

# ART AND SOUL

Artisanal collaboration and a thoughtfully told interior story provide a spirited home for Sydney philanthropists Gene and Brian Sherman.

BY JOANNE GAMBALE PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROSS HONEYSETT



**THIS PAGE** in the sitting room of this Sydney home, 1970s Camaleonda lounges by Mario Bellini for B&B Italia and 1954 D70 convertible sofa/divan bed by Osvaldo Borsani for Teeno, all reupholstered in wool bouclé, and 1950s Italian pole light, all from Don Cameron Gallery.



**THESE PAGES** in another view of the sitting room with a view of Gene Sherman's study, Table Basse Inca (6 Plaques) coffee table (2013) by Ingrid Donat for Carpenters Workshop Gallery; De Padova 606 Universal Shelving System, turned charred eucalyptus vessels (2019) by Makiko Ryujin, 1970s Uchiwa bamboo and Japanese washi paper pendant light by Ingo Maurer for Design M, all from Don Cameron Gallery; *A Widow of Three Months, Flagstaff, Transkei* (1975), *Concession Store Proprietor (seated) and Assistant* [Harry Joffe, Brian Sherman's uncle] (1966) photographs (on floor) by David Goldblatt. In the study, 1940s Arredamenti Borsani walnut chairs, reupholstered in velvet and 1980s Livinia table lamp by Masayuki Kurosawa for Artemide, all from Don Cameron Gallery; *The Headless Buddhas of Angkor* (2012) artwork by Dinh Q Lê.





## GENE SHERMAN'S LIBRARY EXCEEDS

10,000 books, many alive with her eager annotations. Of course, the great doyenne of Australian culture also owns a few artworks – more than 900 in fact – and each one, she says, has its own tale to tell. She regales some of these as she doubles our allotted one-hour slot in her home near Sydney's Centennial Park.

DESPITE OWNING 19 previous homes with Brian Sherman, the financier-turned-animal-protection-advocate and her husband of 52 years, Sherman has just experienced her very first interior architect. Don Cameron — known for contributing to Canberra's Hotel Hotel and some extremely cool Y2K music videos — believes it was their mutual love of literature that won her over.

"Gene saw my library — stacks of books out of control," says Cameron. "When I understood Gene's relationship with art and how it was more about the narrative around the work; that was the access point. I have a very similar feeling for furniture."

Together they would rewrite the interior story of a wainscot-clad Californian bungalow built in 1918 for Sir Allen Taylor (of Taylor Square), a former Sydney lord mayor. It was a process of much mutual enlightenment.

Cameron corralled a team of local artisans, adept in brass fabrication, furniture restoration, upholstery, clay rendering, stone masonry and fine joinery to restore, create and affect the very fabric of the house. An iterative design process for the joinery with friend and collaborator Boris Tasic of Élan and Albert Bartolo of Bartolo Brass has produced some of the most creative and enduring elements; "the soul of the project", says Sherman.

All good stories need dialogue, emotion, movement and an unpredictable narrative thread. Cameron's mise-en-scène tendencies come from his film directing. The plot twists only add to the story, and at the Shermans', everything interrelates.

"Don taught me about collecting furniture and design in a way I knew existed but I didn't ever embark on," says Sherman. "I always just bought with my eye and my heart but never really thought about who the designer was and how they fit into design history. Now I have a whole inventory of pieces put forward by him. I've learned the names and histories of them all."

Ditto, says Cameron, who sees Sherman as an innate educator. She's spent more than 30 years at the helm of Australian culture, as a curator, arts advisor and benefactor. Her latest venture, the Sherman >>



THIS PAGE in the entrance, *Sans Titre* (1956-1959) photograph by Seydou Keita; *Portrait of a Lady II* (2012) sculpture by Bharti Kher; *Floor* (1997-2005) installation by Do Ho Suh.



**THESE PAGES** in the 'Xila' kitchen from Boffi, curtains in Dominique Kieffer sheer fabric from South Pacific Fabrics; lighting from Flos; *Family Tree* (2000) artwork by Zhang Huan; *Dancing Bride* (2016) artwork (in foreground) by Lisa Reihana.







**THESE PAGES** in the dining area, recycled fibreglass and silver-plated brass table from Vincenzo De Cotiis; various 1940s-1950s dining chairs by George Korody, reupholstered in mohair, from Ken Neale; curtains in Dominique Kieffer sheer fabric from South Pacific Fabrics; Hanging Atomic lamp (2013) by Atelier Van Lieshout for Carpenters Workshop Gallery; *Family Tree* (2000) artworks by Zhang Huan.



« Centre for Culture and Ideas (SCCI) hosts forums on fashion and architecture. It's headquartered at one of the property's five buildings; a "salon-style pavilion".

There was no formal brief, but Sherman's basic concerns included a properly equipped bedroom and ensuite for her dear husband Brian, now living with Parkinson's. Cameron obliged with bespoke bronze hand-rails and solid walnut joinery with no austere clinical references, a must for the aesthetically sensitive Shermans. Next came need for tactile but neutral textiles and gallery-quality lighting. Walls are eschewed for stone-hued curtains so heavy they require custom double-rails, and so long their ends drape languorously across the floors.

In lieu of a runner down the hallway is a four-metre long work, flush set into the floor, by Korean artist Do Ho Suh. Hundreds of tiny plastic figurines reach upwards as though to support you as you walk over the work. The building's foundations required reinforcing with extra footings just to hold it. "Gene and I are not the most practical of people — thankfully we don't hold it against each other," says Cameron.

A wing made of 300 sickles by Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan looms above the gas hob; "the only work that could hang there without the risk of damage," deadpans Sherman. As we chat beneath a large skylight Sherman talks to Cameron about a flock of Cai Guo-Qiang scorched gunpowder starlings she means to hang, which might require replacing the Mario Bellini table beneath.

In the sitting room, Camaleonda lounges are reupholstered in earthy, textural bouclé. Sherman's love of Japan (she's been 58 times) is evident throughout, though not necessarily intentional, in washi paper pendants, low-set seating areas and a wooden decked shower.

As for Sherman's relationship with fashion, Cameron visited her home in Woollahra to measure the wardrobes and contemplate how he could bring sufficient theatre to Sherman's daily routine. He designed a glazed top dressing table in solid walnut to house her vast collection of wearable art (and she does wear it, every day). The wardrobes employ a photographic lighting technique; back-lighting the walnut carcass to silhouette Gene's all-black, all-Japanese designs, then modelling the garments with a frontal fill light — art is brought to every experience of the interior.

The home's story is now past its final edit — everything fits into place, but interiors are fluid like the lives inside. Brian Sherman's moving biography *The Lives of Brian* tells of his personal struggle with Parkinson's, and on our tour we find him in the sunroom dictating his next book. Another story to add to the rich anthology housed in this multi-storied place.

[scci.org.au](http://scci.org.au) [gallery@doncameron.com](mailto:gallery@doncameron.com) [elanc.com](http://elanc.com)



**THIS PAGE** in the ensuite looking onto the main bedroom, pietra bronzea limestone from Artedomus; solid walnut, walnut veneer, brass and hessian joinery designed by Don Cameron and produced by Élan; lighting from Flos.





**THESE PAGES** in the main bedroom with a view of the sunroom, solid walnut, walnut veneer, brass and hessian joinery designed by Don Cameron and produced by Élan; side table from Vincenzo De Cotiis; floor lamp by Serge Mouille and 1950s Italian teak and brass wall unit by La Permanente Mobili Cantù from Don Cameron Gallery; *Dingo Springs* (2006) painting by Paddy Bedford. In the sunroom, 4 bowl pendant lamp with arch from Anna Charlesworth.



**THIS PAGE** in the sunroom, 1950s student desk and chair by Pierre Jeanneret for Le Corbusier and 1960s Italian teak and brass wall unit by La Permanente Mobili Cantù, all from Don Cameron Gallery; India Mahdavi Stromboli rattan table from Alm; curtains in Dominique Kieffer sheer fabric from South Pacific Fabrics; Fantasma (Ghost) floor lamp by Afra and Tobia Scarpa from Don Cameron Gallery. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the bathroom, pietra bronzea limestone from Artedomus; ribbed solid walnut joinery designed by Don Cameron and produced by Élan; Garden tapware from Boffi; *Jugaad with Car Parts* (2016) side table by Trent Jansen from Sally Dan-Cuthbert Gallery.



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GENE SHERMAN