

# Colour explosion allows Boomer to express hue-manity

**Julie Power**

There's goat slow-cooking in the kitchen of 76-year-old Michael Dowe's newly renovated home that his architect describes as a kaleidoscope of colours.

Decorated in jewel box colours that are everywhere all at once, former *Herald* food reviewer Dowe's flat in Elizabeth Bay gives the finger to beige and bland interiors with ugly accessible furniture and grab rails that pervade housing for older Australians.

"This is where I want to die," he said of his newly renovated apartment by architect Phillip Arnold of Plus Minus Design. Called the Apartment for an Older Man, it was shortlisted in the interior architecture category of this year's NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects Awards.

Boomers such as Dowe came of age in the decade of Vietnam, peace protests, sexual freedom and psychedelic music by Led Zeppelin and the Beatles, and the beginnings of interesting food arriving with migrants from Europe and China to Australia.

They want housing to match their tastes and needs, not their parents or grandparents. When the *Herald* visited, Dowe and



Michael Dowe gets cooking in his home (and kitchen) of many colours. Photo: Anthony Browell

Arnold were discussing where to hang a photo of Bob Dylan by photographer John Gollings.

In contrast to the colour at Dowe's, another shortlisted entry in the alterations and additions category, A House for Grandma by Brcar Mohony Architecture, is

sleek and modern. Architect Natalie Brcar said the standalone secondary dwelling on an existing site on the North Shore with its own entrance had generous proportions to allow ease of access for the owner's mother if she wanted to move in or for a young

adult who couldn't afford to move out.

Like Dowe's flat, A House for Grandma was designed on a smaller budget than most projects. Brcar said it was designed to show "you can still build nicely and with economy".

"The palette is restrained and contemporary, but it doesn't scream that it is fit for an older person."

Dowe entertains at least twice a week and his brief to Arnold was: "I want to keep on cooking. I want to listen to music."

When the *Herald* visited, a homemade Basque cheesecake cooled on an ultrawide kitchen bench that doubles as a servery to the dining room. The room is painted green and pink with yellow highlights with exposed pipes painted to match.

"I love colour," says Dowe, who owned a seagrass matting company. "No, no no," he responded when asked about neutral palettes.

The renovation turned a large kitchen into a dining room, and created a small kitchen where a second bedroom was located. It was done at a fraction of the cost of many expensive projects in the awards.

Arnold said to save money, they avoided applied finishes. "We took it back to its raw structure, but we wanted to avoid adding a finish because you pay for that."

The new dining room had an unexpected grace note, Dowe said: "The acoustics are fantastic, and we are all at a certain age where we struggle to hear each other."