

Mansion

INCORPORATING NEWS FROM DOW JONES' MANSION GLOBAL

AUSTRALIA

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LIBBY MOFFET

GLOBE SENSATION

Homeowners are flicking downlights in favour of sculptural feature pieces that add texture, ambience and serve as functional art

From sculptural wall lights to statement lampshades, Australians are increasingly turning to ambient lighting to add a new layer of beauty to their homes.

Gone are the grid-like rows of downlights that perforated ceilings across the country 20 years ago, as homeowners now embrace a subtler approach that recognises the aesthetic and emotional role lighting can play. And with a growing appreciation of authenticity and an ever-increasing range of bespoke lights on offer, designers say choosing a light can be like selecting an original artwork – often with a price tag to match.

Justine Hugh-Jones, founding principal of Sydney-based interior design practice Hugh-Jones Mackintosh, says she's noticed a change in attitudes to lighting over the past decade.

Not only are architects moving away from overhead lighting towards alternatives such as uplighting and pelmets, homeowners are looking to interior designers to provide decorative lighting as part of their projects.

"I think clients have learnt that decorative lighting adds a dimension they never really appreciated before," Hugh-Jones says.

"During the day you see the sculptural quality of decorative light, but clients have also come to value the ambience and visual layering it creates at night-time."

Leading lighting designer Christopher Boots also reports a "palpable shift" towards a more layered, nuanced approach to lighting.

"Homeowners are seeing and feeling that the right ambient lighting influences our moods and our wellbeing," Boots says.

Michael Murray, managing director of Rakumba, Australia's oldest luxury lighting brand, says he has noticed a growing appreciation of functionality as well as beauty.

"Australians are starting to understand the effect of indirect light. They're getting rid of downlights and starting to use lighting to create its own effect – for example grazing down a wall or highlighting the texture of a stone," Murray says.

Hugh-Jones says the heightened focus on lighting means it has become a bigger part of her clients' design budgets, particularly when statement pieces are involved.

"With some pendants and wall lights you need to explain to people, because of the cost, that they are like sculpture and as important as a piece of art," Hugh-Jones says.

"But it hasn't been a hard education. Clients love it and they're actually sometimes more excited about spending that money on a beautiful lamp than they are on the sofa."

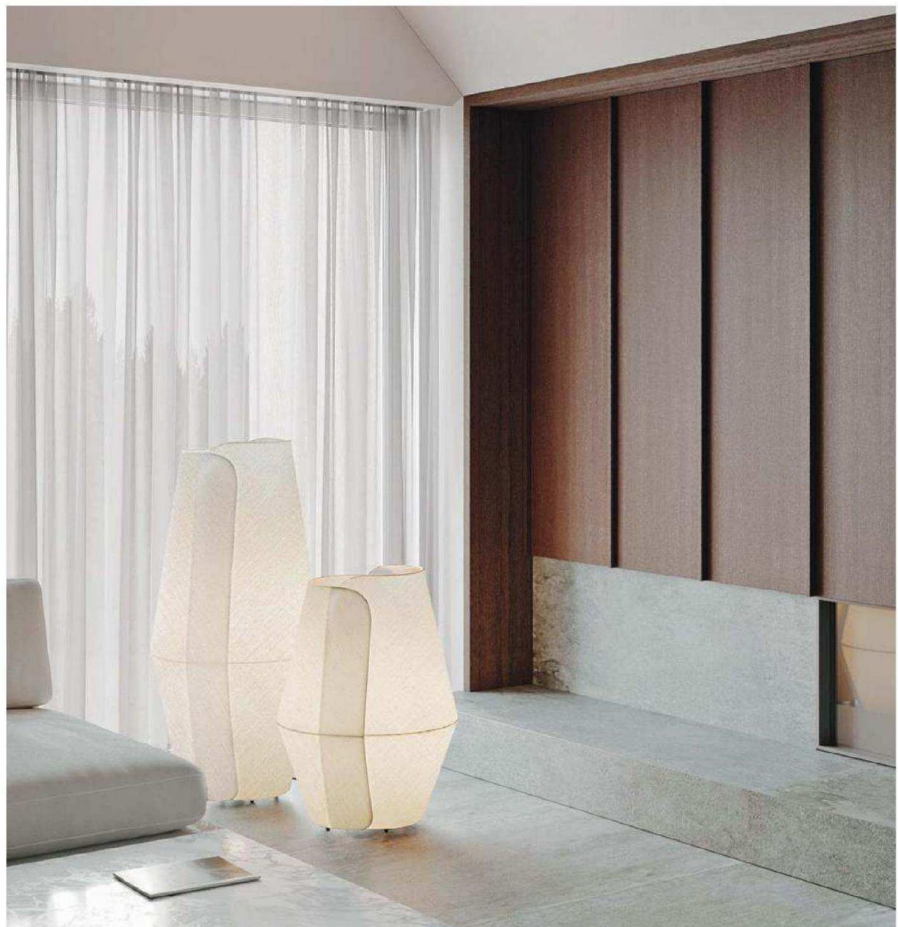
Melbourne-based designer Simone Haag says it's not uncommon for her to specify a feature light in the realm of \$30,000.

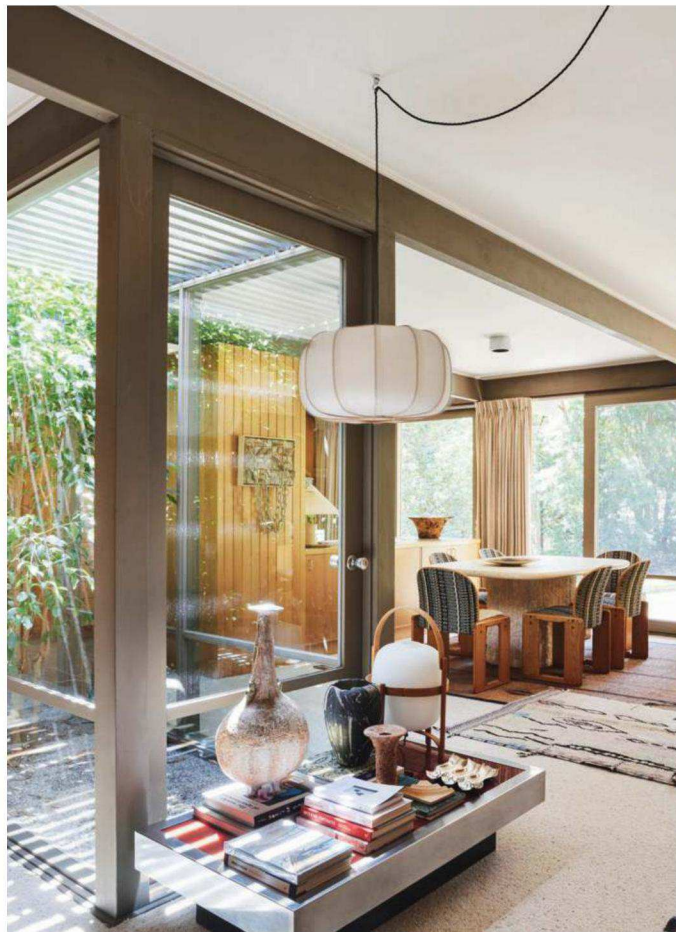
"Many of my clients are happy to invest in lighting as they – and I – see it as functional art," Haag says.

Rakumba's Murray says Australian lighting designers have expanded their presence at the prestigious annual Milan Design Week, and international clients are appreciating that Australian lighting is "well and truly up there" with products from Europe and the US.

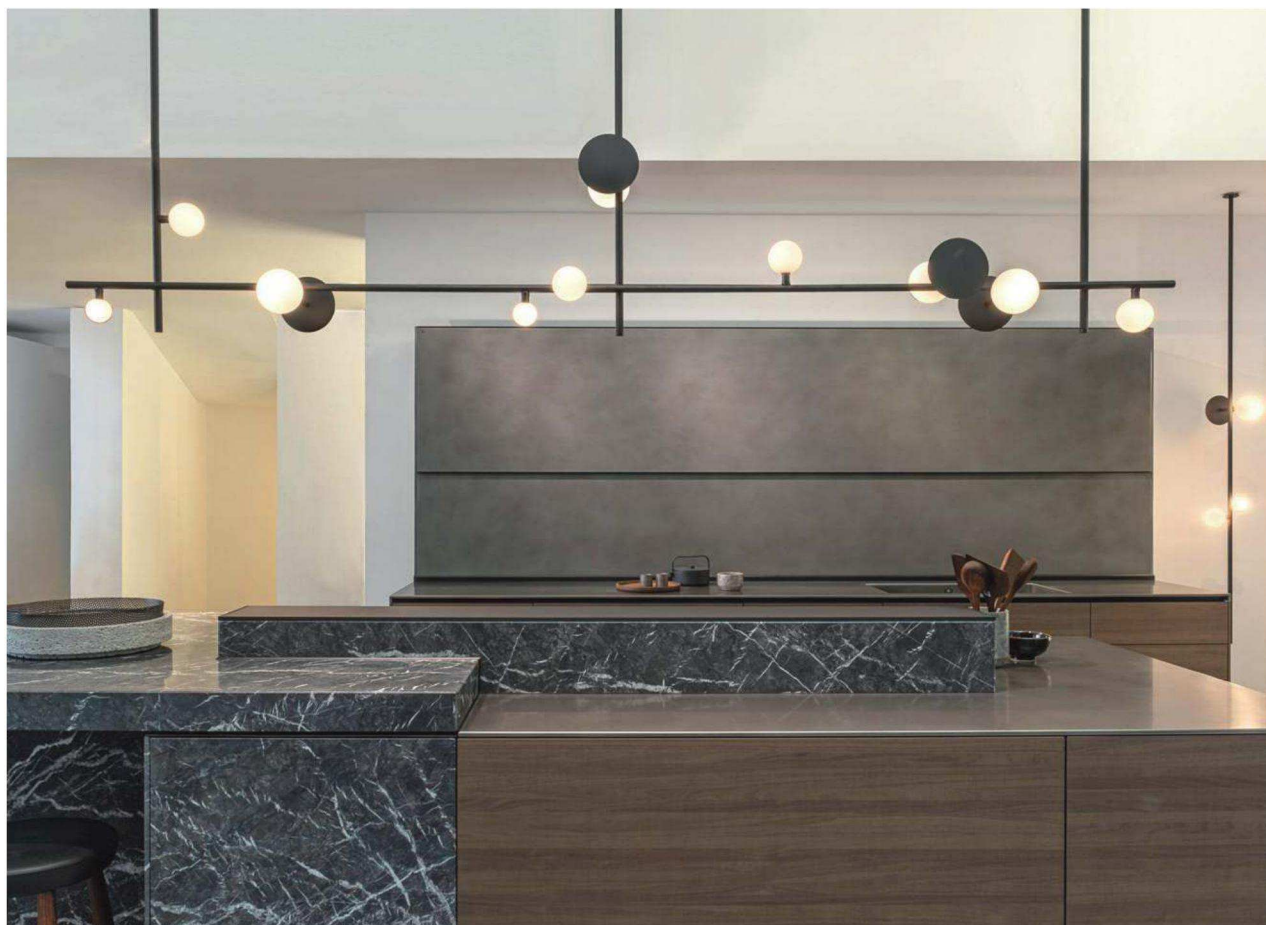
Murray also notes a move away from replica designer lights over the past few years as Australians put more emphasis on authenticity. "People are starting to value that something is not a rip-off."

With downlights now being used more judiciously – most commonly in task-driven areas such as kitchens – homeowners are turning to other options, including wall lights, known as sconces. "Sconces are undeniably enjoying a





Clockwise from main: Christopher Boots' Ouranos collection; Time & Style pendant with Simone Haag styling; Rakumba brilliance with bedroom fabric lights, and statement lights in kitchen and living area settings



revival," says Boots. "Like jewellery for the home, they add just the right touch of elegance and warmth to a space."

With his clients focused on statement pieces, Boots says natural materials are always in high demand, particularly hand-selected quartz crystals such as those used in his Prometheus chandeliers.

"We're also seeing a renewed appreciation for the warmth of classic metals like bronze and brass."

Meanwhile, Murray notes a trend towards fabrics, reflecting a move towards softness in interiors, and reports "huge" interest in Rakumba's new Volute fabric collection with Sebastian Herkner.

Hugh-Jones nominates lampshades as her favourite decorative lighting piece. "We've had such fun in recent years with textiles on lampshades – we use surprising fabrics and trims and shapes," she says.

The interior designer also adores vintage pieces, which she mixes with new lighting in every project. "There's been a big surge of love for mid-century Italian Murano glass wall lights with colour in them, lots of jewel tones," she notes. "It's really nice to repurpose some old glass in people's homes."

Haag says she's noticed a recent shift from clear glass shades toward finishes such as fibreglass and even leather.

She says her preference is to use lamps in her work. "I like to place them in areas people may not always consider, such as in a bathroom or robe area. Dimmability and warmth are so important."

The interior designer nominates the striking Pipistrello lamp and Santa and Cole Cestita lamps as two of her favourite designs, adding that she also loves lamps from Time and Style because they're a reminder of her travels in Japan.

"Lighting creates nostalgia – and nostalgia is an emotional tool when wielded right," Haag says.

For Boots, the best lighting designs are those that become cherished heirlooms. "Anything made with an eye for detail and consideration for longevity is a big yes from me."