

MARDI DOHERTY Interior designer

The shapely form and materials of vintage lights are a beacon for this Melbourne designer.

When you're an interior designer by trade and the daughter of keen collectors, the chance of developing a serious collecting habit is high. "I've inherited the collecting gene," says Mardi Doherty, principal at Melbourne interior design practice Doherty Design Studio. "As a child, weekends were spent at auctions, and to this day I love nothing more than digging around antique shops and attending furniture and art auctions around Victoria."

Mardi has collected vintage lights for more than a decade. "I started out collecting Murano glassware too, but having young children put an end to that!" she says. For Mardi, there's a seductive appeal about older lights. "I find the workmanship, detailing and finishes irresistible. Plus I love their history – some of which I know and some of which I can only imagine. I like picturing the homes they were once in, and giving them fresh life in my own."

Mardi's fossicking has yielded about 15 pieces – a mix of '70s European brass and steel, pendant lights, '50s coloured glass and brass table lamps, and '40s Murano glass fittings. Many are dotted through her home; many more are kept in a storage unit. "Every six months I'll mix things up by moving lights to different rooms, adding a contemporary shade here or there, and bringing in new pieces from storage. Going [to the unit] is a favourite part of the process – it's like walking into a sweet shop and falling in love all over again."

So what does she look for in a piece? "The shape and materials are the first things that draw me in," she says. "But the clincher is the light they emit, I find it completely delicious." Price, she says, doesn't really come into it. "My collection ranges from a \$40 lamp I picked up in a Geelong market to a \$1750 light that I bought at auction. If something grabs my attention, I have to have it."

So what has she got her eye on now? "I recently missed out on a pair of beautiful floral pendants at auction," she says. "But that's the thing about old lights – they're designed to last, so if I keep my eyes open, there's every chance they will crop up again, and when that happens I won't walk away empty-handed!"

Doherty Design Studio; dohertydesignstudio.com.au.

H&G PEOPLE



TARAS WOLF Architect

This fan designed his home around his Mercedes-Benz collection – and his Star Wars memorabilia is out of this world.

It's impossible for Melbourne architect Taras Wolf to pinpoint when he started collecting Mercedes-Benz paraphernalia. "They've always been a part of my life," says Taras. Growing up in a family where Mercs were the daily runabout, some of his favourite childhood memories are of researching and restoring classic models with his 'car nut' father. "His hobby became a bonding experience for us and I saw firsthand how a shared interest could bring a family together."

Some 30 years on, Taras is sharing this passion with his wife Rebecca and their three children, aged nine, six and three. Indeed, their three-level home was built around Taras' five classic Mercedes-Benzes with the star of ►

◀ the show – a 1968 280SL Pagoda – parked in the middle of his office space in an open area adjacent to the family dining room. “Everything in my collection is open to be interacted with and within this space my family can decide if they want to participate or not,” he says.

Along with the cars, there’s Mercedes memorabilia, including brochures of every Mercedes-Benz since the 1960s, hundreds of books, and impressively, a glass display unit featuring toy model replicas of his cars that Taras diligently swaps once a month when he rotates the cars in his office. But it doesn’t end there – Taras is also a keen *Star Wars* collector, a habit he picked up when he was four years old. “I only have a few thousand pieces now, but before I sold 90 per cent of them to buy the 280SL, I had enough *Star Wars* memorabilia to fill a three-tonne truck!” As is the case with his car collection, many of the action figures have been integrated into the family home, with Taras and his children pulling them down regularly for a play. “Collecting these has always been about reliving my childhood,” he says. “But seeing my son enjoy them too, it feels like things have come full circle. I appreciate that.”

He still enjoys picking up new pieces but says he probably won’t add to the Mercedes-Benz collection – at least, not yet. “I’m trying to find the balance between how many I can accommodate and how many I can enjoy,” he says. “But I eventually want to buy one more so I share the joy of researching, finding and restoring a vehicle with my kids. Isn’t that what it’s all about?”

**Wolf Architects; (03) 9807 1586 or
wolf@wolfarchitects.com.au.**

**‘I’D DESCRIBE THE COLLECTION AS PART
OF MY LIFE-LONG LEARNING.’ BRIAN STEENDYK**

PREVIOUS PAGE / Brian’s parents handed down this classic T4 chair, crafted by Fred Lowen for Tessa in 1971. On the shelves are some of his natural ephemera, including a collection of twigs, stones and coral. There are also the skeletons of crustaceans and succulent plants displaying the Fibonacci series spiral growth pattern.

BRIAN STEENDYK Architect

This Queensland bowerbird has trained his eye to seek out curvy forms and intricate patterns in natural objects.

Brian Steendyk has spent a lifetime studying patterns. The Brisbane architect and furniture designer is fascinated by the markings found on natural things: the ripples on a shell, the perforations on a lotus pod or the radiating circles on a sawn piece of wood. And they all form part of his collection of “natural elements with beautiful patterns”, a prized, ever-growing assemblage he keeps on a bookcase in his library.

“The collection is eclectic and includes mundane, everyday things through to more intricate things,” says Brian. He finds these objects in the most unexpected places. “There’s even a block of wood I collected from a building site: one face is normal sawn timber, but the other face is intricate and the way it’s been cut and broken is exquisite.”

Like a bowerbird, Brian is perpetually seeking out patterns that resonate with him. He is particularly drawn to spirals and curvilinear forms. “I’d describe the collection as part of my life-long learning. I’m always training my eye. It’s a constant searching for these little elements.”

Far from being mere objects of beauty, these things represent a deeply significant interest for Brian. “There’s something about the repetition of form and pattern that we humans feel at one with,” he says. “It gives us a sense of calm and belonging.”

This fascination for pattern has direct relevance to Brian’s work. He has a deep respect for the Renaissance mathematicians who sought to explain natural phenomena through numerical sequences and equations. “It’s integral to what I try to do with my architectural and object design: there’s a mathematical equation behind all the spaces and objects I design.”

Brian is also a collector of chairs. Among his selection are ’70s Tessa T4 chairs, PK22 chairs by Poul Kjaerholm, a few Thonet No. 14s, and a Grant Featherston fibreglass chair with a footstool that turns it into a chaise longue. The Tessa chair has particular meaning for Brian, who inherited four from his parents. “It was designed by Fred Lowen who won an Australian Design Award for the design in the 1970s.” Brian won the same award in 2003 for his Cero chair: a happy coincidence that is not lost on a collector with an eye for patterns.

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Steendyk; (07) 3839 0400 or steendyk.com.**