

DESIGNING
WITH
BLACK

Architecture & Interiors

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STEPHEN CRAFTI

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Stephen Crafti

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FOREWORD

STEPHEN CRAFTI
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Black has always been my favourite colour – or absence of colour. If I was given a choice, I would live in a black house. It could be made of concrete, steel or even timber, as long as it was black. While I dream of one day of living in a black house, my recent move to an unrenovated home provided the opportunity for thinking black. ■ While the 1930s duplex (one up, one down) I purchased would look odd painted black, a renovation did allow me to apply a 'black paint brush' across many of the surfaces. The timber floors, for example, concealed by carpet for nearly 80 years, were polished in lacquered black. This not only provided a strong contrast to the chalk white walls, but also allowed light to reflect from the high-gloss finish. After the floors came new curtains. Although there was a vast range of colours to select, a sheer black curtain swatch won the day. While appearing slightly 'gothic' to the street, these black curtains allow the unadorned 1930s window frames to appear recessive in the façade. ■ When it came to planning a garden, black resurfaced. The tired silver-grey timber fences needed painting and black seemed an obvious choice. Everything I planted in the garden, from the moss-white birch trees to the oak-leaf hydrangeas appeared sharper against the black background. One nursery I spoke to suggested black irises would make a wonderful statement in the garden. Another garden supplier suggested a black magnolia tree as a wonderful feature. When it came to buying mulch for the garden beds, I found I was drawn to the black mulch, something I hadn't seen before. My son, who started a vegetable patch, included beans – black ones of course – a penchant for black must be genetic! And when the outdoor furniture was being recovered, the designer suggested black to complement the white plastic tubular frames. How could I resist? ■ However, when my partner designated one of the spare bedrooms as a walk-in wardrobe, it became clear that a book on black design was in the wings. Her clothes come in every shade of black. The only alternative is a small collection of white shirts. Even most of her contemporary jewellery is black, as are her shoes, handbags, scarves and even socks. Like black clothes and accessories, which appear timeless and elegant, black houses appear ageless. Whether clad in stained black

timber or in steel, designing with black makes a quiet statement among considerably 'noisier' neighbours. Black homes provide a quiet ambience in the streetscape, allowing the landscape to predominate. ■ This book on black houses includes buildings that are entirely black. Other projects are best described as houses with 'black additions', allowing a new contemporary wing to appear recessive behind a period home. There are also black houses in this book which use a 'splash of white' to articulate a pathway or entrance. And although these homes are essentially black, the interiors are often white – partially or entirely – to provide a sharp contrast to the exterior. ■ Many of the homes featured in this book also bring a touch of black to the interior. This could take the form of stained black timber feature walls, stained black timber floors or even black laminate joinery for kitchens and bathrooms. Black furniture also features prominently, sometimes placed against white, such as dining tables. ■ While black designs have their converts, the effect is maximised only when they are placed in the right context. For example, one black house, featuring a black steel façade, was the perfect solution between two inner city homes. This contemporary house is not only recessive in the Victorian streetscape, but creates a sense of intrigue from the outset. Another house, clad in black zinc, does not overshadow its neighbours – significant homes built during the twentieth century. ■ Black is both a geographical and cultural phenomenon. Black houses, for example, are integral to the culture of New Zealand. The climate in New Zealand suits black houses, with the lush vegetation providing a wonderful framework. In contrast, cities such as Sydney are where the white house rules supreme – understandably, given the strength of the natural light. ■ Those with a penchant for black, be it in what they wear, the objects that surround them, or their 'outlook in life', will appreciate this journey through black homes. Like my own house, where black seems to camouflage any irregularities, black design helps to remove superfluous detail that takes away from the overall concept. And although I'm surrounded by black in my current home, there's a feeling of solidity, not despair.



INTRODUCTION

This book on black houses includes buildings that are entirely black. Other projects are best described as houses with 'black additions', allowing a new contemporary wing to appear recessive behind a period home. There are also black houses in this book which use a 'splash of white' to articulate a pathway or entrance. And although these homes are essentially black, the interiors are often white – partially or entirely – to provide a sharp contrast to the exterior. ■ Many of the homes featured in this book also bring a touch of black to the interior. This could take the form of stained black timber feature walls, stained black timber floors or even black laminate joinery for kitchens and bathrooms. Black furniture also features prominently, sometimes placed against white, such as dining tables. ■ While black designs have their converts, the effect is maximised only when they are placed in the right context. For example, one black house, featuring a black steel façade, was the perfect solution between two inner city homes. This contemporary house is not only recessive in the Victorian streetscape, but creates a sense of intrigue from the outset. Another house, clad in black zinc, does not overshadow its neighbours – significant homes built during the twentieth century. ■ Black is both a geographical and cultural phenomenon. Black houses, for example, are integral to the culture of New Zealand. The climate in New Zealand suits black houses, with the lush vegetation providing a wonderful framework. In contrast, cities such as Sydney are where the white house rules supreme – understandably, given the strength of the natural light. ■ Black can also camouflage any irregularities, and black design helps to remove superfluous detail that takes away from the overall concept.

The Ridge Road Residence by studiofour, clad entirely in white mahogany, stained black, appears like a burnt log in the landscape. ■ Photo: Shannon McGrath





This house, elevated on steel poles, is partially clad in black polycarbonate. “We obviously love black, but in this instance it was used to diffuse the light as well as screen a neighbouring home”, says architect Andrew Simpson. To further diffuse the light, the architects created a secondary ‘skin’ of clear polycarbonate. A gap between these two layers purges hot air during the warmer months. The external black polycarbonate wall, which appears to wrap around the roof, also slightly twists. “We saw this form like the canvas awning you often see attached to caravans”, says the architect. ■ Photo: Christine Francis