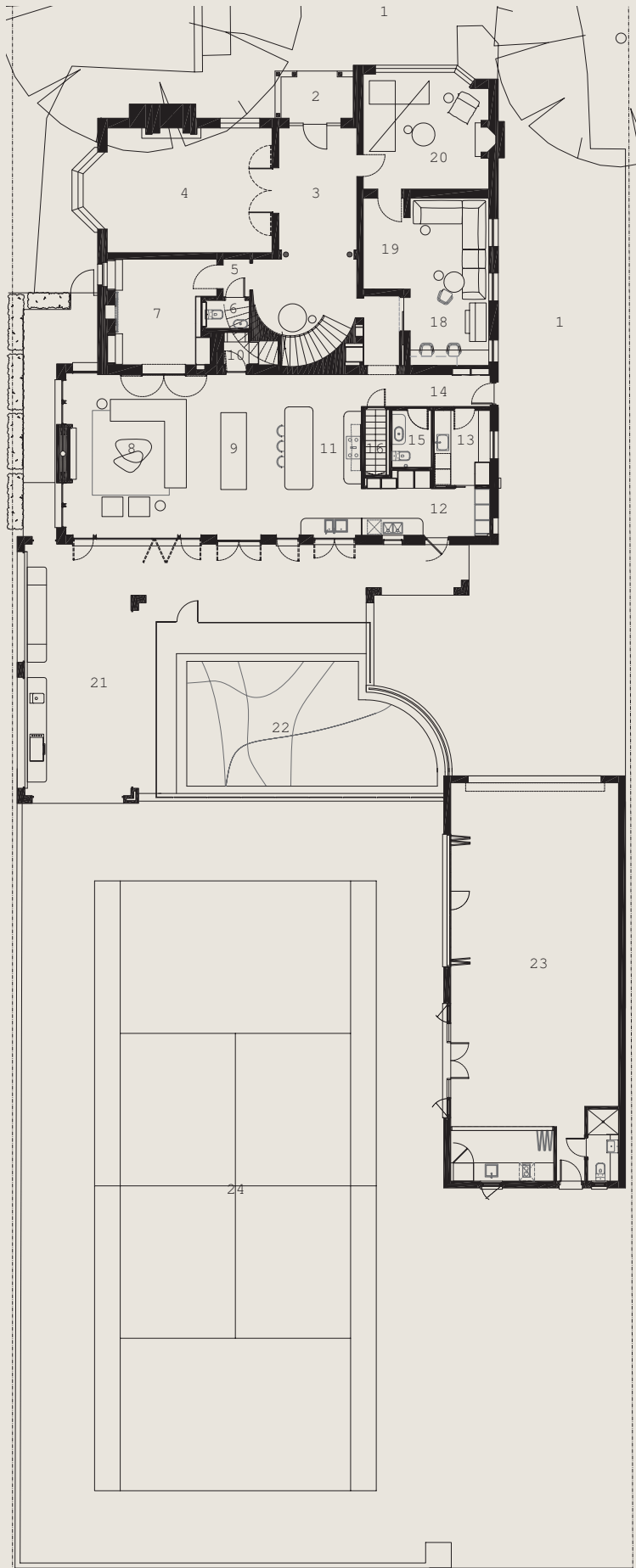
[REIMAGINING] In the reimagining of Unley Park Residence, the team at Williams Burton Leopardi embraced the nuances and quality of its well-preserved 1930s architecture. Adroitly noting that the building doesn't sit definitively within one stylistic category, but is an excellent example of the eclecticism of Australian interwar residential architecture, they leant into this as they worked fastidiously to modernise it.

Williams Burton Leopardi's distinguished portfolio of projects includes many award-winning revitalisations of heritage buildings. Unley Park Residence's sense of whimsy and romance set it apart. Leopardi explains that 'there is a storybook feel to this home that we wanted to retain. Its unique set of details were exciting for us to work with and enhance.' This sympathetic approach meant that the team worked hard to 'leverage as much as possible of the existing hero elements, while peeling away distractions that had been added over the years'.

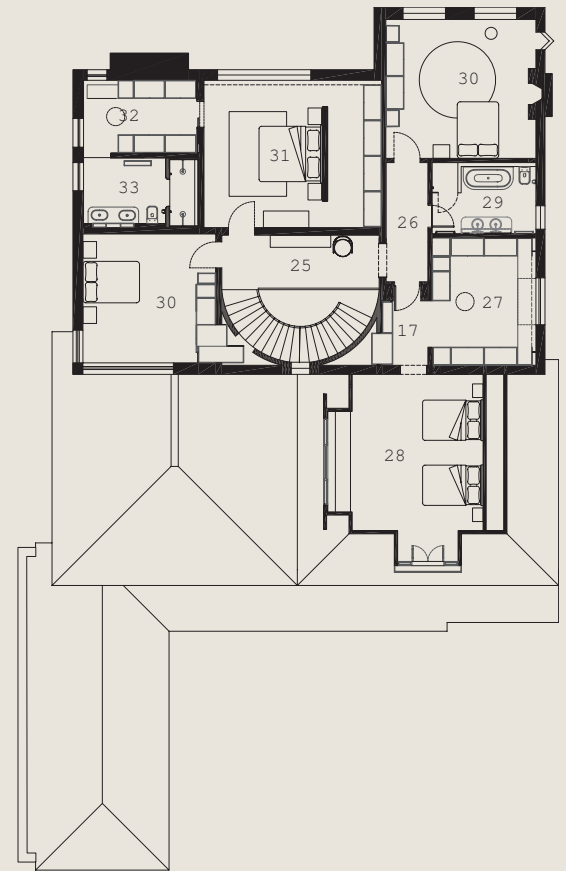
Where substantial planning changes have been made, they are done in a way that honours the quality of the original building fabric, interpreting it to add a complementary new layer. The luxuriously detailed new bathrooms and expansive kitchen nod to the esprit of the Art Deco and Art Nouveau movements. Leopardi says the team sought to 'draw inspiration from the existing fabric of the house and let that guide us'.

In the reconfiguration of the large family room and outdoor entertaining area at the rear of the house, the meticulous detailing promoted by the Modernist architect Mies van der Rohe and his circle in the mid-20th century provides a reference for the tall new windows that seamlessly merge the family room with the carefully manicured garden.

Many of the functional updates to Unley Park Residence, including the air-conditioning and home technology, are invisible, which speaks to the authenticity and rigour of the renovation.



GROUND FLOOR



LEVEL 1

FLOOR PLAN KEY

- 1 Driveway
- 2 Porch
- 3 Entry hall
- 4 Formal dining
- 5 Ground level hall
- 6 Powder room 1
- 7 Study
- 8 Living
- 9 Dining
- 10 Wine room
- 11 Kitchen
- 12 Pantry
- 13 Laundry
- 14 Lobby 1
- 15 Powder room 2
- 16 Cellar stair
- 17 Lobby 2
- 18 Kid's study
- 19 TV snug
- 20 Kid's living
- 21 Terrace
- 22 Pool
- 23 Garage
- 24 Tennis court
- 25 Landing
- 26 Level one hall
- 27 Girl's dressing
- 28 Girl's bedroom
- 29 Bathroom 1
- 30 Bedroom
- 31 Main Bedroom
- 32 Dressing
- 33 Ensuite

[10]



[11]





[10] In the main bedroom, period detailing, plush new joinery, antique furniture and contemporary objects are perfectly balanced and arranged.

[11] The roof cavity has been reworked into a delightful children's bedroom.

[12] The luxuriously detailed bathrooms are a nod to the Art Deco and Art Nouveau movements.

[13] Floor-to-ceiling geometric tiling spans the curved partition in the bathroom.

ARCHITECT:
Williams Burton Leopardi

PROJECT TEAM:
David Burton, Sophia Leopardi,
David Handsaker, Emma Aronsten

BUILDER:
Ikon Projects

ENGINEER:
gama consulting

JOINER:
Admor Dimensions

STONE FABRICATOR:
Adelaide Marble Specialists

WINDOW TREATMENTS:
Heritage Window Treatments
and Tailored Window Treatments

PHOTOGRAPHER:
Caroline Cameron

ORIGINAL ARCHITECT:
Caradoc Ashton and Fisher

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE:
Old English

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:
Curved staircase, herringbone brick front
facade, moulded chimneys, diamond-pattern
leadlight casement windows with sandstone
quoin detailing

HERITAGE STATUS:
Contributory Heritage Place