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OPEN DOORS

NEW DIRECTIONS
IN AUSTRALIAN
ARCHITECTURE
AND INTERIORS





I was originally drawn to architecture by the precision, complexity and beauty of an architectural drawing I saw as a child. I first worked in an architectural office on school holidays when I was fifteen and always used my Christmas holidays working on building sites or within architectural offices. I deliberately moved around to get the feel of small, medium and large-scale practices. Before I'd set up my own practice I'd experienced eight different offices in both Melbourne and London.

By the end of university my interests had turned to more modernist tendencies where the emphasis was less about content and social referencing and more about creating a more defined form and a proximity and intricacy of detail, surface and materiality. British architects such as Chipperfield and Pawson were influences and represented this change in thinking during the early-mid 90s. During my time as an architect in London, my attention shifted to interiors. I found that, while most of my colleagues in Australia were still concentrating predominantly on exteriors, I was negotiating the fine line between interior design and architecture.

Nowadays, I see myself as both an interior designer and an architect. I like to treat interiors and exteriors individually but also symbiotically, as integrated ideas. The result is that they speak to each other and often integrate as one. This type of design is becoming more sought after in contemporary Australian homes where outdoor living occurs year-round.

So far my practice has focused on residential projects, but our portfolio contains a number of projects of varying sizes and scopes including furniture commissions and restaurant, hotel and commercial office fit-outs. Our work on smaller residential projects has helped hone our skills in being resourceful, creative, maximising physical space and making budgets extend as far as they can go.

We approach each project differently and find that each new client helps us develop our identity. We like to think we collaborate with clients rather than forcing our ideas upon them. We put a large emphasis on making sure clients spend time on their brief, identifying who they are and how they want their space to represent their lifestyle and personality. The bones of the brief are then developed and there is a synthesis of complex phenomena that is eventually crystallised and put into a coherent and rational order. Creative solutions often arise out of this process, which presents to us some of the most exciting aspects of what we do. Clearly we try to provide some 'wow' factor, but it also has to feel comfortable and appropriate to that particular client.

Philosophically, the practice aims to engage with issues of culture and habitat through

rigorous interrogations and a belief in design as a means of addressing spatial and programmatic concerns within historical and social contexts. This translates into a special interest in living and working spaces that can embrace many aspects of contemporary life. We are interested in spaces that address the primal experiential nature of people, through basic attractions to light, materials and patterns of movement.

We are not necessarily preoccupied with concepts that contain intentional subtexts but would prefer to assimilate with existing conditions and provide simple responses to architectural challenges that are appropriate to the sense of place and locality. This involves a commitment and close attention to the detailing of scale, surfaces, thresholds and junctions and the rigorous exploration of the zones between what has come before and what is new. We also like to collaborate outside the normal parameters of architecture with the likes of artists and sculptors.

It seems that architecture is developing faster than ever but in a sense it also remains the same. The obvious emerging influences are the development of computer modelling programs and the effect they will have of the freedom of form-making but there is also the rapidly increasing importance of sustainability and its affiliate notions of recycling on micro and macro levels. It will be interesting to see how this plays out within the aesthetics of future buildings and interiors.

The good thing about practising in Australia is that there is an increasing amount of people who are willing to invest in good design. Whether it's for real estate reasons or to provide unique environments in which to live and work, design is there to add a sense of pleasure and ease of lifestyle. The concentration on the home as a retreat and escape from a chaotic world and as a place of aesthetic beauty has become increasingly dominant. Hopefully the days are gone where only the lofty and artistic embrace good design. I think it is increasingly apparent that people from all backgrounds can find value in good design.

ALBERT PARK HOUSE

OPPOSITE Conceived as two pavilions, a central courtyard mediates the existing front Victorian cottage dwelling from the new more contemporary intervention at the rear and is given additional resonance via a level and material change. Decking boards continue inside and outside to blur the division of interior and exterior and act as a bridge between the dwellings. Photo: John Wheatley

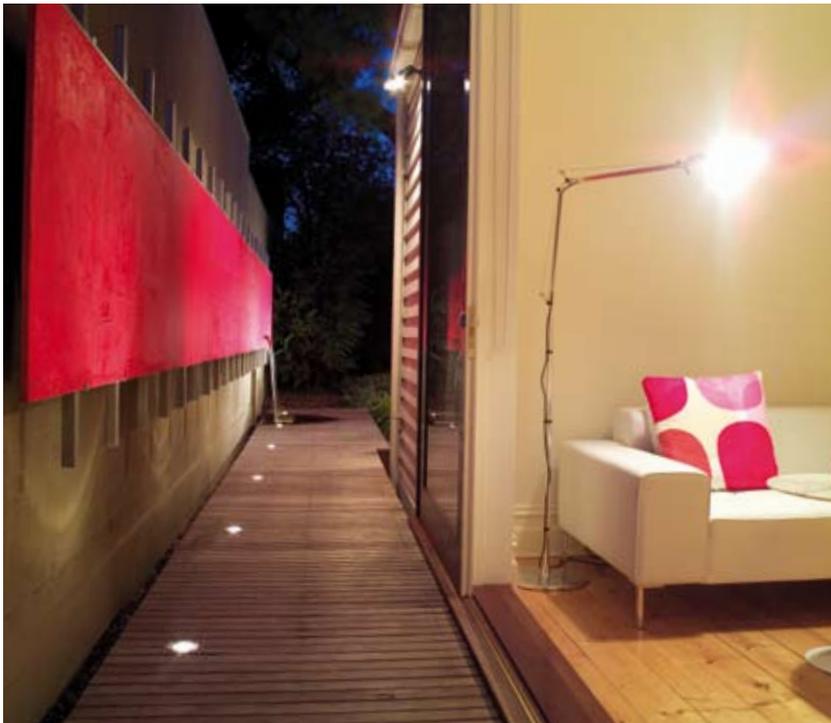




ALBERT PARK HOUSE

The rear courtyard space provides another series of figure/ground relationships. The continuity of material and colour is integral to the sense of flow and movement. Sliding door panels concealed behind the kitchen enable this courtyard to open up to front and rear areas of the house, enabling valuable northern solar access into the rear dwelling and to regulate airflow within the residence. A mirrored courtyard wall extends the feeling of depth and separation of the dwellings. Photos: John Wheatley





CLIFTON HILL HOUSE

The clients, a couple with a keen interest in art and design, were sceptical at first at the suggestion that the side alley could become the central display piece of the home. Although external, it was conceived as a second hallway that would connect the disparate living spaces and serve as art, sculpture and a water feature. A sheer-descent water feature spills out of the painting and through the deck base creating a focal point for the rear living space. Photos: John Wheatley



PRAHRAN HOUSE

All the internal walls of the previous partially detached rear are pushed to the site boundaries, effectively fortifying the internal and external living areas and maximising the site's useable area. A series of architectural 'objects' are dropped onto the virtually clean slate of the rear open space. This series of seemingly random (though carefully positioned) geometric forms dangle precariously over the drop in floor level, accommodating the fall of the site. Photos: John Wheatley



SOUTH YARRA HOUSE

At the rear of this dwelling, the concrete banquette runs from kitchen bench seemingly through the threshold to become outdoor kitchen. The internal walls and ceiling wrap around to become an external fence. The interior of the bathroom is clad in dark slate tiles to provide distinction from the other rooms and to enable it to meld seamlessly with the colouring of the external courtyard walls. We approached the project with the intention of reusing the majority of the existing structure, recycling existing materials, and using natural and salvaged local material wherever possible. Photos: Shannon McGrath