



Special Feature

## Munro House: Paying homage to an art deco streetscape in glamorous Elizabeth Bay

ELICIA MURRAY ■ WRITER | MAY 11, 2021

Elizabeth Bay is one of Sydney's most glamorous harbourside enclaves, with an almost Parisian flair to its historical villas, tree-lined streets and cafe culture.

The area is a melting pot of architectural styles, from the Regency elegance of Elizabeth Bay House to the Spanish mission-style opulence of Boomerang estate and the heritage allure of the neighbourhood's handsome interwar blocks.

One of the most recognisable features of this upmarket suburb is its high concentration of art deco apartment buildings.

Originating in France in the early 1900s, art deco style was a backlash against traditional notions of elegance.



Elizabeth Bay's glamorous, Parisian atmosphere makes it the prime location for a development like Munro House to reside. Photo: Supplied

Fashion, jewellery and other forms of design were inspired by a range of sources, including art nouveau, the Bauhaus, cubism and ancient Egyptian decoration.

By the 1930s, art deco was one of the most fashionable architectural styles in the world.

Sydney was no exception, embracing the look, with its geometric ornamentation and parallel-line motifs, as a new symbol of wealth and sophistication.

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Streamline moderne – sometimes called ocean liner style – was a more subdued version of the look, stripping art deco designs of their ornamentation and focusing instead on sleek forms with rounded edges and long horizontal lines.

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The heritage streetscape of Elizabeth Bay is the setting for a [new residential project](#) that celebrates the art deco era without being defined by it.

[Munro House](#) by developer Top Spring Australia is a collection of 30 luxury apartments in a six-storey building designed by PBD Architects, with interiors by leading Melbourne practice Mim Design and landscaping by Taylor Brammer.

There's a contemporary flair to the streamlined brick facade, which is arranged in a series of vertical bays.

Cascading shapes are combined with off-form concrete and blackened steel, selected for their ability to age gracefully.



Through its use of curves, shapes, off-form concrete and blackened steel, the furnishes of the homes have the ability to last for years. Photo: Supplied

Paul Buljevic, managing director at PBD Architects, says the juxtaposition of materials brings art deco ornamentation into the 21st century.

“It’s an understated architectural statement in some ways,” says Buljevic. “It’s a bold form, but it uses subtle curved edges harmoniously balanced with the landscape design.”

For the interiors, the vision was to create an illustrious retreat in the vibrant suburb, located two kilometres east of the Sydney CBD between Potts Point and Rushcutters Bay.

“The apartment planning is really well-considered. It’s a really workable, efficient floor plate that considers room size, proportions and ‘furnishability’. They’re quite generous apartments.”

Like the exterior architecture, the interiors incorporate elements that pay homage to the art deco period without being a recreation.

Generous kitchens feature oversized sculpted benches and clever details referencing the architecture.

Curved walls create a rolling softness to rooms.

Custom-made handles take cues from an artwork the developer commissioned from Jade Oakley that will take its place at the front of the building.

Oakley, who has produced large-scale public artworks for clients including Otto, Quay Restaurant and the Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne, looked to the natural history of the area and the heritage architecture.



The interior design pays homage to classic art deco design at its peak, but with contemporary style finishes.  
Photo: Supplied

“The history of the site is very important to me when I think about an artwork,”  
Oakley says.

The artwork is inspired by the Port Jackson fig tree, which grew near the harbour in

pre-colonial times.

The species was retained in the sprawling botanic gardens that surrounded Elizabeth Bay House when the stately home was built for high-ranking colonial official Alexander Macleay in the 1830s.

“By allowing the tree to interact with the built environment, I am referencing the picturesque garden of Alexander Macleay, in which natural rocks and original trees were retained to create wild, romantic landscapes,” Oakley says.

Macleay lost his job as colonial secretary in 1837.

Unable to pay his debts, he moved out of Sydney’s original trophy home in the 1840s and his eldest son, who took over his debts, lived there until he died in 1865.

Over the years, the estate was subdivided – including the land on which the new apartments will be built.

For more than 60 years, the Greenknowe Avenue address was the headquarters of the Country Women’s Association.

The group was founded by Grace Emily Munro, after whom the development is named.



The Munro House development is footsteps away from some of Sydney's most prized locations, including the Royal Botanic Garden, Rushcutters Bay and the harbour foreshore. Photo: Supplied

Residents will have access to three communal outdoor spaces: a Zen garden, a roof terrace with barbecue and a ground-floor retreat with an electric fire pit.

The apartments feature Wolf appliances, underfloor heating in the main bathrooms, a water purification system, a video intercom and smart home technology.

There's electric vehicle charging, bicycle parking and number plate recognition for basement entry.

Dennis Vertzayias, partner at Laver Residential Projects, says most of the early enquiries have come from downsizers.

"They're quite active downsizers," Vertzayias says. "They still want to be amongst the buzz. They might have a boat down at Woolloomooloo and play tennis at Rushcutters Bay."

There's also strong interest from high-flying executives – both singles and couples – who love the idea of the lock-up-and-leave lifestyle near the cafes, restaurants, cycleways and the harbour.

Potts Point is home to an eclectic restaurant and bar scene, including The Apollo, Bistrot 916, Monopole, Bistro Rex and Dear Sainte Eloise.

Arthur McElhone Reserve gardens, Elizabeth Bay House, Hayes Theatre Co and the weekend food markets at Fitzroy Gardens are all within a few blocks.

“Munro House is positioned on the premier eastern side of Macleay Street and is walking distance from iconic destinations, including the Royal Botanic Garden, Woolloomooloo wharf, Rushcutters Bay Park and harbour foreshore and onto the CBD,” Vertzayias says.

“Not to mention the designer boutiques and world-class European-style cafes, bars and restaurants literally on its doorstep.”

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