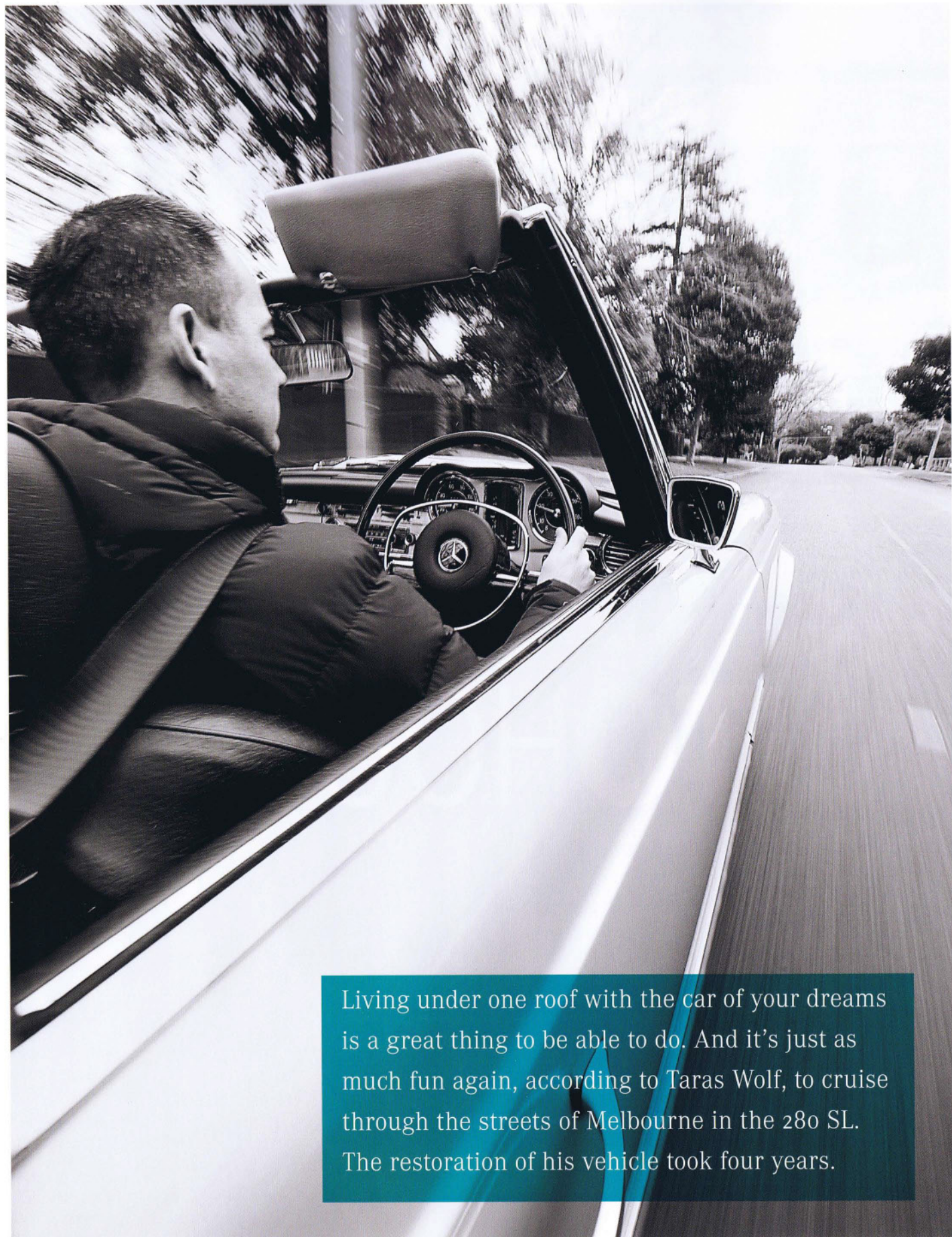


AUTOHOUSE

Rather than banish his classic Mercedes-Benz cars from his home, Taras Wolf has welcomed them into it: This is where the architect both works and lives with his wife and children, and the vehicles are part of the interior decor – first and foremost among them the jewel of his collection, a 280 SL.



Living under one roof with the car of your dreams is a great thing to be able to do. And it's just as much fun again, according to Taras Wolf, to cruise through the streets of Melbourne in the 280 SL. The restoration of his vehicle took four years.



He casts a first glance her way more or less as soon as he gets up, through a narrow window in an upstairs closet. She catches his eye for the second time as he pauses briefly on the glass-walled gallery where his bookshelves are. And then almost immediately a third time, as he makes his way down the wooden staircase to the kitchen. She pretty well joins the family at the breakfast table and is still there when it's time for dinner. If he sits down at his desk during the day and sharpens his pencil ready to get a new idea down on paper, she's right where he can see her. It's not that she would ever try to impose her presence or make eyes at him, but this Pagoda – a 280 SL from the W 113 model series – is just everywhere you look. Here, in a suburb of Australia's second-most populous city, Melbourne, inside the home of architect Taras Wolf.

You could now spend a long time wondering whether his wife Rebecca doesn't just occasionally get a teeny bit jealous (although she of course disputes this, because there's no real reason at all, as a human being, to be jealous of an automobile, however attractive it may be). In fact, maybe she's actually quite happy that her husband no longer needs to leave the house to go and pander to his cars, but can do so with the family around him. There are many collectors who love their classic cars, but Taras Wolf takes things a most unusual step further: The 42-year-old Australian takes the vehicles out of his garage and puts them in the middle of his home. He has a choice of four classic Mercedes-Benz models, but it's mostly his very favorite auto that gets to stand in pride of place on the slightly raised area immediately in front of his desk: a gleaming silver 280 SL, built in 1968.

This predilection for exceptional automobiles is something that Taras Wolf, the son of an Australian mother and a Thai-Chinese father, has inherited from his father. In Bangkok, where he grew up, the family would always have one Mercedes-Benz or another in its fleet. "I was probably only about three or four years old when I was first allowed to take the wheel. Obviously only by sitting in my father's lap, but it was nonetheless a great feeling," he reminisces about his first attempts at driving. The back seat of a "Stroke Eight," model series W 114, became his playroom. Not always to the delight of his parents: One day their offspring managed to leave a piece of modeling

clay in the car, which soon melted into a sticky lump in the heat and could only be removed with great difficulty. "That taught me a lesson," smiles Taras Wolf. "Ever since then I've looked after my autos very carefully."

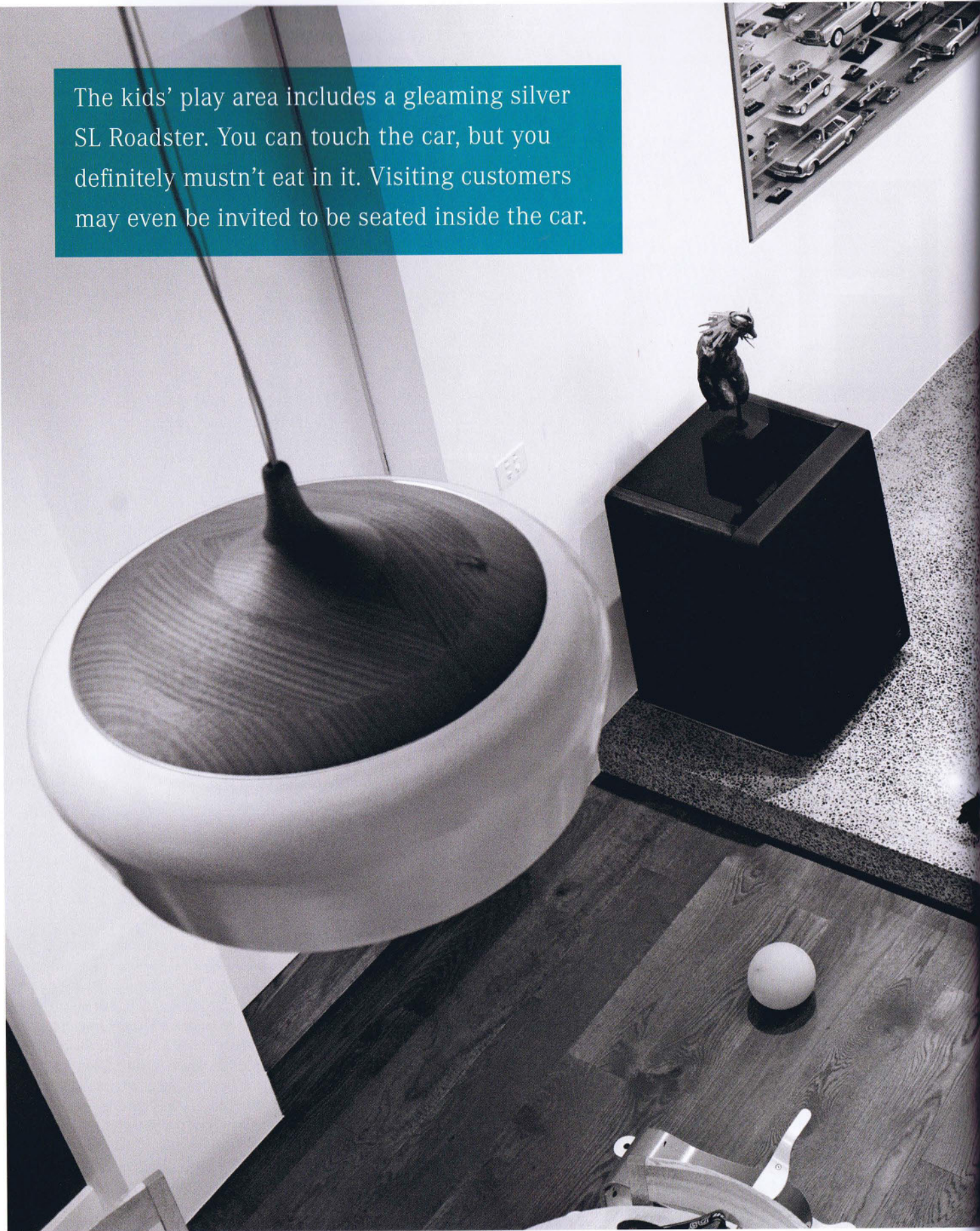
The first car of his own with the three-pointed star was a Coupé from the 107 series, a 1976-built 280 SLC that had once belonged to his mother. "It had pretty much come to the end of its time, really, but kept pulling itself together again – much to my amazement. The R/C 107 is simply a well-built Mercedes that you can just keep on repairing. And of course you can still get genuine parts." Six classic Mercedes models later, in 2000, Taras Wolf moved to Melbourne, where the young architect immediately added a few more Mercedes-Benz vehicles to his collection. A 250 CE (W 114) of 1971 was pressed into service for his first date with the girl of his dreams, while a rare 280 SE 3.5 Cabriolet (W 111) became his wedding car. Making up the current quartet are a 450 SEL 6.9 (W 116) of 1979 – and the adored Pagoda. "I dreamt for so many years of this model: It was a complete obsession. And then, even once I'd found the right car, I had to wait another four years for the restoration to be completed."

Room for a family and a Mercedes-Benz

Even in Melbourne it's not that easy to find an apartment with parking for three or four cars, so Taras Wolf moved to a converted warehouse – where it was only a few steps from the living room to the garage. When the time came to design a house for the family to live in, the architect felt he didn't want to banish his autos from his home. The new home, completed in 2012, has 400 square meters of living space over three levels. There's plenty of room here not only for the three kids, but also for one automobile – while the other Mercedes models have to make do with waiting about for the family in the garage.

"I didn't want to have to choose between kids and cars," says Taras Wolf. "If a car needs polishing, we do it together, in the living room." Daughters Ariana and Kiara and son Arakai play hide and seek around the cars these days. "They're not allowed to eat inside them and they →

The kids' play area includes a gleaming silver SL Roadster. You can touch the car, but you definitely mustn't eat in it. Visiting customers may even be invited to be seated inside the car.





The "drive-in" concept takes on a whole new meaning in this dining room.



The Melbourne architect's household includes four classic Mercedes-Benz automobiles and an M-Class.

have to be careful with the chrome. But they're allowed to touch the cars – after all, that's something I enjoy doing myself." Potential customers of the architect may also be invited to try sitting in the car. "Autos and buildings are more than just enclosed spaces: Both are objects that have been designed, that have a soul," the architect says. "I use my passion for classic vehicles to convey to customers the sense that I pay as much attention to details and moods in my work as the designers of these automobiles did, all those years ago."

"The perfect automobile"

As the mood takes him, but usually once a week, the architect swaps the cars around so that, in any one month, all four classic Mercedes-Benz models will normally spend at least some time on display in the house. It's been that way with the new house for nearly three years now, but the 42-year-old has still not by any means seen his fill of the metallic members of his family. There's still no indication that he might one day find their presence unwelcome. Indeed, with the vehicles in front of him, Taras Wolf describes their timeless design with genuine enthusiasm – reserving the top accolades for his dream car, the model series W 113 that became known as the "Pagoda," courtesy of its slightly concave hardtop.

Taras Wolf talks of the distinctive lines of the sports car and its very modern styling, which is in marked contrast to the rounded shapes of its predecessors, the 190 SL and 300 SL. He holds forth on its immediately identifiable features, such as the impressive headlamps and the broad, powerful radiator grille that gives the Roadster such a pronounced masculine appearance – even though the design of the Pa-

goda is generally accepted as showing a woman's touch. He rounds the discussion off by drawing attention to the rather more subtle details and their effect on all five senses: "The fact that genuine materials were used here is something that you can not only see, but also smell, hear, taste and – more than anything – feel. The temperature and texture of wood are quite different from those of any imitation. Metal is very different to touch compared with some substitute plastic material." Taras Wolf is very sensitive in this respect anyway: Shoes are taboo in his house. The family, the staff in his architectural practice, even customers – all of them should allow their toes the intense experience aroused by the different surfaces and temperatures of the floor.

As has become abundantly clear by now, we are dealing here with a perfectionist. So now the rather heretical question: Is there any detail at all of the Pagoda that he doesn't like? Could the people who developed it have done anything differently, all those decades ago? "Not really," says Taras Wolf after a brief period of reflection; "as far as I'm concerned, this is the perfect car." As to the way the vehicle is displayed, there is still work to be done: Surely it should be possible to do more than simply park it between the dining table and the desk.

In his idle moments he mulls over ideas for the next house that he would like to build for his family – and, of course, for his vehicles. "It'd be really cool if I didn't have to leave the car on the ground floor, but could drive it up a ramp to the upper level," he muses. "That would be some experience!" But even for Taras Wolf, there is a limit to where his love of classic cars will take him – not least thanks to the fact that his wife Rebecca has a view on the matter and no doubt brings some of his wilder ideas down to a more realistic level when he really gets carried away. •

When working on his designs for contemporary buildings, Taras keeps his life's automotive dream and design classic permanently in front of him. "Autos and buildings are objects that have been designed, that have a soul."

