

# COVER STORY Peter Vincent



**Old-world stucco ...** at 1 Middleton Street, Petersham, left, created by J and J Traditional Rendering and Plastering.

Photo: Quentin Jones

## HERITAGE

Rendering facade, but sometimes rendering covering in

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# Stuck on style

It's happening all over town, but rendering isn't always the way to go.

**F**rom new housing and apartment developments to pubs, shops and, well, half the houses in your street - these days it seems half of Sydney is rendered in a smooth concrete finish.

Has rendering always been so common? Architectural historian Robert Irving says rendering, as a formal building technique, is "as old as architecture" and much older in traditional home construction in Africa and the Mediterranean region.

The modern revival of rendering was led by 18th-century architect John Nash, who boasted that he "found London a city of brick and left it a city of stucco". He popularised the stucco-finished Regency style, which also became fashionable in Sydney in the 1820s.

Rendering reached its zenith here in the 1880s, with meticulous detailing on the facades of many Victorian Italianate homes. Improved brickmaking techniques late in the 19th century heralded the era of the face-brick look, which dominated

Sydney until recently. But why has our attitude towards face brick changed in the past 15 years?

Joe Stephens, of Leichhardt-based J and J Traditional Rendering and Plastering, believes homeowners "just got sick and tired of looking at red brick".

According to Archicentre's David Lawrence, Sydneysiders found a look to replace brick in the late 1980s - an imitation Mediterranean style popular at coastal Queensland developments.

*Sydney Morning Herald* architecture critic Elizabeth Farrelly sees rendering as a symptom of how fashion-conscious Sydney homeowners have become.

"It does have some practical benefits, such as providing a waterproof layer, and people realise that it's a quicker and cheaper way to boost your asking price than doing a full renovation," she says. "But it has also been a post-modern fashion to cover up real materials.

"Housing is an expression of popular culture and popular culture, by its nature, changes."



**Going pro ...** Jaime Oliveira and his team from Portowall, on the job in Hunters Hill (above and below).

