

Reflection of times gone by

All that glitters is not gold, writes **Jenny Brown** but much is beautiful.

THE purpose of all those mirrors in the great halls of Versailles was not to reflect the flamboyantly attired and coiffed French courtiers but to refract and magnify candlelight.

The cut-glass of chandeliers was designed to serve precisely the same purpose in the long dark nights of the pre-industrial ages before artificial lighting.

Although reflective surfaces were known to the Egyptians who relied on polished bronze, mirror glass was a 14th-century invention and, according to Armadale antiques experts Phillip and Liz Capocchi, the mirrors of the Renaissance were backed with real silver to effect the reflective surface.



Looking back: Liz and Phillip Capocchi in front of a Frans Franck mirror.

PICTURES: GARY MEDLICOTT

Mirror glass, which sometimes also used mercury, was a 17th-century innovation, says Mrs Capocchi. "As the manufacture of mirrors progressed they became an important decorating tool for the very wealthy. In palaces, they were actually built into the wood panelling."

Glass was expensive, so fantastic framing devices were employed and some of the best period craftsmen and designers put their skills into strikingly individual pieces.

Because they do double duty as objects of timeless beauty, they can, says the Capochis, be the making of any room. "Mirrors are often the Wow! factor," Mr Capocchi says.

The Capochis have a long established High Street, Armadale, business profile. They have just moved into a voluminous 600-square-metre space which gives them scope to display their various pieces in enviously spacious arrangements and room for a central gallery.

Their second exhibition this year focuses on mirrors and the 50 original items in *Reflections* range from 1760 to the 1960s.

The earliest, a pair of arched metal windows with small mirrored inserts, was made in France in 1760. The highlight for Mr Capocchi is a 1950s carved wood and tortoiseshell veneered mirror by world-renowned Belgium designer Frans Franck which is astounding, he says "because of its rarity, scarcity and quality. Franck specialised in

making objects out of tortoiseshell."

For pure Wow! impact, he also appreciates a Milanese hall mirror from the 1950s — a two-metre-high oval of peach glass with a green onyx shelf and an elaborate wrought-iron frame. "For me," he says, "the very design and colour make it an amazing piece."

On a much smaller scale but no less idiosyncratic is a small round mirror made in Germany's Black Forest and set into a pine frame carved as an owl. The clawed feet hold the bottom of the glass. "It is so interesting to see that there really are a million ways to frame a mirror," Mrs Capocchi says.

While the one-off pieces are all "period" they work well in almost any setting, she says. "People are looking for individuality in collector pieces and mirrors like these can be used in even the most minimalistic setting.

"There is not a room in the house that isn't beautified by the inclusion of an antique mirror. They remain a very important part of decor to this day."

Mr Capocchi says while modern mirrors tend to be more streamlined — "less formal and more relaxed" — the style remains sophisticated."

The 50 mirrors in the display,

which range in price from \$500 to \$30,000, have come from dealers, shops, markets and even car-boots in France, Germany, Holland and the south of England.

"The high-end mirrors mainly come from France because in the 18th and 19th century, France was the source of high-end furniture," Mr Capocchi says.

The age range of the representative pieces matches the breadth of periods the Capochis sell in their new emporium. Crockery, art, baskets, chandeliers and sideboards derive from all eras, culminating in the 20th century, and the corner of the store, where the Capocchi's daughter, Angela, showcases her take on that era's decorative arts.

Because the volume of their imports so often coalesce into themed groupings, the couple are looking forward to being able to present regular in-store shows.

The next one they are considering will focus on sports and leisure equipment.

"I've bought some old gymnasium equipment," Mr Capocchi says. "Old punching bags, a pommel horse and lacrosse sticks."

"We've had many evolutions in 35 years in business and this direction is a lot of fun for us because we can make it so unpredictable," Mrs Capocchi says.



PAGETURNER

Out of Town
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IT'S an alarming global trend: a desire to get maximum house for the buck on an allotment that's too small. The race for bulk and "pre-eminence" is winning, especially in new suburban housing estates, where scant regard is given to environmental or aesthetic concerns. Inland, however, the picture is more promising.

In a succinct introduction, editor Peter Hyatt, with Jennifer Hyatt, sums up the premise of this book: out-of-town houses are often outstripping their urban counterparts in inventing a better housing typology. They are effective solutions that remain mindful of delicate eco-systems.

"Out-of-town houses are spare in form, often constructed from prefabricated components, and reflect the shrewd transfer of an industrial or rural vocabulary ... They are much less concerned with fashion than utility and flexibility."

The authors have selected 37 projects, mainly from the Americas, Australia and Japan. Three were designed by Victorian architects. In Yea, Col Bandy's Kerrisdale Farmhouse is based on a tent fly; highly adaptable, it is a house that harmonises with its surrounds. The Lookout House at Red Hill, designed by David Luck, is a minimalist form, its black steel sheet walls opening and closing to the landscape through sliding doors; within, there are moveable walls. The curves of Jesse Judd's Wheatsheaf House, realised largely in corrugated steel and plywood lining, draw from an Airstream caravan and the house is at once embraced by yet separate from its environment.

MIRANDA TAY

A decorative Venetian mirror, c1860 (below) and a carved pine mirror, c1900, from the Black Forest (right).



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■ *Reflections* runs until the final week in July.