

LIFE OUTSIDE:
Chic alfresco pieces

belle

FESTIVE



WE VISIT
NEIL PERRY AT
MARGARET

FABULOUS

summer

100+

PAGES OF
CREATIVE, CLASSIC, COASTAL + CONTEMPORARY HOUSES

Driving with SWEE LIM

THE DESIGNER, ART CONSULTANT AND
STYLIST RIDES TO HER GO-TO STORES IN A
GLOSSY MERCEDES-BENZ E 350 CABRIOLET.

By motoring expert *Elise Elliott* @EliseElliott Media

Photography **TIM O'CONNOR**



SWEE LIM is one busy bee. Quite serendipitous then that she is humming around a Richard Stringer sculpture of said insect lying on a miniature building. "I love this piece! It's sculptural and over-scaled within an architectural format, yet quirky," says Swee. The piece somehow embodies her: she's a professional, punctual, perfectionist – and playful. In her business, Swee Design, she is creating a buzz with memorable and meaningful spaces in her selection of furniture, art, sculpture and objects.

"Art is more than decorative; it's thought provoking. It brings in energy and changes the way we engage emotionally and spatially with a room. It's an integral part of my work," says the Melbourne-based designer who is mother to Charlie and Mimi, herself an impressive young artist. Swee studied art history at university and her first career was as a manager of cultural programs. This introduced her to a talented troupe of local and international artists and galleries – the perfect canvas on which

to build her bespoke business. "I like spaces to have personality, to reflect clients' tastes. This means a careful curation of furniture layered with personalised items providing a point of difference. My signature is eclectic, combining different styles with a contemporary aesthetic and bold colours," says Swee.

The new Mercedes-Benz E 350 Cabriolet also fuses classic with contemporary. The German car-maker boasts a long automotive history which began in 1886 when engineer Karl Benz invented the world's first gasoline-powered car. Today the E-series combines high-end tech with classic design cues from the marque's storied past. The sparkling metallic Rubellite Red exterior with Macchiato Beige interior provides a perfect palette.

Melbourne has delivered a still and sunny day, and the car's electric roof takes just 20 seconds to lower. What better way to cruise to favourite suppliers than behind the wheel of a glamorous convertible? sweedesign.com.au; mercedes-benz.com.au



MONDOPIERO

This emporium of wonders fills you with rapture. The French call it *le frisson*, shivers of delight. Mondopiero provides that sensory overload. From the astonishing floor-to-atrium bookcase crafted in black steel and the olfactory delight of Santa Maria Novella fragrances from an ancient apothecary to Studio Kalf's curious repurposed vintage candlelights and the tactile shock and awe of Massimo Corsini's lighting crafted with discarded cans.

Such exquisite pieces – where to begin? Swee chooses a unique glass vase in amber from German company Guaxs, and a striking marbled tray from Kaymet, which has a Royal Warrant to Her Majesty the Queen. Both fit snugly in the Mercedes-Benz's boot.

Owner Piero Gesualdi's vision was to open a space celebrating bold and brilliant ideas, excellent quality and fine craftsmanship. Behind his dream is an ever-reliable wingwoman, and life and business partner, Michele Azzopardi. "Piero is the frontman, the ideas man," says Michele, expressing their simpatico. "Michele is the glue keeping it all together," says Piero. mondopiero.com.au

BEHRUZ STUDIO

Across town, the Cabriolet snags a rock-star park in front of Behruz Studio, a rug mecca named for the late Behruz Aligorgi, a pioneer who set up shop in 1984. Today, sons Omid and Amir run the business, a magic-carpet ride through three storeys of refined modern and antique rugs, kilims and textiles.

Says Amir, "In Dad's words, rugs are the soul of the home, a beautiful anchoring point that brings furniture together. Without rugs, furniture feels like it's just floating around. Born in Tehran Dad was always fascinated by rugs. He was incredibly knowledgeable and an innovator. He built a nursery along with apartments near his factory in Nepal, so weavers could live with their kids next door."

The brothers roll out a breathtaking rug in beautiful shades depicting a garden of life design with mythical animals. It's a one-off from Jaipur using recycled saris and took 28 weeks to make.



Swee is fascinated by the Doble & Strong rugs, a visceral collection from artists Robert Doble and Simon Strong and weavers in Nepal which explore the body. 'Neoteny', a large skull piece, peers down from the wall. It's magnificent and macabre. Too large to fit in the Mercedes, it will be picked up later. bebruzstudio.com

FLETCHER ARTS

A short drive away is Fletcher Arts, a consultancy service connecting artists with high-end architects and designers. "It's a rewarding relationship," says founder Sarah Fletcher. "Art brokers don't compete with galleries, and don't hold the rights to an artist's work; I don't believe they should be owned. Many artists need help driving their own businesses, however, and this is where a broker comes in."

Swee is a regular. "Sarah has an amazing curatorial eye and her selection is unusual but stunning. The pieces are dynamic and constantly changing across the five rooms," she says. In one narrow room, the aforementioned bee sculpture takes pride of place, while a dining table is adorned with other fascinating pieces. Swee chooses a Peter D. Cole triple-disc sculpture from his series 'India Song' and a moody landscape by Greg Woods – providing the perfect juxtaposition to the back seat of the drop-top. fletcherarts.com

AJAR

Hola! Our final destination is a slice of Spain in inner Melbourne. "Ajar is a fabulous space. Their team of architects, industrial and interior designers provide a sense of warmth and fun to the furniture and lighting ranges. I love their use of colour and unusual forms," says Swee of the store's curated selection of Spanish wares.

After hearing about our industrious day sourcing supplies, sales consultant Rubén Escobedo suggests we relax on the fabulous 'Marlow' sofa in a golden, velvety fabric. Completing the 70s vibe are Jordi Canudas' 'Dipping Light' in orange and amber stripes and 'Plec' coffee tables by Antoni Pallega. Pass the sangria! ajar.com.au



**SWEE'S THOUGHTS
MERCEDES-BENZ
E 350 CABRIOLET**

DESIGN

"This car is me!" I said sinking into the deep butter-soft leather seat. While ever so sumptuous, however, would the upholstery in a pale, elegant Macchiato Beige cope with my kids, Charlie and Mimi? Luckily, this day was Adults Only and I was going to make good my escape. The interior with its refined materials and bespoke detailing is much like a beautifully designed home. Every aspect of the exterior, from its effortless sleekness to the lithe curves extending from front to rear just shouts Mercedes. The rich burgundy with a name like a racehorse, Rubellite Red, would have been my first choice too.

DRIVEABILITY

The picture-perfect day was ideal for a convertible. With Elise and me doing our best Thelma and Louise impressions, my only regret was that we didn't get to hit the open road, losing a scarf or two along the way. I can't imagine a more inspired way of getting around to source unique furniture, art and objects for my clients. Quiet, smooth yet powerful, the E 350 is a mix of business and pleasure, with the emphasis on the latter.

FUNCTIONALITY

This is an intuitive car. The seatbelt extends forward automatically as if to greet you and set you up for the trip ahead. Getting as close as possible to galleries and stores is vital for me when carrying delicate and unique items to and fro. The controls help manoeuvre the car in and out of the tightest spots so few parking spaces will be off limits. While the warm day made it a moot point, the car has a neck-warming system and heated steering wheel, front and rear seats to ensure an open-top experience all year round.

This page, clockwise from above Swee at Fletcher Arts with a Peter D. Cole sculpture. Elise and Swee with chess set by Cole+Cooper and tall candlestick by Peter D. Cole. Elise and Swee carry the sculpture and a Greg Woods landscape to the car. Swee admires a beautiful rug at Behruz Studio. Opposite page, clockwise from top left The Mercedes in front of Behruz Studio. Swee with repurposed lamps by Studio Kalf at Mondopiero. Ajar's Rubén Escobedo with Swee and Elise on a 'Marlow' sofa. The duo takes to the road in the Mercedes-Benz E 350 Cabriolet.