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Chasing the sun

Renovation queen Lana Taylor brings Europe home for spring

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The talent pool

Lana Taylor, member of the popular Three Birds Renovations team, shares her inspirations with Angela Mollard

Should Lana Taylor ever put her home up for sale she knows a real estate agent would freak out over the number of bedrooms.

Looking at the oversized, multi-levelled home with its enormous windows and jaw-dropping staircase you'd imagine there would be at least four. Even five or six.

In fact, there's only three. One for Taylor and her husband Jason, and one for each of their children, Ruby, 12, and Heath, 10.

"I don't like people staying, I like them staying somewhere else," says the design dynamo, laughing. "I'm really comfortable saying I've designed this home for my family. What a waste to have a guest room set up for people staying maybe three times a year. No thank you."

As one third of the Three Birds Renovations team, which has become a juggernaut in the home improvement market, Taylor knows exactly what's needed when flipping a property for profit. But when it comes to her own abode she's broken all the rules, eschewing an ensuite, building a staircase right through the middle of the house and positioning her home office to enjoy the best view.

"Too many people fall into the trap of designing their house for whatever everyone else thinks but it's not about everyone else," she says firmly. "Your house should be an investment in yourselves."

To that end, Taylor is sitting at her huge white desk in front of a glorious photograph of the Greek

island of Santorini overlooking one of the terraces of her Northbridge home. She hasn't actually been to the Greek Islands and doubts she ever will, but the white-washed walls, shuttered windows and trailing bougainvillea of the popular holiday destination became the inspiration for her "forever" home.

A reluctant traveller, she says she didn't need to fly to the Aegean to bring the vision to life in suburban Sydney. "I don't have a

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It's not about what everyone else thinks ... Your house should be an investment in yourselves

yearning to go but I love what the other side of the world feels like so I brought it to me. Once I understood the theme and vision it was very easy to execute."

Taylor's home is just one of the dozen houses she and her Three Birds colleagues, Erin Cayless and Bonnie Hindmarsh, have transformed in what can only be described as the "makeover" genre on steroids. In just six years the trio has built a business on taking tired ugly duckling properties and

Renovation queen Lana Taylor poolside at her stunning Northbridge home.





renovating them into luxurious resort-style real estate. To tour a Three Birds home is to be immersed in coastal chic where glass voids, raked ceilings, timber flooring, gas strut windows, statement lighting and wall-to-wall white surfaces make you want to curl up on a daybed and never leave.

The team is about to reveal its 12th house, a contemporary cottage in Windsor where, much like a favourite renovation show, they've taken a couple's keys and their budget and transformed it according to their own vision.

"We put the shout out to our audience and we were inundated with 850 submissions in 48 hours from people who wanted us to renovate their home," says 42-year-old Taylor. We chose this lovely couple with two kids but we had to sit them down and tell them they had no input or creative control." She shrugs and beams the Birds' trademark "can do" smile: "They're going to spend the money anyway and they'll get an amazing result."

While Three Birds Renovations began with the trio chronicling their first house flip on social media, it has morphed into a fully-fledged brand which includes an online renovation school, a best-selling book, seminars and multiple corporate partnerships. They've hired a CEO, have a staff of 12 and have finessed their vision so that they are now focused on inspiring and empowering women to create their dream homes. Entrants to The Reno School receive modules which take them through everything from hiring a builder to landscaping their front entrance while access to supplier discounts and a thriving Facebook community of fellow renovators means they feel part of a club.

"The Reno School gives people the best chance of minimising mistakes, avoiding budget blowouts and having a good relationship with tradies," points out Taylor. "They'll enjoy the journey and, most of all, be happy with the results."

An unexpected upshot of having such an enthusiastic following—they've amassed 629K Instagram followers and more than 8000 have signed up to Reno School—is that all three are now stopped in the street, arguably more often than their famous former footy playing husbands, Jason Taylor, Nathan Cayless and Nathan Hindmarsh. "The majority of people who follow us have no idea who we're married to," says Taylor. "It's wonderful to have a world for ourselves that is



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nothing to do with them.”

While the three husbands once helped lay some turf, they leave their wives to get on with their venture which, Taylor says, makes them “prouder and prouder by the minute”. As for their individual roles, Cayless oversees operations, Hindmarsh is the creative visionary behind their projects and Taylor is in charge of marketing. Personality-wise, the former marketing executive, who previously worked for big corporates including Procter & Gamble, says they couldn’t be more different.

“We call Erin the introvert, Bonnie the extrovert and me the ‘nextrovert’ which is next level extrovert,” she says, laughing. So do they ever fall out? “We’ve definitely had disagreements but we’re good at removing sources of conflict,” says Taylor. “We have love and respect for each other and we are rational women.”

One thing they differed on was the wearing of tool belts. As Taylor recounts, when they started their business she bought one for each of her business partners but they refused to wear them.

“I put mine on and put my tape measure and phone in the pockets while Bonnie’s phone was catching dust over by the bricklayers. I wanted to say: ‘I’m here and I’m serious.’”

As a passionfruit and lime candle burns on her desk next to a \$7 bunch of fake peonies from Kmart – “I put them in water so they look real”, says Taylor – it’s clear going into business with friends has paid off. The trio has nine children between them and, as Taylor points out, there’s a lot of driving to after-school activities but the sense of

purpose and achievement is palpable. As well as marketing the Reno School, Taylor could well consider bottling and spruiking her own chutzpah. When she left the corporate world she was offered a job at Google but when Hindmarsh and Cayless floated their plan the same day, she knew it was a risk she wanted to take. “Don’t die with the music in you,” is a favourite quote. As she says: “I don’t fear failure but I absolutely fear not having a go, and not knowing what could’ve been.”

With their big smiles, glossy hair

The Three Birds: Bonnie Hindmarsh, Lana Taylor and Erin Cayless at a project in Glenhaven.

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and glowing skin, it's no wonder "the Birds" and their equally shiny houses have become an Instagram sensation but they're genuinely down-to-earth and remain relatable. The day before our interview Taylor was stopped at Chatswood Chase by a bloke who said his wife was a fan.

"Well, we better get a picture of us together for her," she suggested. She also drops in on the brand's Facebook group, dropping in with comments on everything from tile selections to how to save money on skirting boards. And for those who have swooned over her home, terracotta rendered when it was bought by Jason back in 1998, we can reveal that it is as "lived in" as anyone else's: Belfrey the rabbit has a cage under the stairs; parrot Sunny is allowed to fly around the raked ceiling in the living room and Jason's computer (cables showing) is propped on a cake stand near the kitchen.

As for the Birds' status as renovation influencers, government subsidies for builders and renovators and people unable to spend on travel means it's likely we'll be focusing more than ever on our homes. Ever the enthusiast, Taylor falls over herself to offer tips. Be respectful rather than confrontational with tradies. Have a vision board and ruthlessly edit it because renovating is compromise. Copy ideas you love.

As for their predilection for white houses, Taylor believes white is a beautiful, timeless and airy choice which always improves a streetscape. But she does have one criticism of the increasingly popular shade.

"We don't need more choices of white, we need less," she implores paint manufacturers. "Give us 10, five warm and five cool, and be done with it!"

The next intake for the Reno School starts on September 14. www.therenoschool.com



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