

An ivory-inlaid mirror reflects a picturesque scene of a Khai Liew table with restored Marcel Breuer chairs, which overlooks Clovelly's cliffs. Opposite page: A Moorish-influenced curved white staircase winds up to the second floor and is crowned with a circular skylight.

## foreign affairs

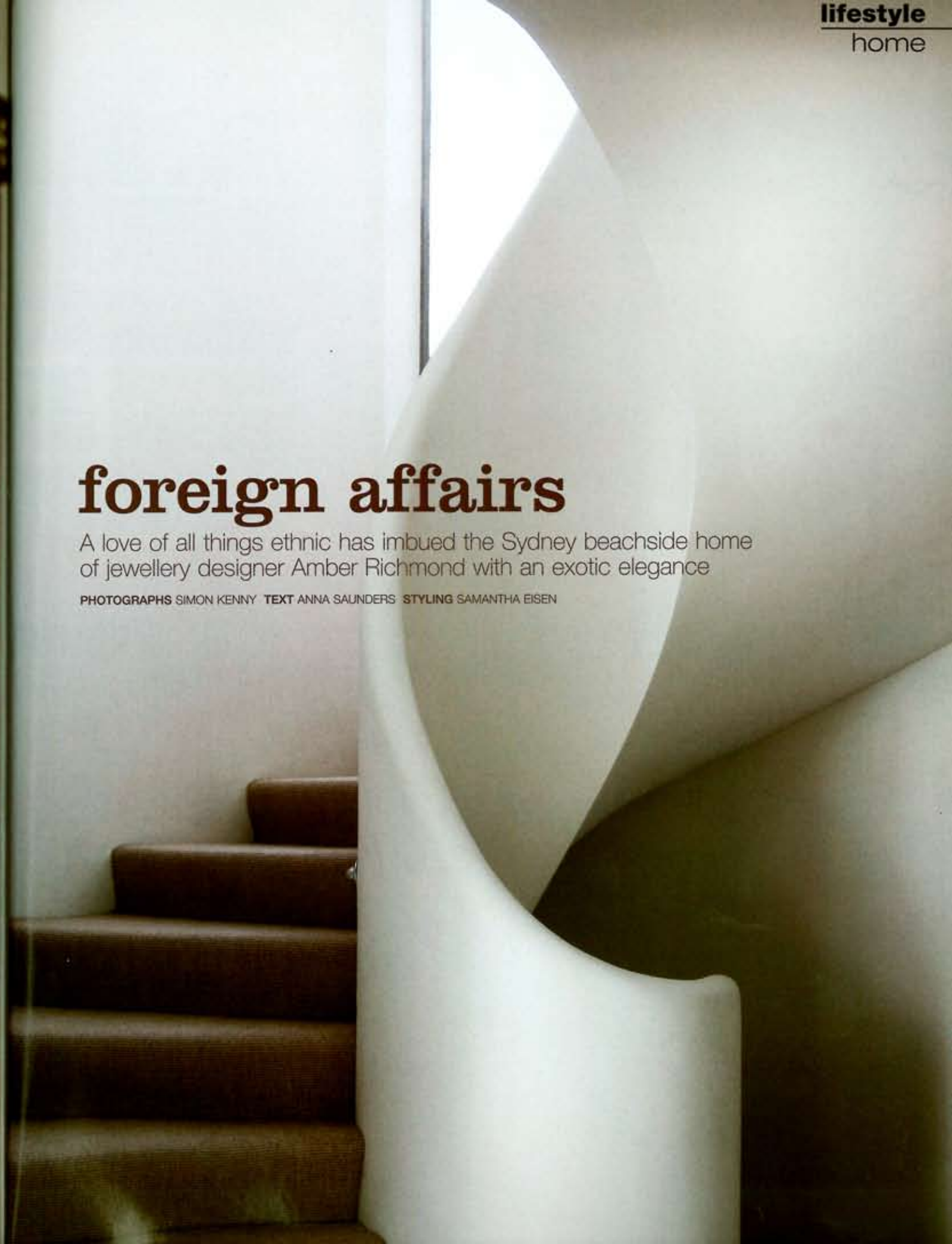
A love of all things ethnic has imbued the Sydney beachside home of jewellery designer Amber Richmond with an exotic elegance

PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON KENNY TEXT ANNA SAUNDERS STYLING SAMANTHA EISEN

101  
IDEAS

reflect it ...

Placing a mirror near a window not only creates a greater sense of space, but also acts as a frame for a beautiful view. Meanwhile, delicate detailing can add a feminine touch to an otherwise minimalist room.





# 101 IDEAS

cook it ...  
Make the most of every inch of space in your kitchen – and create a visual feature – by building practical shelving, as Amber Richmond has done above her stove top.



Richmond is a keen cook who loves Asian food, and designed her kitchen to allow maximum bench space. The rich chocolate browns also help add a sense of warmth.



"A ladder makes this room seem like my own library," says Richmond, whose entire bookshelf (above) is filled with cookbooks and books on design. From top right: Asian touches are evident throughout; these Varenna chairs were discovered in a junk shop near Jervis Bay, NSW; art by Philip Wölfhagen hangs in the hallway above teak furniture sourced from Indonesia.

Smiling with satisfaction, Amber Richmond recalls the day back in 2004 when she snapped up a dainty eggshell blue and pale pink artwork. "I just knew it would be perfect for my daughter's bedroom," she explains. The fact that, at the time, Richmond didn't have a daughter, and that little Maya wouldn't be born for several years, didn't faze her whatsoever. And it's a testament to the Sydney jewellery designer's confident and uncannily sharp eye that the painting does indeed look perfect in her daughter's bedroom, exactly as she planned.

Richmond's house is full of such stories; nearly all the *objets d'art*, furniture and collectables that fill the elegant Eastern Suburbs home she shares with husband, Jamie, and two children, Maya, one, and Jay, four, have their own tale, having been gradually accumulated and squirrelled away over decades.

"Jamie is always telling me to throw things out," laughs Richmond. "But I'm not the sort of person who would ever say: 'Right, today I'm going to go shopping to buy furniture.' My style is clean and pared back, but ethnic – a little bit African and Asian."

That ethos is evident in every corner of the home, where myriad cultures collide to stunning and exotic effect. On one wall, an Indian ivory-inlaid mirror with cobweb-fine gilt, which reflects a beautiful view over Clovelly's cliffs, sits above a heavy dark wooden Indonesian trunk, which, in turn, somehow perfectly complements a nearby cornflower blue and white Chinese urn.

"As a child, I used to accompany my grandmother on overseas trips," says Richmond of her predilection for Asian furniture. "She has amazing style and we'd spend hours just fossicking in markets." ▶







Clockwise from far left: Richmond designed the North African-influenced steel screen that hovers above the pool; a selection of her beautiful creations; this antique Chinese urn was collected by Richmond's grandmother; a Thornton Walker work hangs above a mossy green rug from Tibet and a corduroy couch, which soften the surrounds.



## "SOMETIMES, [THE HOUSE] ALMOST REMINDS ME OF AN ART GALLERY"

Twenty years later, Richmond admits that she still stumbles across many of her favourite pieces in markets and garage sales. "I have to have a bargain," she declares.

Take the set of 14 chic cane and chrome chairs, which Richmond discovered ... on the side of the road? "Yes," she confirms proudly, adding that after her grandmother gave her two 1970s cane chairs by European interior designer and architect, Marcel Breuer, she was amazed to spot two more lying on the side of a Sydney street during a council clean-up. "I couldn't believe it!" Though the chairs were ripped and rusty, Richmond quickly had them restored and was soon regularly prowling the pavements for more.

Throughout the house, such finds are balanced perfectly with exquisite art and luxury furnishings. In the downstairs bathroom, a \$15 carved wooden box Richmond

picked up in a garage sale sits serenely next to a \$600 solid silver apple from Tiffany & Co. Upstairs in the office, a custom-designed wooden desk by acclaimed Adelaide designer, Khai Liew, lies next to two Varenna chairs Richmond spied in a junk shop near Jervis Bay on NSW's South Coast.

It's an approach that Richmond also applies to her jewellery design, mixing diamonds with antique pieces made from turquoise, jade and silver. Yet despite the eclecticism, her home still exudes a minimalist, uncluttered air. "Sometimes, it almost reminds me of an art gallery," muses the designer, glancing at the sandy-coloured stone floors and high ceilings, before pointing out that the corduroy of the sofa, the chocolate browns of the kitchen and the vast collection of cookbooks in the upstairs office help provide a sense of warmth.

The couple first discovered the property eight years ago and were captivated by its sea views. After demolishing the original, squat, single-storey structure, they resolved to design a home with "solid, clean lines" and a slight Moorish flavour, which would also take full advantage of the narrow site. The result is a stylish, airy two-storey home,

painted a pale blue-grey, which offers several private pockets and outside spaces, including a pool, to break up what could have been a long, tunnel-like shape. "It's an inside-out home," explains Richmond. "We didn't want a house that was solely focused on the view, where you feel as though you have to walk all the way to the end to get the right effect."

Consequently, each pocket and space offers its own features, such as the Moorish-inspired curved white stairs, which are topped with a circular skylight. The North African theme continues outside, where a latticework of iodised steel hangs over the pool, allowing light to filter through, while still maintaining privacy. Below this is a full-length outdoor mirror, which will gradually develop a spattered, cloudy patina with weather damage, but for now is a great way to keep an eye on roaming children.

In fact, despite the countless collectable pieces, the entire house is very child-friendly. "You can't be too precious. One day, these will be filled with beautiful things," Richmond says, pointing to custom-made dark wooden shelves. "But right now, all these *Barney* CDs and picture books are our beautiful things. After all, a house is made for living in." ■