

inside

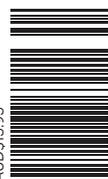
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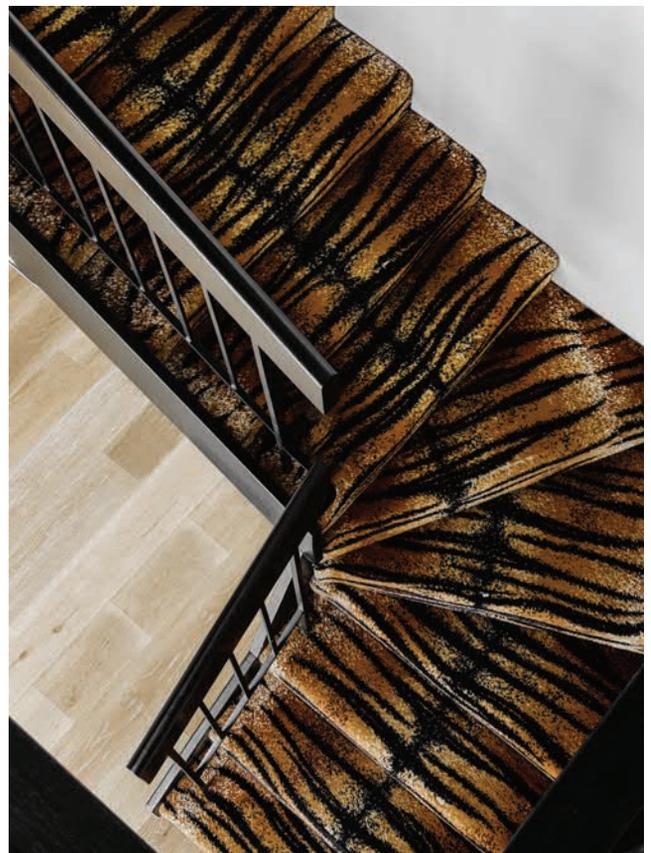
Very nice to meet you

David Flack

Well planned for good design, *inside* co-editor Gillian Serisier takes a look at what drives David Flack.

text—Gillian Serisier





With an almost three-year-old practice, 18 projects currently in construction and 20 more in the works, David Flack is one of the hottest of the hot young things of the Australian design world.

Charming, irreverent, fun and exceedingly sharp, his approach to design has been crafted and considered from the get-go. While at university he gained the Hecker Phelan & Guthrie internship. By the end of his year with HP&G, Kerry Phelan left to start KPDO and took Flack with her, where he stayed for the next four years as Phelan set up her practice. "She was a huge influence on who I am as a designer. The main thing I have learned very strongly from her is to detail first, then design from there. It's intrinsic now in the way I design: I am always thinking about the detail and the big picture unfolds from there," says Flack.

By 2014 Flack was ready to start his own business and he took on a small run of residential projects and a sprinkling of commercial. And this is where he steps out of the usual 'evolution of designer' mould. Flack is a designer who both appreciates and understands design and expertise, so rather than wing it, he engaged a branding consultant who he worked with for a year to determine exactly what he wanted the studio to be. "I really wanted to plan it. I always thought if I was going to launch a studio I would want it to be a really amazing studio and something that was different," says Flack. Key to his branding goal was a direction as strong as his own sense of design,

which would differentiate him in the market, while never selling him as something he wasn't, as he explains: "I'm very comfortable with my aesthetic and where the studio is going. It has a nice bravery to it - from that standpoint I don't care what other people think - you either love it or hate it. I don't mind copping a bit of flack and I don't ever want to rest on my laurels; sometimes you need a bit of a kick up the bum."

The latest transition in this development is a new studio that deliberately limits the team to eight (Flack, studio manager and partner Mark Robinson, three senior and two mid-level designers and a bookkeeper) and two dogs, Frank and Alfred. "It is very much about picking and choosing who we want to work with. We can choose our clients and control the studio and we won't take on a client if we think the aesthetic isn't right for us," says Flack. Moreover, the new studio is purpose built to the theatre and pleasure of designing, with layout space more valuable than desks and plenty of room for experiencing colour and materiality. "There is more focus and room for playing. We just love playing, customising - the new studio really transforms that whole experience of what design is. It's fun, it is a luxury to have an interior designer and you should really enjoy the process," says Flack. Moreover, with all projects either referrals or from Instagram, there is an onus on keeping the experience of both the design process and outcome high.

previous—Caravan, Seoul. Image Sharyn Cairns. **above left**—Ginger & Smart. Image Toby Scott. **above right**—Elsternwick residence. Image Brooke Holm. **opposite left**—Caravan, Seoul. Image Sharyn Cairns. **opposite right**—David Flack. Image, Brooke Holm



That said, while the machinations of creating a brand were at work on one level, the Flack design aesthetic was evolving. "When I look back at the first projects they are so different from what I am doing now, but I have always known what I wanted," says Flack. Early designs such as the very minimal, but warm and luxurious East Melbourne house 'went viral' with social media and the A&D media picking him up almost instantly.

The Holger and Holger house he completed at the same time, however, has to a large extent defined his market appeal, with four modernist houses currently in construction. His modernism is not the white on white variety, but rather an homage to the modernist era's big personalities and quirky design stratagem. As a case in point, Flack recounts being asked to a home where a staircase of tiger stripe carpet held centre stage. The client asked what he thought and what he would do with it. "I said, 'It is bloody amazing: keep it - I'd revolve the whole design around it.'" Where all other designers had said get rid of it, Flack had struck the right chord with the client, but more importantly it was a genuine response and the finished interior for Elsternwick residence 2015 is spectacular.

Commercial interiors have also played a huge role in defining the Flack aesthetic. "There's a strong thread in my commercial that's very Milanese 50s, a mash-up of opposing materials that are kind of ugly, but together they are really beautiful - mad

detailing in micro sections, then a big freshness in other sections," says Flack. His interior for Entrecote 2015, for example, pairs large swathes of uninterrupted colour with elaborately detailed fireplace surrounds, art and lighting. Idiosyncrasy and insouciance also play a defining role: "[There's] always a quirk or moment where you think, 'I would never have put something there,' disruption, I always think you need a bit of ugly. You are not going to get a white finish at Flack Studio," he says.

Ginger & Smart, for example, pairs powder pink with deep teal and is ever so gorgeous, while the retained builder's scribbles on the column is a foible typical of Flack.

With eight in the practice, Flack Studio will continue to be David Flack. That said, his reputation and client list is extraordinary, as are his interiors. In the last month, he has completed a restaurant in Seoul - Caravan 2017 - with plans for Caravan 2.0 and a bakery also in Seoul. Add to this a very large art gallery and cocktail bar in Shanghai, due to open in September 2017, plus a restaurant/provedore in Fitzroy. Given all this it's hard to imagine staying at eight, especially when you add in the 20 residential projects also in the works. Mark Robinson makes a very good point, however, saying, "The staff are all designing and have ownership of their projects - they are working with David and presenting the work they want to make and delivering really impeccable unique interiors."