

Mill Street



Wall / Old White 333x1000mm

Image courtesy of White Pebble Interiors
Photography by Chris Groenhout



Well known and much loved Melbourne based interior designer Frances Cosway's passion and down-to-earth vibe translates to the beautiful spaces she creates for her clients. Author of 'Your Forever Home' and hot off the trails of an exciting new design venture, Frances kindly shares some perspectives on the Mills Street project and recounts what it was like working with Earp Bros along the way. Frances lets us in on her design process, her new book and the in's and out's of this stunning new project.

What is your design philosophy?

My design philosophy is all about a home that is a reflection of you; your lifestyle, your life story and your travels. Your home should be surrounded by things that mean something to you. I'm definitely not one to follow trends. It's all about making your home a reflection of you, making a very personal space where people feel

very comfortable, surrounded by things that they love.

What are some of your main sources of inspiration?

I would say that the main source is travel. I lived in Europe for 12 years and that has had a very big impact on my design. I'm a big, big fan of the Middle East so that definitely comes through, more so in my own home. I draw inspiration from nature, particularly around colours and texture; and of course, other designers.

What does your design process look like and how does it evolve throughout the project?

We first obtain a detailed brief from the client and produce a written Return Brief. This gives the client an opportunity to review exactly what they are after in terms of functionality, aesthetics, and other considerations.



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Floor / Dover Topo 596x596mm

Once this is approved we start the design process. Internally we then have a collaboration meeting to discuss ideas as a team, and discuss the direction for the design and possible sources and suppliers. We then present our ideas and schemes back to the client. We often don't use formal material boards, and talking to other residential interior designers, they are using them less and less too. We prefer to use larger samples, creating a 'board' onsite and layering the materials together so the scheme is visible in a larger format and the client can really see and touch the materials.

Is that because you find it's difficult for clients to visualise the end result using a mood board that uses small product samples?

I think with the moodboard, you've got such small pieces that people keep asking, 'how big is that tile' and you end up lugging all that stuff to the client anyway. A small swatch of a tile that has a lot of movement in it isn't going to be reflective of the overall look and even one tile sometimes isn't enough. Sometimes I'll need to show an image or much larger pieces that I can overlay, so the client can touch and feel a bit more. I think this way they get a much better sense of how it's all going to come together.

What was your brief for the Mills Street project?

The family building this home are very sophisticated. He is Danish and they both have a very sophisticated and simplistic design philosophy and aesthetic. The brief was to create a home set apart from others. Something that was unique to them and reflected their design taste – simple, sophisticated, timeless and functional. Many of their friends had recently built and they felt that all these homes looked the same. It was very important to them that they were able to create something that had their personality reflected in it, and didn't look like everyone else's. As it was their Forever Home, they needed it to stand the test of time with growing children too, and their gorgeous dog!

With a new build, how do you bring in that homey feel?

I focus on soft furnishings and art. Thankfully this couple loved their art and it's the art that has added pops of colour around the house. They have a similar belief in art that I do, in that you have to have an emotional connection to art as opposed to something you just stick up to fill a space. So, I love the pieces they have chosen which has helped to incorporate colour. They had some of their own pieces from family in Denmark and some

items they already owned. It's really about adding layers and textures.

How did you decide on the surface materials used in this project?

As timeless was part of the brief, with a sense of uniqueness and sophistication, I always knew that texture, and references back to nature would be used. The combination of neutral colour tones and the texture from the tiles and other materials used provides for a simple, pared back finish that is a real reflection of the Scandinavian simplicity that my clients love.

What was it like to work with Earp Bros on this project?

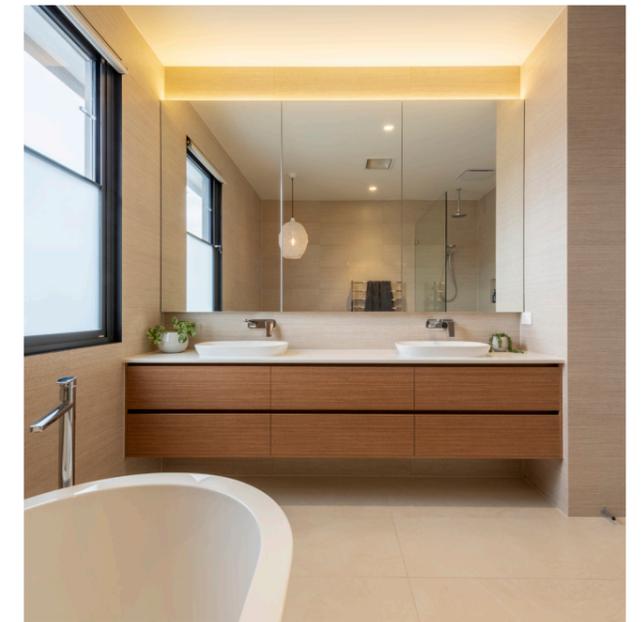
I always have an excellent customer service experience with Earp. They are always more than happy to show me alternatives, provide sampling in the sizes I need, or assist with sourcing something specific. And whenever I send a client into the showroom, they are brilliant with my clients too.

Did you work with a landscaper on this project?

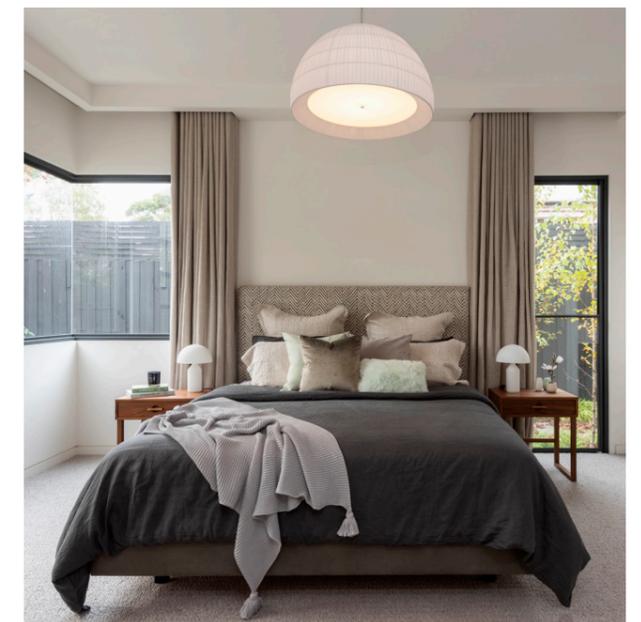
In terms of landscaping, they have a south facing rear garden and I was very conscious of having an uncovered alfresco area to avoid creating a dark space. I worked with a landscaper to make sure it was light and open. Since they had lived in a home with a south facing rear garden before they really understood the downside of this orientation. The harsh black pillars will be softened with foliage over time. Vines will travel all over those pillars and when they are established it will look amazing.

Looking back at the finished product, is there anything you would go back and change?

I don't think so. During the project there were a few last minute changes. For example, the kitchen bench had already been specified and afterwards I discovered a new product. Once I showed it to the clients and relayed the qualities of the product we just changed the spec straight away. Just because I felt it was a superior product. Another thing I put forward to them was to consider the impact of their west facing windows and to reduce their size. The client wasn't keen to do this, and that's fine, as that's a personal decision, but in my role I feel it's important I allow them to make informed decisions, but yes, if I had my way I would have reduced the amount of west facing glazing.



Floor / Sandstone Beige 450x900mm





Floor / Montana Cottage 193x1200mm

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What is your favourite part of the Mills Street project?

The owners and I both share the same favourite and that is the floor. The Porcelanosa floor tile by Earp Bros. I'm really happy with it because the clients were adamant that they wanted a natural timber floor. I actually brought them to my home so that they could see my timber tiles and they were blown away by how lifelike it looked. Once I told them about the advantages of having a timber tile floor over natural timber they were absolutely sold. They are so impressed with the low maintenance, how easy they are to clean, that they are scratch resistant and are so easy to live with, particularly as they entertain so much.

There are so many areas I love in that house but I really love the kitchen. It is pared back, but with pops of colour. We used coloured lighting as a feature and there is still a lot of texture in that kitchen even though it is very, very simple. Also for me - the clients. They were so wonderful to work with and it was such a beautiful project to be involved with.

When it comes to designing your forever home, where should you spend and where should you save?

That's interesting, I was just talking about this at Earp last week at my Forever Home Masterclass. You really need to spend in the not so obvious places visually, so in the construction, with things that are very difficult to retrofit. It's about maximising the insulation, installing the best quality windows you can afford, using the orientation of the home to your benefit, the use of thermal mass where you can, and installing energy efficient measures from the outset. Anything that is part of the construction is normally difficult to retrofit later on, so it's worth spending in these areas as you effectively get one go at it. I find that this is a big education process I go through with clients because they are interested in how good their kitchen is going to look, they are interested in how visually appealing things are going to be, but they forget about how that space is really going to work.

Spending the time to really go through your floor plan to get it right is crucial. I feel people get so excited about getting off the ground without really analysing the floor plan in detail to make sure it's future proof. I often slow clients down to make sure we are getting it right before they start paying for engineering and other expenses. So, spend on items that are difficult to retrofit; your tiles, your benchtops and the other long term building elements of the house.



Floor / Sandstone Beige 450x900mm

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Where can you save? You can easily retrofit taps. Use something that is more cost effective and change that later. Anything that is recessed into the wall or ceiling is best to do properly the first time around. Think about lighting in this instance. Pendant lights can be changed, but anything fitted on the wall or in the ceiling will be much harder to replace down the track. If in doubt, think about what can be retrofitted easily. Save your money there and put your money into the build itself.

What makes a house a home to you?

The personalisation. That it doesn't look like everyone else's house. That it's got perhaps a little bit of an eclectic feel with things that mean something to you. For example, a sideboard from your grandmother or a piece of artwork that has been handed down or you've picked up on your travels, pictures of your kids, drawings and things that are part of your family. I always say add things from your life story, because that's what makes your home personal. That's what makes your home different to others and that's what makes it calming and more comfortable for you because these things mean something to you. You are instantly going to relax in a space that's surrounded by the things you love. That's how my house is and that's what I try to get my clients to understand as well. Not everything has to match or be contrived - mix it up a little bit.

What is the idea behind your new book 'Your Forever Home' and how can it help people?

My book is for anyone about to build or renovate. I wrote the book because I had a lot of clients asking me about the process, asking about the stages of the build, how to find out what they don't know, how to get a kitchen right. I went looking for a book and there wasn't one, so I wrote it. It's a step by step guide, it's not a coffee table book. It's written in a very simplistic way to prepare people for a build or a renovation, so they can ask the right questions and really get into some of the detail. It covers kitchen and bathroom design, types of flooring, I go into materials, how to get in experts, who you need to get involved, so it's a very hands on book.

Where can you buy 'Your Forever Home'?

The book is available from
www.yourforeverhome.com.au
& www.whitepebbleinteriors.com.au