



MEZZANINE IN COLLABORATION WITH OUR
EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD* BRING YOU **20** NAMES
THAT ARE BREAKING GROUND IN OUR CREATIVE LANDSCAPE
– AND THEY ARE ALL **UNDER 40!**

EACH OF OUR AMAZING NOMINEES APPEARS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER
*OUR EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD IS LISTED ON PAGE 106

AMBER ROAD
NOMINATED BY MEZZANINE

We are lucky to have the two women of Amber Road on the MEZZANINE editorial advisory board, they bring a contemporary, realistic view to practice, life and design intertwined.

MEZZANINE

INTERVIEW BY Peter Salhani



left: The Finery

below: WTC Alameda Park in collaboration with SC Paisajismo, Barcelona



left: Katy Svalbe and Yasmine Ghoniem of Amber Road

top: Beachside apartment, Sydney

above: Cronulla residence, Sydney

PHOTOGRAPHY | CHRISTOPHER MORRIS | LERINAH WOLF | FRIERUSCOE | KATY SVALBE

Landscape architect Katy Svalbe and interior architect Yasmine Ghoniem are sisters. Having established their Sydney collective, Amber Road in 2013, just two years later, they were shortlisted for Emerging Practice of the Year at the World Interiors Awards, and locally at IDEA.

The studio brings together art, design and landscape, with artist collaborations integral to the work – embedding meaning, and reminding of the handmade. A recent example is the interior for chef Kerby Craig’s Ume Burger, at Sydney’s Barangaroo. It commissioned ‘Paper Engineer’ Benja Harney of Paper Form, who created a sweet series of origami food sculptures for the menu boards — a nod to the Japanese tradition of ‘model food’.

Ghoniem is a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, US, where she led design for major hospitality and residential projects, before relocating to Australia in 2013. She is also a musician and member of Sydney band, The Conversations. Svalbe graduated from the University of Western Australia and was a founding member of ASPECT Studios. She is also a sessional design tutor at the Landscape Architecture schools at UNSW (University of New South Wales) and UTS (University of Technology Sydney).

Both have lived, studied and worked overseas — Svalbe in Spain, Ghoniem in the US and Middle East. A restless curiosity informs their work and lends an ‘old soul’ approach. In three years together, they have built a portfolio of redoubtable depth and maturity. From homes and interior elements to gardens, hospitality and public space, their projects are deeply rooted in a love of nature and a longing to enhance human connection.

Perhaps it stems from having grown up with different fathers on different continents. The name Amber Road refers to their paternal lineage, and the ancient trade route that links the Mediterranean to the Baltic coast.

As citizens of the world and designers of the future, they are thinking about the kind of society they want to live in. One that fosters community and creativity, where housing costs are shared. Where younger, older, coupled and uncoupled can collectively live inspired lives in inspired surrounds.



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top left Deco house,
Melbourne

left Cronulla residence,
Sydney

bottom right Beachside
apartment, Sydney



Amber Road
Sydney, NSW

amberroaddesign.com.au

/// In Europe it's not just about home ownership, but long-term rental opportunities as well. In Australia we need more options and greater flexibility than the current real estate market paradigm.

What were the founding ideals of your practice, and some of your influences?

We wanted to work small and collaboratively with artisans, to make places and spaces that would delight and transform people. And we wanted to be mistresses of our own destiny! Initially we avoided labelling our services, because design is a surround-sound experience – from landscape to interiors, and everything in between.

Our influences are many, but here are a few: Eileen Gray, Hundertwasser, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Miralles, Gaudi, Michael Reynolds, Bill Mollison, Louis Kahn, Carlo Scarpa, Mies van de Rohe, India Mahdavi and Luis Barragán.

How do your complementary skill sets interact in practice?

Our abiding passions – interiors, landscape, music and art – are in many ways similar, yet we approach them from different angles. So we are kind of parallel, yet intersecting. The conceptual foundations of a brief can come from either of our individual disciplines, or directly from the brief. Because we contribute equally to every project, the typical lines between inside and out tend to blur.

In establishing the practice, what did you get right and what have been the challenges?

The main challenges have been maintaining a work/life balance, and taking stock of our achievements – we're not great at those! Things we got right include: not growing too fast, maintaining curiosity and conversations (we're always learning), not being trend-driven in design responses, collaborating with artists on most projects and sharing a work environment with other driven creatives – we're wonderfully supported in the studio by two outstanding designers.

Our focus is to only work on projects that inspire us, and to keep playing a key role in the design and making of each, so we plan to keep the studio small, with a core team, and collaborate with other studios if a larger project requires more hands on deck.

What needs to change or improve, so you aren't locked out of home ownership?

In Europe it's not just about home ownership, but long-term rental opportunities as well. In Australia we need more options and greater flexibility than the current real estate market paradigm.

There's a growing movement towards alternative typologies and we're keen to participate. Two models inspiring us are Nightingale in Melbourne, and the Baugruppen-style research program in Western Australia (between the University of WA and Landcom) – both exploring collectively built urban housing, with a community focus over profit.

Something we're exploring with our own family is shared housing for intergenerational living. We've started our research by sending questionnaires to the family asking the sorts of places they would like, what rooms they're happy to share and what rooms they aren't. We've learned a lot about our family already! Let's just say it's a work in progress.

