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# Mansion

INCORPORATING NEWS FROM DOW JONES' MANSION GLOBAL

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## Fleurieu flourish

Secrets shared on peninsula gem

## So Frenchy, so chic

Savoir faire for historic home

## Stone sizzlers

Latest in kitchen benchmarks

+  
**14-PAGE  
INTERIORS  
SECTION**

*Into the*  
**STRATOSPHERE**  
The Gold Coast towers as records tumble

# Interiors

LIBBY MOFFET

## Flying start to French affair

*A little magic goes a long way in the chic renovation of a historic home with a compact footprint*

Sitting in the living room of his classically elegant Cognac home, interior designer Andrew Loader is smiling as he recounts how he was only a small child when he first set his heart on living in France. Growing up in New Zealand, Loader had a picture book of Ian Fleming's *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, the children's novel in which the fictional Potts family fly across the English Channel to France in their magical car.

"When you turned the page you saw a picture of the French coastline and there was a lighthouse and it had a French flag," Loader recalls. "I remember thinking to myself 'I will live there one day' – so that was the start of the love affair for me."

Loader and his partner, banker Mike Galvin,

now own two homes in southwest France – an "ancient" farmhouse north of the Charente department which they refurbished after buying in 2012, and their Cognac house, purchased in 2017 and since fully renovated.

A former hotel general manager in Australia, Loader was based in Bangkok as Asia-Pacific vice-president of marketing and communication for French hospitality firm Accor when his passion for interiors prompted him to set a new course and study interior design.

In 2010 he opened his Sydney-based business, working with clients across Australia and New Zealand while also holidaying regularly in France.

It was the decision to expand his eponymous practice, Andrew Loader Design, to France that drove Loader and Galvin to purchase their home in Cognac.

"When I started to look at where I might open a studio I settled on Cognac because of its terrific location," Loader says.

"It's a 35-minute drive from here to Charente's capital, Angouleme, and from there you can take the TGV to Paris in just under two hours, or Bordeaux in about 35 minutes.

"Plus, there are lots of foreigners living within the greater Charente area, so I saw the potential for business for my firm here."

Loader says his renovation experiences and a range of smaller projects in France have provided him with valuable local contacts and an understanding of issues that might impact a refurbishment, such as the region's damp winters, for example.

Meanwhile, his Southern Hemisphere background means he also brings Australian influences to his French projects, particularly an appreciation of sunlight.





Loader's design flair is also showcased in the kitchen space, which stretches across a 4m wall beside a contemporary white lacquered timber dining table.

Intent on hiding the kitchen when it was not in use, Loader installed full height bi-folding doors at either end of the wall. When the doors are closed, only a small section of shelves arranged like a cocktail bar are visible. "I thought it was a unique way of dealing with a kitchen – being able to partially hide it and then create the illusion of something else," he says.

Monochromatic decor features throughout the home, with soft shades of grey offsetting the black floors, and white walls that help to create a restful retreat.

From the hallway, a black and white stairway decorated with striped wallpaper leads to two bedrooms styled using grey leather bedheads and custom-made velvet cushions. The adjacent bathroom is tiled in grey and white Italian porcelain.

"It's a lovely place to come home to," the designer says. "Every time I walk in I feel this sense of calm and I think that comes from the colour scheme and the various fabrics and finishes and texture."

The few pops of colour that appear in the home include a stunning azure Murano glass piece purchased on an Italian holiday, as well as two muted 1902 works by British illustrator Lance Thackeray that once hung in Loader's childhood home.

Upstairs, an antique side table is laden with silver-framed photos that portray six generations of the designer's family.

Loader says the mementos are a key part of his home. "I think it's really important when you're creating a design that it's authentic – that there are elements there that are either original or part of your family history, or represent how you live your life.

"It's very important that design doesn't come out looking like it's a showroom."



Andrew Loader (left) favours a monochromatic look; his photo-laden antique side table adds an important authentic touch

Whether he's working in Australasia or Europe, Loader says he favours a classic look with contemporary layers – it's a style he has brought to his historic Cognac home in the meticulous renovation that took six months to complete.

Built in the late 1800s from Charente limestone, the four-level two-bedroom home sits at the end of a row of three and has a very compact footprint.

Last renovated in the 1990s, the home featured layers of floor coverings which Loader peeled back to reveal the original oak

parquetry and timber floorboards, now stained in Japan black.

To achieve a classic look, he designed chic wall panelling for every room and used a chalky white paint with light-reflecting qualities throughout the interior.

"I wanted to keep everything essentially the same – so every room with the same panelling and the same colour – because it takes away the confusion of lots of different competing materials in a small space and it makes everything appear much bigger and more streamlined," he explains.