

Sculpture by the Sea

The design of a *clifftop villa* by Nina Maya Interiors called for mesmerising curves, crystal walls and a towering glass conservatory that emulates the splendour of its surrounds.

By Freya Herring
Photographed by Felix Forest
Styled by Joseph Gardner



On the pool terrace of this Bellevue Hill home, custom **pool lounges** by Nina Maya Interiors and produced by Jade Customs; Paola Lenti Bistrò **umbrella**, enquiries to Moebel. [Details, tap here](#)

The first thing you see upon entering Villa D’Estate is the stairway, curled like a cat’s tongue in a swathe of grey steel, and lit from above by a hand-poured skylight that creates patterns of light on its static, metal form. It’s a sign of things to come in this Bellevue Hill home — here, everything feels sculptural. Hardness and softness sit together in equal measure, pulling and pushing against each other to deeply satisfying effect.

“I love sculptural things,” says designer Nina Maya of Nina Maya Interiors and the recently launched practice Maya Sternberg Architects. For this 596 square metre house, which was a full knockdown-and-rebuild project, she says, “We wanted to soften, because the floor plan is quite angular and straight. I wanted the lines in the interior to be feminine and soft and inviting.” It’s something she thinks women in design do especially well — temper spaces to make them feel welcoming and liveable. “I think we bring an innate knowledge of what makes a home a home.” The staircase at Villa D’Estate sets the tone for the rest of the house — “It was the starting point,” says Maya. “Its curves inform things like the beautiful fireplace and the kitchen island, which is made out of 120 pieces of marble that softly curve so it looks like it’s carved out of stone.” It’s a space very much in the modern vernacular of a luxurious kitchen — white on white, huge Primavera marble island, grand Lacanche oven — but details like these elevate it beyond expectation. “Luxury for me is ‘quiet’ luxury,” says Maya. “It’s using the best quality materials and focusing heavily on the detailing. It’s not loud, it’s not ostentatious; it’s refined and sophisticated.”

Another sculptural moment, this time in an oft-overlooked space, is the solid marble vanity in the ground-floor powder room, adjacent to the main entrance. Emerging from the floor, its pillowy folds stretch and gradate towards the wall as it ascends, like an imagined alien stalagmite. It backs onto a double-height external wall constructed using crystal bricks custom-made by Maya’s team for this property. “We had this vision of what we wanted and there was no one in the world making them, so we set about creating them ourselves from scratch,” she says of the journey to create the glistening bars. “We created a series of moulds over six months and had different prototypes made until we were happy.”



Designer Nina Maya in the home’s conservatory with a view of the internal courtyard; **landscape design** by Myles Baldwin Design.

The result is a wall that feels more like an artwork than a piece of construction. “The powder room glows,” says Maya. “In daylight, when you’re inside, you’ve got this beautiful, illuminated crystal wall. And then at night-time when you’re approaching the house it glows from the inside out — this really soft, glowing crystal wall as you approach the building.” And in those darkest of hours, the vanity and custom mirror (created in collaboration with artist and designer Oliver Tanner) are silhouetted behind the bricks; a celebration of bespoke craftsmanship.

Transparent and translucent materials are threaded throughout, and the glass conservatory is their ultimate expression. It may seem like madness to bring a glass box into a subtropical climate, but here the natural landscape lends itself to the task. “There are huge, 300-year-old trees above it that are 60 metres high — an incredible, green canopy,” Maya says. “So it’s not hot — it’s actually like being in a rainforest; it’s really protected from the sun.” Though a conservatory can conjure thoughts of basic British extensions, Maya is quick to clarify. “It’s a double storey void in glass and bronze metalwork,” she says. “We put my favourite pieces of furniture in there, which is the Pierre Paulin setting. There’s a beautiful bonsai and you feel like you could be in a different country in that part of the house, it’s such a retreat.”



In another view of the conservatory, Alpha sofa and Club chairs by Pierre Paulin, enquiries to Moebel; custom coffee table, side tables and rug by Nina Maya Interiors; bonsai from Relik Designs; Michael Verheyden bowl from Ondene; Suwira McDonald vase from The DEA Store; De Padova Bombori lamp from Boffi; *Unnamed Flag Crayon* Twins commissioned artwork by Ben Mazey.

But this isn't a view you'd get anywhere else. Next to the dining area, a semi-circular infinity pool looks over Sydney Harbour in all its finery, and Maya says this vantage point has become the owners' favourite spot on the property. Because even this Sydney home — with its five bedroom suites, seven lounges and 'rainforest' conservatory — can't compete with the Opera House and Harbour Bridge. But it certainly does try.

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In the formal living room, custom **sofas** by Nina Maya Interiors and produced by Atelier Furniture; custom **armchair** by Nina Maya Interiors and produced by Jade Customs; custom **coffee table** and **side table** by Nina Maya Interiors and Oliver Tanner; custom **fireplace** by Nina Maya Interiors and installed by Mediterranean Marble and JCorp Construction; Floris Wubben **vase** from Studio Alm; Michaël Verheyden **bowl** from Ondene; Suvira McDonald **vase** from The DEA Store; custom **rug** by Nina Maya Interiors; vintage **pendant light** from Tamsin Johnson Showroom; Akari **floor lamp** by Isamu Noguchi from Studio Gardner; *Broken Whites Painting In (2022)* **artwork** by Jan Maarten Voskuil from Peter Blake Gallery.



In the formal dining area, Pukalu **dining table** by Van Rossum and FBC London Edesia **dining chairs**, enquiries to Moebel; ceramic **vessels** by Astrid Salomon from Studio Gardner; custom **ceiling lights** by Randy Zieber and Oliver Tanner.



On the pool terrace, custom marble table by Nina Maya Interiors; outdoor **dining chairs** from Restoration Hardware; **greenery** and **planter** from Relik Designs.



In the powder room, **vanity** in Hormuz Green marble; **sensor tap** from Astra Walker; custom **mirror** by Nina Maya Interiors and Oliver Tanner; Floris Wubben vase from Studio Alm; custom crystal glass **bricks** by Nina Maya Interiors. [Details, tap here.](#)



In the main bedroom, Camaleonda **armchair** by Mario Bellini for B&B Italia from Space Furniture; linen **bed cover** from Cultiver; Royal Botania Organix **lounge** (on balcony), enquiries to Moebel.