

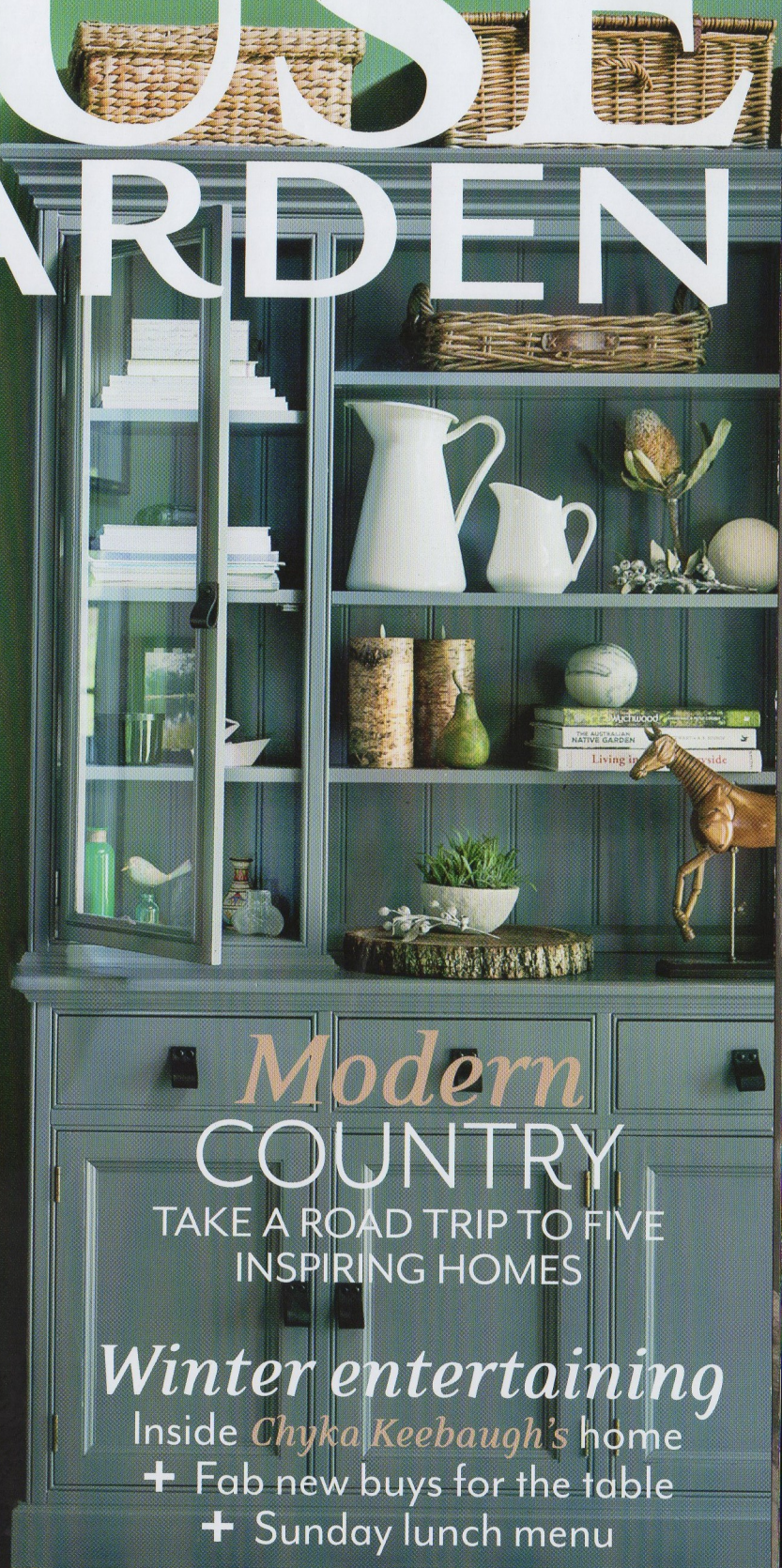
AUSTRALIAN

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Women in design
RUTH LEVINE

Art, design, family and friends are tightly interwoven threads in the life of this Sydney-based interior designer.

STORY *Elizabeth Wilson* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Paul Suesse*

Some people are hard-wired to pursue a creative life. As a child, interior designer and artist Ruth Levine always had an art project on the go; she drew incessantly and made furniture from empty cereal boxes. She changed the wallpaper in her doll's house each week and her favourite 'toy' was a bag of exotic fabrics. At 17, she redesigned her own bedroom, saving up to buy shag-pile carpet, Marimekko curtains and silver wallpaper from Florence Broadhurst. It was a watershed moment: she loved the exhilaration of creating an interior scheme.

In her early career, Ruth worked with interiors maven Babette Hayes before launching her eponymous company 30 years ago, quickly establishing a name for her luxe, layered interiors and bold use of colour. These days, Ruth splits her time between interior-design projects and her own art practice. Working under the name of Studio Levine, she makes bowls, vessels and objects from recycled paper, fabric, string and intriguing materials such as concrete extruded from core holes or recycled aluminium coffee-machine pods. Her advice to aspiring designers? "Take a leap of faith, persevere and enjoy what you do." ▶



7.30am

QI GONG AT HOME, BONDI JUNCTION

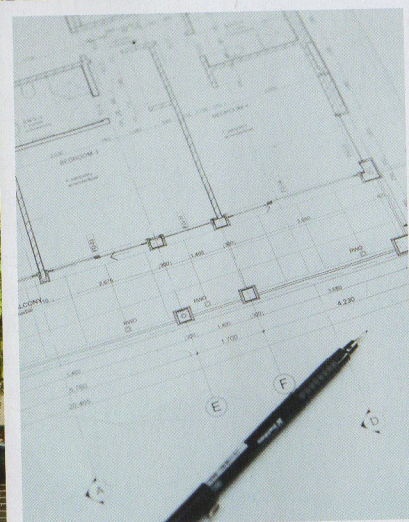
Rising at 6.30am, Ruth enjoys an hour of thinking time. "I plan the day and take pause to be grateful," she says. Then it's time for exercise, sometimes led by her sister Gina Basger (below left), who visits regularly from Melbourne. "I'm very lucky to have a beautiful sister who doubles as my qi-gong instructor and personal trainer," says Ruth. "Gina often visits and I take advantage of her expertise."



9am

RUTH LEVINE INTERIOR DESIGN, BONDI JUNCTION

Ruth operates her interior-design practice from her home, overseeing a dedicated team of four including Deb Freedberg, pictured with her, below right. "We have a parent-friendly studio environment and, thanks to technology, varying working hours. All the team have young children at the moment and we manage to achieve a good family life/work balance," says Ruth. With multiple projects on the go at any one time, she relies on "laughter, camaraderie and quiet time alone" to balance the outpouring of ideas and energy.



'What I love about interior design is its power to transform a space and enhance the lives of its inhabitants.' Ruth



11am

SITE MEETING, POINT PIPER

Ruth and some of her team – Jess Heneka (left) and Deb Freedberg – meet with master cabinetmaker Stuart Glendinning to discuss the finer details of the joinery they've designed for a harbour-front home in Sydney's east.

2pm

ART STUDIO, QUEENS PARK

Working on a collaboration with painter Juliet Holmes à Court (below right). Their upcoming exhibition (see below) will feature works inspired by the poetry of Paolo Totaro OA (centre). Ruth's mixed-media vessels will complement Juliet's paintings. "It has been mind-stretching," says Ruth. "Paolo's poetry is highly visual and lyrical and a great synergy exists between the three of us."



2-4pm

ART STUDIO

A passion for texture and repurposed materials are driving forces in Ruth's work. Here, she shapes a bowl from layers of thick canvas. Her totems (right) are 160cm tall and made from recycled PET bottles, weighted with concrete and bound in canvas and recycled denim. The surface layer is linen and cotton printed with black and white photographs of trees taken by Ruth in Darwin. The totems are inspired by Paolo Totaro's poem *The Question*.

5pm

SPENCE & LYDA, SURRY HILLS

Unveiling one of her latest creations, the Phoenix Bowl, to Fiona Spence, proprietor of Spence & Lyda, which retails Ruth's vessels. The bowls are made from shredded paper that's soaked, mulched and blended with impasto gel, then moulded into shape and embellished. "I've drawn on this bowl with different thicknesses of graphite to create another layer of texture and movement," she explains.

6pm

HOME WITH PARTNER LES FREEMAN AND HER SON TOBY EVANS

Toby (above left) is a designer, photographer and IT consultant. Over drinks, they discuss plans for an exhibition of his pointillist-style digital paintings. Ruth's collaborative exhibition with Juliet Holmes à Court and Paolo Totaro, *Trembling Man: 2 Artists and a Poet*, is showing at Palm House, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, from July 7-18. Ruth Levine Interior Design; (02) 9389 8978 or ruthlevine.com.au. H&G