



Sydney, NSW



Opposite: Neale Whitaker (right) and David Novak-Piper with their beloved dogs. "This house speaks an awful lot about us," says Neale.

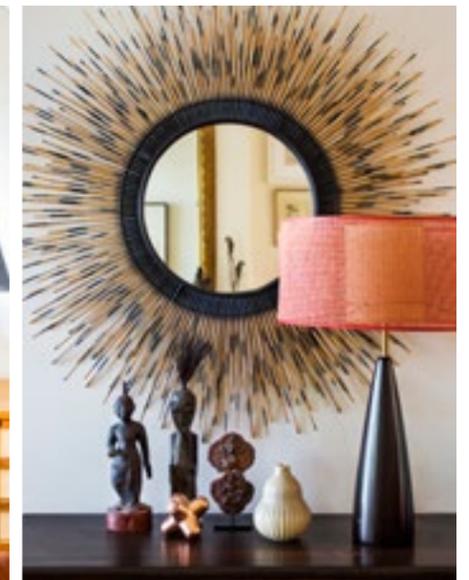
PORTRAIT *of style*

When *The Block* judge Neale Whitaker and his partner David first saw this Victorian terrace, they knew they had to buy it, he tells **Juliet Rieden**.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FELIX FOREST STYLING BY HANDE RENSHAW

THEY ARE HUNTING dogs and are the most gentle-natured dogs in the world," Neale Whitaker announces as Otis, six, and Ollie, three-and-a-half, rush to the door, inquisitive and barking. In fact, he's right. His two Weimaraners are incredibly affectionate and quite the hosts in the inner-city Sydney terrace that the dapper judge of *The Block* and editor-in-chief of *Belle* magazine shares with his partner, stylist David Novak-Piper.

The dogs run freely throughout the three-storey home, but they like the sitting room at the back of the house best, nestled between the kitchen and courtyard, where they have their own ▶





The generous rattan and wood chairs are made by Norman + Quaine and “are an update on traditional rattan-backed planters”, says Neale.



sofa and watch as David cooks up a storm and Neale pours the wine.

The couple first saw the house in 2005, when they decided it was time to buy, having been together for 10 years. “We both had reservations about the neighbourhood as it was definitely the Bronx end rather than the Paris end of Surry Hills,” says Neale, laughing. “But we love the house – the feel of it, the courtyard, the light well through the middle. It was an interesting, late-Victorian house that had been opened up, giving it a sense of space.”

The house had been renovated in the early 1990s and the first thing Neale did was to redo the kitchen. “We are quite into our food and David is a great cook, an ex-chef, so the kitchen is important to us. We replaced that in the first six months.”

They also painted the walls a neutral cream and added plantation shutters. The key to the unique aura of this home is all the things in it – the eclectic mix of furniture, ornaments and the incredible collection of original artwork and photography.

“I think this house speaks an awful lot about us, about our characters” Neale says. “It’s welcoming and open, and demonstrates our tastes and the things we love and care about. The more antique pieces in the house are

David’s and the more contemporary mine. But, somehow, they work together.”

One of the most arresting pieces in the house is a huge painting above the dogs’ sofa of the family – Neale, David, Ollie and Otis – all together. “It’s by artists Gillie and Marc Schattner. She’s English and he’s South African, they’re based in Sydney and they paint as a couple. They start at different sides of the canvas and meet in the middle, and their trademark is Weimaraner dogs. We had thought how we would love them to paint our dogs and then, out of the blue, I got a call from them. We love it.” ■

NEALE’S DESIGN SECRETS

- 1 Books add soul to a home, but only if they’re books you want to live with.
- 2 Don’t try to match everything. A mismatch of styles and colours is often far more satisfying.
- 3 Use colour sparingly. Better to introduce bold colours through soft furnishings, lamps, accessories and art.
- 4 A neutral rug is your best friend. The wrong choice of rug or carpet can upset a room more than anything else.
- 5 You don’t have to follow current trends. Your home should reflect your taste and your life.



This portrait by Gillie and Marc Schattner takes pride of place above Otis and Ollie’s sofa. Left: The gallery wall hosts a “collage” of family photos and artwork.

