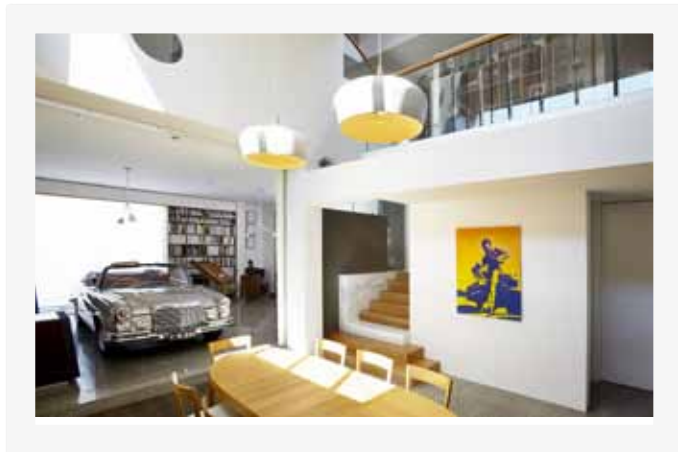


LIVING THE *LIFE*

For this Australian-based architect, home is where the heart – and his spectacular fleet of Mercedes – is

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Left: Taras Wolf's modernist-themed home has the cars to match. Above and below: it's rather doubtful you'd find similar furniture in an Ikea showroom

You might love classic cars, but would you share your house with one? This is what Melbourne-based Mercedes fan and architect Taras Wolf has done, by designing and building a home where one of his fleet of period Mercs – most often his immaculate, pagoda-roofed 280 SL – shares the space where he and his family live, and Taras works. If he wants to give the car a polish, he just has to get up from his desk, and being able to keep an eye on it means the Wolf children can play in this precious car without giving their dad palpitations.

'At the end of the day it's covered in fingerprints, but with kids and cars that comes with the territory,' says Taras.

Where did he get the idea of sharing his house with a classic?

'I was living in a warehouse in the suburbs, and my cars lived with me, so I really wanted to design a house where I could do that again,' explains Taras, whose home has a slightly austere, modernist aesthetic that seems to suit the Sixties and Seventies Mercedes models he loves. They also provide a talking point for visiting clients.

Taras's love affair with the marque stems from growing up in Bangkok, Thailand, where his dad ran a series of British classics, including Rolls-Royces and Triumph TRs.

'Without air-conditioning the experience wasn't always pleasant,' recalls Taras, adding that Thailand's clammy climate wasn't friendly to rubber parts, and that just finding decent classics there was a challenge. Then his mother began driving a 1976 Mercedes 450 SLC, which mixed classic charisma with Teutonic staying power. Later, when young Taras restored it, in the process discovering the true extent of its engineering quality, he was smitten.

Six classic Mercs (including a pair of Pagodas) later, the then 27-year-old had relocated to Australia and continued indulge his passion for the brand. As well as his current, 80,000-mile Pagoda, Taras runs a 3.5-litre 280 SE convertible, one of only six right-hookers Mercedes imported to Australia, a 250 CE and a 6.9-litre 450 S Class. All Taras's cars are driven regularly, and he talks with quiet authority about the pros and cons of each. Take the low-key 250 CE. 'There's a little bit of Pagoda in it. It's still an excellent daily driver because it isn't too precious,' he says. It still has the original chrome. You can tell because there's a blue tinge to it.'

Taras reckons his classic fleet makes more sense than spending vast amounts on something new. 'I like the idea of driving cars that don't lose money every minute you're driving them. You could spend Aus\$90,000 [about £59,000] on a nice sports car and watch it lose Aus\$10,000 [£6550] a year until it's a pile of junk. Get the right classic and it will keep its value. Put money into it and it might even go up.'

Taras cheerfully admits that having a classic Mercedes as a visual focal point in his house is a talking point when clients visit, as is using it to drive them to one of the other houses he's designed.

Even the architect's wife seems happy to share her home with his cars, as Taras no longer vanishes for hours to look after them.

'As the family grew it was getting harder to justify the cars. The only way to do it was integrate them into family and business life,' he says.

'I think I've got the balance right.'

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