

A fashionable life

JODHI MEARES

Jodhi Meares invites Margaret Merten into her very private home and reveals her next project – stylish abodes for Melbourne’s A-list.

Is there anything Jodhi Meares can't turn her hand to? In her career thus far she has been a top model, a fashion designer, a company director, a TV host on *Australia's Next Top Model* (yes, we know, she didn't do the live broadcast, but as she said at the time, she's never trained for live TV, and, let's face it, she doesn't have to do anything she doesn't want to do), and is very involved in a number of charities.

But Meares is about to add another string to her bow as an interior design consultant to a massive and very exciting new R.Corporation development in Melbourne called Clara. The luxury residential project will include lush vertical gardens, a cinema and even a Turkish hamam-style steam room and sauna. It's being launched in October and Melbourne – or for that matter, Australia – hasn't seen anything quite like this before. Meares is very excited about the opportunity to flex her creative flair. But more on that later.

Meares has been busy. However, don't think for a minute she's one of those highly-strung types who vibrate at a higher frequency. Quite the opposite.

In person, she's chilled and calm, happy in her own skin and totally without pretence. On a winter's day I catch her just about to leave the apartment with her beloved dog, Tenzin, a placid but enormous rottweiler cross. Unfortunately for Tenzin, my arrival means the outing has to be postponed, and we instead nip down the side stairs into her gorgeous apartment in one of Sydney's very best streets.

"It was one of the first places I looked at," she says of how she came to buy the luxurious apartment. "I was renting a little house down the road and I always loved this building. There's something quite masculine about it. I don't like things to be too frilly. When the apartment came up for sale I just knew it would be perfect."

Meares is wearing relaxed blue jeans, her skin flawless and glowing, even at this time of the year when the hours of sun are shortened. She's undeniably beautiful, but not in a predictable way. For the BAZAAR photo shoot she sits in her kitchen, having her hair and makeup done, gossiping with the crew, making sure everyone has tea and water, and generally behaving as if she's one of us.

But she's not. She was famously married to one of Australia's richest men and the tabloids had a field day when it broke up. She took it all in her stride and has always been the soul of discretion about the divorce, refusing to be drawn on the issue. It's this discipline that partly explains why she's been so successful.

She sold her booming bikini label Tigerlily last year, although remains as creative director (and has just flown back from Hamilton Island where she was shooting her latest Tigerlily

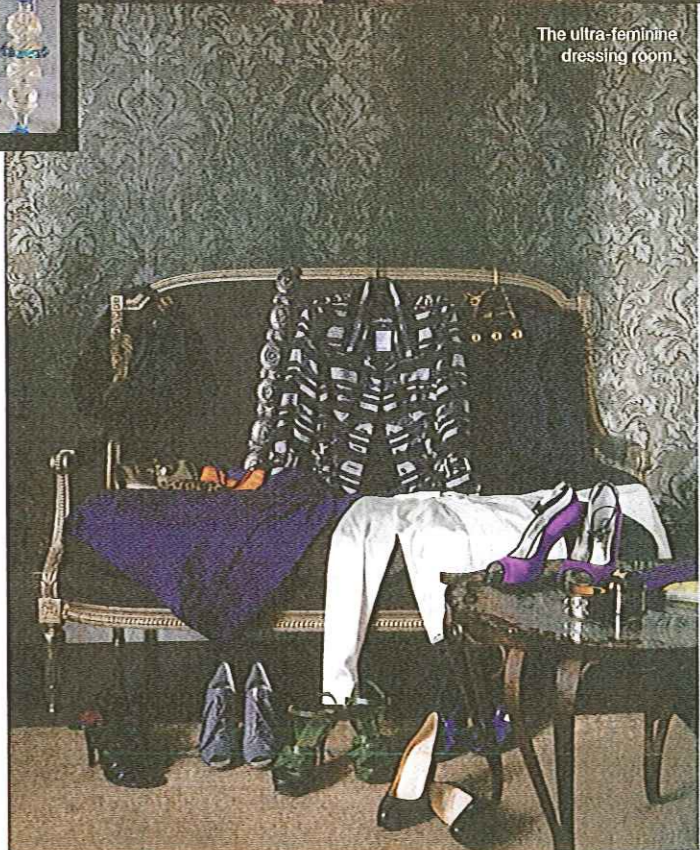


STEPHEN WARD, STYLED BY MARINA AFOANIS, JODHI MEARES WEARS HERMÈS JACKET, HERVÉ LÉGER DRESS, HER CANYON SHOES, ENZO ANGLÈ CUFF, BOTTEGA VENETA BAGGIE, PRON COSMOPOLITAN SANDALS AND MANSUR ZIVILLI RINGS

The lounge and dining room open to a terrace overlooking Sydney Harbour; coloured glassware (inset) adds a decorative touch.



The ultra-feminine dressing room.



campaign) and now that her TV commitments are over, she's ready to throw herself into the Clara project.

The initial contact came through her friend Amanda Briskin, the founder of accessories company Mimco, who introduced her to Andrew Rettig, of the R.Corporation, to consider Meares for the gig. "She said, 'It needs to be Jodhi – this is the lifestyle she leads.' They'd really thought about the person they needed and having my design background with the bikinis, even though bikinis and interiors are quite separate things, it's sort of connected – all roads lead to Rome," she laughs.

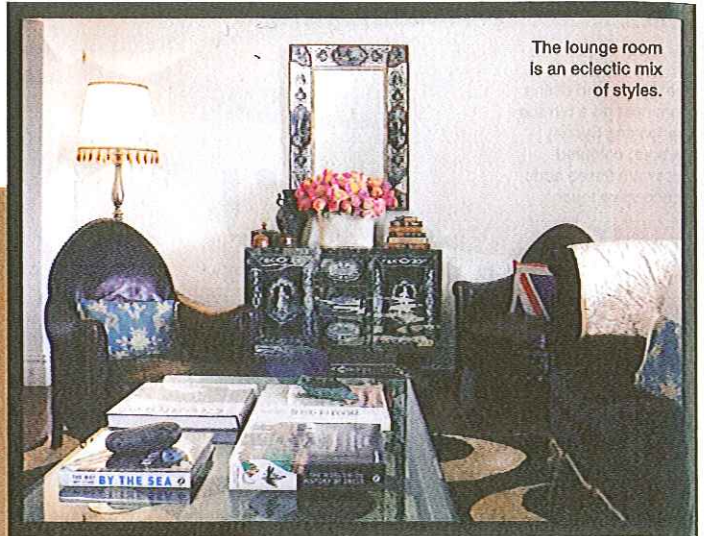
It's easy to see why the R.Corporation, located in South Yarra, needed the right kind of person for this role. It's a massive development and a creatively driven one, with \$140 million behind it. These are the same people who brought Philippe Starck to Melbourne to be involved in their Tribeca development in East Melbourne, which puts Meares in very good company.

"They felt I'd understand the project," she explains, "and knew I was interested in interiors and furniture. When I was approached I thought it sounded great. It was exciting."

And don't think this is one of those name-only associations: Meares dived in and worked intensively with the architects, admitting it was the creative aspect that really interested her. "There are three different buildings and I sat down with the architects. Some apartments have vertical gardens. Others have intricate metalwork decoration – it's going to be beautiful." ▶



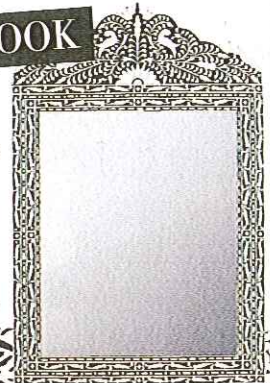
Meares's bedroom is a softly lit haven.



The lounge room is an eclectic mix of styles.

GET THE LOOK

Right: large camel-bone mirror, \$1020, from Exhibit Interiors, (02) 8399 2866. Below: Akira Fuyu rug, from \$5990, exclusive to Designer Rugs, (02) 9550 9933.



Hermès Elephant Madras ashtray, \$805, (02) 9287 3200.

And her role? Technically she's called a lifestyle collaborator. "Initially, when I started working with them, the question was 'How would I live in a space like that?' Because they are really modern spaces, I think that's where old furniture works best. I prefer that than it all being the one thing. I also spent some time in South Yarra to really understand the area, going to local markets, getting a sense of how I would live there, that kind of thing." It was something she really enjoyed, particularly the opportunity to explore the previously unfamiliar Melbourne more closely. "It was a really fun project."

They showed her the models, the finishes on the flooring and she became very involved in shaping their vision. It's a "whole" approach to the new development, with the company really investigating, through Meares, how people will live in these spaces, and then integrating those insights back into the design. The outcome is a Jodhi Meares-styled display suite for potential buyers to explore. "It's going to be a very cool place to live," she observes.

Which brings us to her own home. Meares's haven is perched on the edge of the harbour with ringside views to the glittering city. It's a place to

which she clearly loves to retreat, admitting she's far more likely to spend Saturday night in than out.

Her personal interior style is something she has thought about lately. "It's pretty relaxed, but I do love beautiful things. It's really just things that I love, put together. I'm not very structured. Things change and evolve as you move. But I love furnishings and I do love modern architecture and I'm growing to love it more. But my real taste is 1920s and 1930s buildings, like this one (she gestures), that's what I really love, with the high ceilings, and they've incorporated a lot of that into the Clara project." She leans forward, speaking in a conspiratorial tone, "I love antiques. I love nothing more than going to an antique

fair and looking around and bargain hunting. *Antiques Roadshow* is my favourite show," she almost whispers. "I love it." She's on a roll now. "I love anything that's been handcrafted. Like my car, my Aston Martin ... I love craftsmanship, I think that's where the magic happens." And by the sounds of this, R.Corporation has found itself a major asset for its new project, and Meares may well have found another passion. ■

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