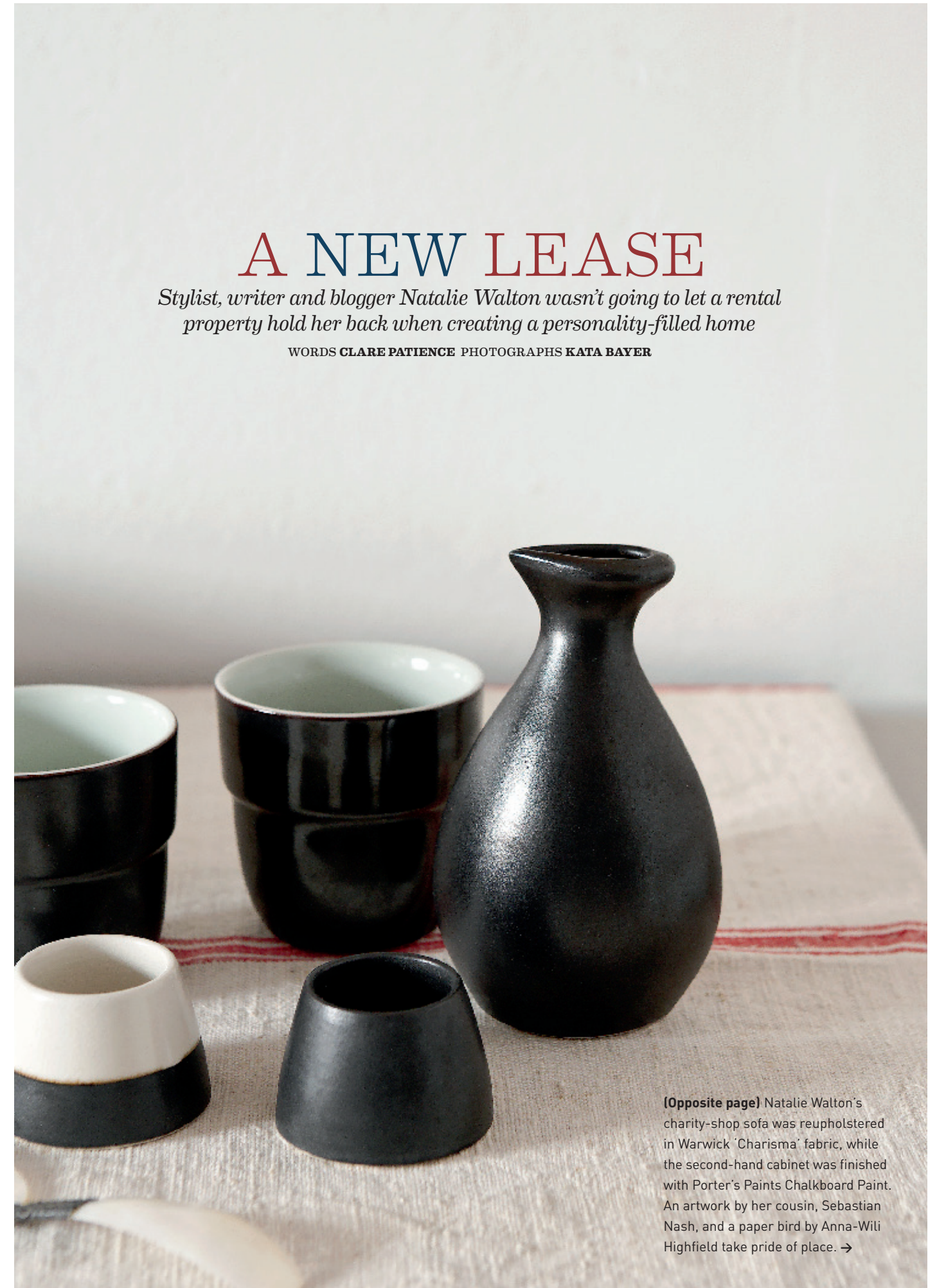




A NEW LEASE

Stylist, writer and blogger Natalie Walton wasn't going to let a rental property hold her back when creating a personality-filled home

WORDS CLARE PATIENCE PHOTOGRAPHS KATA BAYER



[Opposite page] Natalie Walton's charity-shop sofa was reupholstered in Warwick 'Charisma' fabric, while the second-hand cabinet was finished with Porter's Paints Chalkboard Paint. An artwork by her cousin, Sebastian Nash, and a paper bird by Anna-Wili Highfield take pride of place. →



the brief

Needs: A high priority for this young family was to find a ground floor apartment (no lugging babies and strollers up stairs) with an outdoor area and plenty of natural light. There had to be plenty of room to move and, ideally, an Art Deco sensibility to suit the lines of Natalie's favourite pieces of furniture. Adaptability was also required to meet the needs of an infant.

Wants: A comfortable home to welcome friends and family and a space that would provide the perfect stage for art, curios and statement furniture pieces.



The kitchen (**opposite page**) presented Natalie with several decorating dilemmas, but it was the faux-marble vinyl flooring that irked her the most; a lick of paving paint fixed the problem. Greenery, by way of potted ferns, softened the space. Natalie loves the natural light of the living area (**left**), and positioned the daybed where she could read while keeping an eye on her son in the courtyard. Hanging above is an artwork by Richard Briggs. The sideboard (**above**) was a gift from Natalie's stepfather, who had it shipped from Tasmania as a birthday surprise. An opaque adhesive finish took the place of dated blinds at the kitchen window (**below**), not only to update the aesthetics but to provide light and privacy from a neighbouring building.

"I'm one of those pathetic people who spends Saturday nights thinking about how to redecorate," confesses Natalie Walton. "As soon as my children are asleep, I start repainting a bookcase or rearranging a pile of books – I can't help myself." Natalie is an interiors writer, stylist and Daily Imprint blogger, so her professional pursuits blur with her private passion for design and decoration, and, rental or not, she was determined to create a stylish, comfortable home for her little family. This apartment was a three-year stopgap between houses for Natalie, her husband, Daniel, and son Charlie, who was then three months old. "When we walked into this place, it felt good; it was an instinctive response. The courtyard, the light and the fact that it was only about five minutes from Bondi Beach meant that we had to act pretty fast in order to beat the other 30 people who were also looking at it," she says.

The two-bedroom apartment ticked many of their 'must-have' boxes – private courtyard, lofty ceilings and Art Deco sensibility – but had an awkward layout, dowdy cream walls and hard-to-ignore yellowed pine flooring. "It's important not to be apologetic when decorating a rental," says design-confident Natalie. "It should be a place where you want to be. And it should reflect you and your interests, personality and lifestyle. With that in mind, we asked permission to paint the apartment walls. But, honestly, I think I would have painted them white anyway. I figured that, if the landlord didn't like it, I could always paint them back." →





Natalie has potted ferns in the bathroom (above) to soften the space. (Right) Son Charlie's room includes a measuring chart, fashioned from craft paper, and a pre-loved chest of drawers that was revitalised with Porter's Paints Vatican Blue. Natalie and Daniel's bedroom (opposite page) features a bedhead painted in Porter's Paints Rococo, with a handmade cushion by Tara Badcock decorating the bed itself. On the floor, a striped Armadillo & Co rug anchors the room's neutral palette. By swapping locations of the bedroom and living area, a courtyard entertaining space (below) was opened up. Bougainvillea creates gentle dappled light and a sense of privacy, further enhanced by the over-sized fencing that shields the courtyard from the busy street.



But the truly inspired change was her magician-like switch between the living room and the bedroom, aligning the living area with the outdoors for easy entertaining, then sectioning off the bedroom with a bookcase, creating a study nook in the process. Dated lights and window furnishings were replaced with pretty pendant lights and soft sheers. "I covered the kitchen window in a frosted film so that the light could come into the room, but we didn't have to look out onto the neighbouring apartment building," she says.

The floors, however, with their outdated finishes continued to taunt Natalie. In some rooms, she disguised them with rugs, but in the kitchen, faux-marble vinyl was coated with grey paving paint. Artworks and curios were arranged to encourage the eye upwards, away from the floor. Having set the stage, Natalie added her favourite furniture, including second-hand grey painted cabinets and a sofa from an op shop, which was brought back to life with Warwick velvet fabric. The subdued palette marked a new phase for this decorator. "In my previous home, I had lots of colour. But since having my son, I need calm around me. He talks – a lot! – and I now gravitate towards neutral colours, especially greys."

Happily ensconced in their beachside home, Natalie and her family (which now includes their daughter Sabina, just 6 months old) are starting out on a brand-new decorating journey, and no prizes for guessing what she's still doing on her Saturday nights. ❖

the lessons

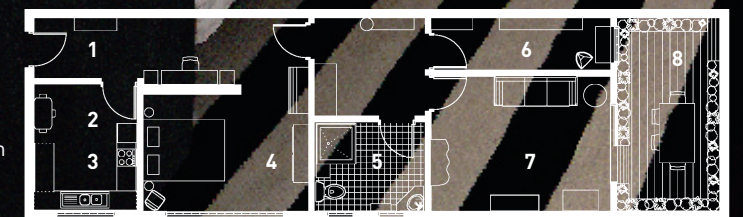
What decorating 'must-have' is too often neglected? I don't think enough people pay attention to lighting. It's often an afterthought, when it can actually be something that really defines a space.

Hardest room to decorate? I was determined to inject personality into the dated bathroom and kitchen. We drew attention away from the ugliness and added some fun features, such as the hanging plants.

Best quick-fix solution? Just adding sheers and floor-length curtains made an instant difference to the hodgepodge of window treatments.



HEART ARTWORK BY RACHEL CASTLE; HORSES ARTWORK BY GINA SINGOZICH



- 1 Entrance hall 2 Dining
- 3 Kitchen 4 Master bedroom
- 5 Bathroom 6 Bedroom
- 7 Living 8 Courtyard