

emporium HOME

At home with

Nicola Finetti

Designer Nicola Finetti's collection of treasured objects brings his light-filled inner-city apartment to life.

Story by Michelle Bateman. Photography by Stephen Ward.

When

decorating his home, Nicola Finetti follows a strategy so simple, it

would make many people nervous. "If I see something I like, I buy it," shrugs the fashion designer. And this is precisely how his 1930s-era two-bedroom apartment in a leafy inner Sydney suburb came to house a delightful mix of classical paintings, Art Deco sculpture and ethnic objets sourced on travels to such far-flung places as Africa and South America.

Admittedly, Finetti has a good eye, developed through years of training. Having studied architecture in his native Italy, he worked in Buenos Aires before moving to Australia in 1984. After determining that his English wasn't strong enough to continue in his chosen profession, he moved into fashion retail instead. "I was in a time of change, I think," he says by way of explanation, "so I decided to do something completely different." Finetti capitalised on the move in 1995, with the launch of an eponymous womenswear label.

It was around seven years later, in 2002, that he found his current home. The attraction, he says, was not just the small, quiet block, the bright outlook and the proximity to the city but also the age of the building. "Living in Italy and in Argentina, you live in these very old, 19th century houses, so it was very difficult when I came here to find something that was older," he explains. "And when it's older, it's more special, with high ceilings and those sorts of things. So when I found this, I was really surprised and I took it." Which brings us to Finetti's see-like-buy shopping philosophy.

"It's like compulsory buying," he laughs, "not furniture but objects because if you buy furniture, you will be overwhelmed." As it is, most of Finetti's input into the look of the home has been through these objects — it required no structural changes, merely a fresh coat of



Opposite page: Finetti reclines on his first Australian furniture purchase: a black leather lounge by Fendi, bought in the late 1990s. Above: the designer had a pair of antique chairs reupholstered in a cheeky leopard print; they now sit in front of his treasured Chiparus sculpture. Below: the hallway features an Asian cabinet, paired with artwork and objets in a similar style.



paint. This isn't to suggest, however, that he has been running around ever since, snapping up homewares left and right. In fact, some of his favourite pieces were acquired only after lengthy and careful consideration. Take his most treasured possession, the 19th century painting pictured on page 115, which was found unframed in the corner of a warehouse in Buenos Aires. "It was covered with a lot of dust and I went there two or three or times to see it, I didn't believe it was that good," he recalls of the painting, which bears the signature of one Jose Garcia, probably an amateur, according to Finetti.

Of more significant provenance is the striking classical-style sculpture of a man holding a spear above a crouching feline. Titled "The Hunt", it's by the celebrated Romanian Art Deco sculptor Demetre (DH) Chiparus, who worked in Paris in the early 20th century, producing fluid, rhythmic pieces typically in a combination of ivory and bronze. "When I was >

An artful assemblage greets visitors to the apartment.



Left and above: more worldly collectables decorate the master bedroom.

Moran "Brando" three-seater leather sofa in Capri Coffee, \$5299.



Capture photo frame, \$36.95.



Royal Albert "100 Years Regency Blue" teacup and saucer, \$145 (includes 20cm plate), and "100 Years Duchess" teacup and saucer, \$145 (includes 20cm plate).



Krosno "Uovo" 30cm vase, \$99.95.

NF by Nicola Finetti printed top with sleeve detail, \$99.95 (available in March).



NF by Nicola Finetti taffeta one-shoulder dress, \$199.



NF by Nicola Finetti dress with shoulder detail, \$189 (available in March).

Be inspired...

By Nicola Finetti's eclectic style with these homewares, available at Myer.

in Argentina, there was a lot of this kind of sculpture, some of them with metal mixed with ivory," Finetti explains. "They are beautiful but they were very, very expensive. When I came here, I don't remember exactly where but I went to an antique shop and I saw this one. I didn't believe it was a Chiparus but [his signature is] written there, on the bottom. It's made from marble and bronze."

In some ways, Finetti approaches decorating with a hunt-like mentality of his own. He describes it as a hobby and has always enjoyed searching for homewares on his many travels. Only a week or two before *Emporium's* visit, Finetti had spent five days in Marrakech, where he researched local embroidery techniques and invested in the Berber rug that now sits under his favourite painting. Followers of Finetti's clothing would do well to pay attention to this rug — "maybe it's the inspiration for my next summer collection", he teases.

For the most part, Finetti says, his design work is kept separate to his interior style but dig a little and it becomes clear that his collectables do occasionally make

their way into his collections. "At one point I had so many insects," he says of a series of mounted and framed bugs, "that in the end, I did something about insects." Then there's the hot pink painting that hangs in a hallway. "I bought it because that colour was something that, for a long time, I wanted to do in clothes. I bought it so many years ago, maybe in the 1990s, but just last season I did that colour, the pink." One ongoing common thread is a love of texture and a confidence that comes from years of experimentation.

"I like eclecticism and sometimes it can be quite fascinating when you put something together with something that is in complete contrast but it works," says Finetti. "And if it doesn't work, I move it to another place or take it to the studio where I work. You have to be a little bit confident, but you have to think a lot, at the same time. You have to have thoughts about texture and when you have some sort of experience, I guess it becomes easier than when you started." It turns out that the decorating philosophy that seems so simple only becomes that way after a lot of practice.

