

FROM LEFT: *Caravan* café's sous chef Bo Kyun Kim; co-owner/co-founder Jessica Chung; the café's interior designer David Flack; front of house waiter Ahjin Son; and barista Jeong Beom Seo. Details, last pages.

CARAVAN

JUST LIKE HOME

A cafe in Seoul by interior designer David Flack gives locals a taste of what suburbia was like in Melbourne during the 1950s.

By Annemarie Kiely
Photographed by Sharyn Cairns



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: Seoul's old town. Custom shelves by Flack Studio; Heath Ceramics handmade wall tiles; Allied Maker Mini Orb lights; Memphis Milano Cucumber vase (on top shelf) by Martine Bedin. Memphis Milano Tabiti Lamp by Ettore Sottsass; custom-made cake stands. OPPOSITE PAGE: Memphis Milano Charleston floor lamp by Martine Bedin; custom banquette and ottoman by Flack Studio; Featherston Scape dining chair by Grazia & Co.



“THE CLIENTS DIDN'T WANT IT TO FEEL NEW OR TEMPORARY”
— DAVID FLACK

When interior designer David Flack pulls up pictures of his latest hospitality project — a petite cafe in South Korea called Caravan — it is presumed the images will evidence the effects of the mobile homes that made their way along the ancient routes of the Silk Road.

After all, Korea was a renowned stop for the trade of its textiles.

But true to Flack form, this homage to the travelling home is steeped in the suburbs of Melbourne, circa late 1950s, when driveways filled with Franklins and Roadmasters waiting to hitch to the FJ Holden for holiday fun. A love of Aussie localism is very legible in Flack's sharp captures of the cafe. They frame window-lengths of berry-red Venetian blinds spilling sun onto built-in banquettes set with '50s-inflected tables and fine-legged Scape chairs (created by Grant Featherston in 1960). Yes, the “collision” of hand-rubbed brass, moss-green terrazzo floors, Memphis props, polished blush plaster walls, grapefruit-pink tiles, fir-green powder-coated steel and Minimalist Melbourne art could be construed as contemporary, but the scheme revels in the slip-stream curves of the postwar Australian caravan and corner milk bar. According to Flack, these so-called dinosaurs of design contain “beautifully humble spaces” that instantly make you feel at home, “which is exactly what I wanted to contrive”. We get the retro vibe, but would the Gangnam futurist city of Seoul?

Flack, who regards the '50s and '60s with the fascination of a Gen X foreigner, says his Australian clients, husband-and-wife team Adam Kane and Jessica Chung, began a love affair with Seoul more than a decade ago, making it their annual holiday destination and ultimately their home. “Jessica is Korean-born but was raised in Australia,” »





« says Flack, adding that she found his studio on Instagram. “They were both avid followers of our feed and then Jessica phoned the office and we had an instant connection over food and design.”

Issuing a selection of ’70s ‘yacht rock’ — including Steely Dan’s ‘Do It Again’ and Roxy Music’s ‘Love Is the Drug’ — Chung communicated her desired mood for the cafe in song. “It got us to the heart of Caravan quicker than ‘I love... I hate...,’” says Flack. “They never spoke about how the space should look; they only discussed the tone and experience they wanted to create. This was to feel like a second home — a space that would change with the light from casual and welcoming for breakfast and lunch to intimate and unpretentious for dinner. They didn’t want it to feel new or temporary.”

The realisation of an around-the-corner cafe that was mood-fluid and “forever” hinged on a project management team that would not get lost in translation. It was found in Daniel Valle Architects, a young Spanish firm that shifted to Seoul several years ago. “The build was complex with some very challenging details and materials not normally used in the Korean market,” says Flack, crediting a couple of young Korean builders known as Hed Urban trained in industrial design with a sensitivity that surmounted all language barriers. “The pace of the build was a lot slower than normal in Seoul, but the client made it clear that quality was paramount to Caravan’s success.”

Flack recalls the fear and then laughter following the day there was a query from the Seoul site office regarding the meaning of ‘joinery’. “We could have given in to terror, but we showed the same level of trust and respect in the process as the Korean team,” he says, pointing to the richness of floor resulting from Korean riverbed rocks. “Caravan is very much a result of that collaborative relationship.” *VL*

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FROM TOP: custom mirror, Birds-Beak wall light and terrazzo tiles, all by Flack Studio and manufactured by Hed Urban; Memphis Milano Oceanic lamp (left) by Michele De Lucchi; Flos Tab T light (centre) and Gatto lamp; Bitossi Calice vase (right) by Ettore Sottsass; custom Carrara marble table tops; Alessi P  p   Le Moko salt and pepper mills; sculptures (far left) by J  b  ne Pasco-White; paintings by Matthew Allen. In another section, paintings by Sean Bailey. Details, last pages.

