

DESIGN

Generously supported by the Cecily and Colin Rigg Bequest, the Rigg Design Prize recognises excellence in Australian design and is the highest accolade for contemporary design in Australia. The triennial prize is awarded to an Australian design practice displaying outstanding creative achievements in contemporary design.

The shortlist for the Rigg Design Prize 2018 includes ten Australian design studios working in the field of interior design and decoration. For the Prize exhibition, the NGV invited each studio to design a purpose-built interior that responds to the 2018 exhibition theme of 'Domestic Living'. The NGV asked the studios to produce an interior capable of expressing how designers conceive interiors as forms of communication embedded with values, ideas and stories that directly engage with the cultural, historical, material and technological aspects of society. The NGV will announce the Rigg Design Prize 2018 winner on 12 October, following an international judging based on the overall quality of presentation and interpretation of the theme; clarity and originality of the design idea; and creative expression.

The Rigg Design Prize 2018 short list is Amber Road (NSW), Arent & Pyke (NSW), Danielle Brustman (VIC), David Flack (VIC), David Hicks (VIC), Hecker Guthrie (VIC), Martyn Thompson Studio (NYC), Scott Weston Architecture Design (NSW), The Society Inc by Sibella Court (NSW), Kirsten Stanisich and Jonathan Richards (NSW). Here, **Simone LeAmon**, NGV Curator of Contemporary Design and Architecture, interviews the principal designers from each of these studios, who share their responses to ideas and contemporary issues affecting the profession of interior design and decoration.

RIGG DESIGN

PRIZE 2018



YASMINE GHONIEM AND KATY SVALBE, AMBER ROAD

In warm climates, a unique feature of domestic architecture is the transition zone between the interior and exterior, or inside/outside. This is a space that particularly interests Amber Road. Can you explain why?

One of the reasons we formed our own practice was to bring together our backgrounds in landscape [Katy] and interior architecture [Yasmine]. We see that the more urban society becomes the more we crave nature, and a sense of being immersed in it.

So, it's natural that one of our obsessions with Amber Road is finding new ways to express and blur the boundaries between inside and outside.

On one level, a verandah is an extension of space. However, it can be many other things: a mediator of climate and a protector of privacy; a voyeuristic place from which to watch other dwellings and happenings; a place for receptions and homecomings; a place to grow things like veggies or fruit trees; a place for artworks; a workspace; a room for storytelling; and a room for sharing confidences or secrets. Or it may simply be a place for rest, and for contemplation.

It is this ambiguity, this duality, this sense of 'not knowing', together with the pull of our multiple personal heritages, that makes this transitional space such a rich source of inspiration and exploration for us.

Amber Road designers Yasmine Ghoniem and Katy Svalbe



JULIETTE ARENT AND SARAH-JANE PYKE, ARENT & PYKE

Is there one quality, above all others, that you believe is important to strive for when designing a domestic space?

Above all else, we hope to imbue each project with a sense of 'ownness'. Ownness, rather than ownership, is a sense of yourself, within and belonging to your space. We know ourselves and we derive peace from that familiarity. Creating an emotional connection to your home goes beyond the layer of personal objects, art and books on display. It requires getting to know you, understanding your needs and your desires for your future.

Our intention for every residential project is to reflect our clients, as that recognition of ourselves evokes a strong sense of comfort and security. We relish the chance to explore each client's particular way of living, and together we find new comfort zones to revel in and enjoy. We mine the heart to uncover and reveal the essential qualities for you to live happily in your home. Our purpose is to take our clients on a journey that awakens or reinvigorates their love of design; to delight and surprise them with unexpected elements that bring them joy, every day. The measure of our success is that you walk into a room and intuitively understand it. It makes sense to you, because it is of you.

A home should never feel overly designed, on trend, or even be a statement. Instead it is a quiet celebration and reflection of those who live there and call it their own.

Arent & Pyke's Juliette Arent and Sarah-Jane Pyke, Photo by Hugh Stewart



DANIELLE BRUSTMAN

Your design practice embraces both interior and stage design. What role does spectacle and theatre play in domestic living and how can, or does, this shape the living spaces you design?

In theatre, a successful set design must work alongside performance, lighting, costume and sound. These elements weave an atmosphere that supports the telling of a story with layers of visual and aural communication. The set is activated and animated by various theatrical devices designed to set a tone and draw in an audience.

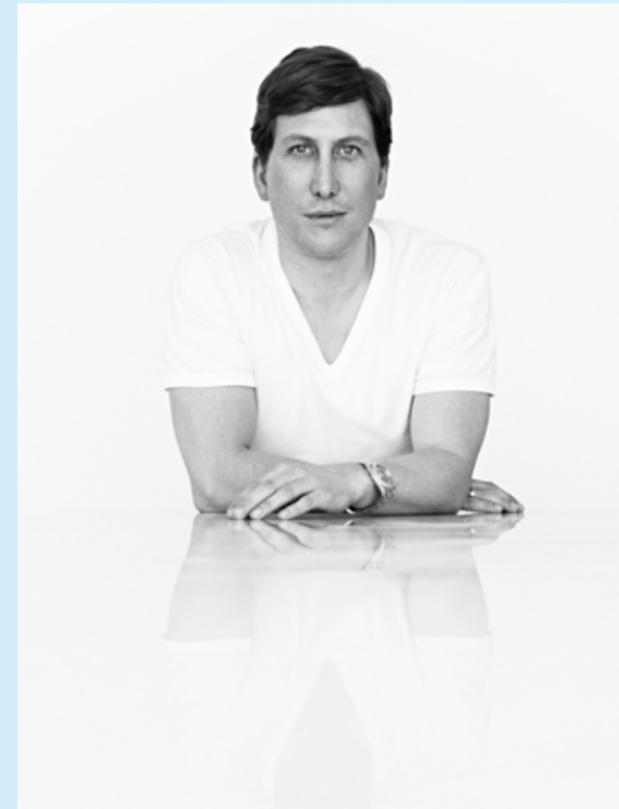
Similarly, interior design can insert a dynamic combination of sensory and material elements into a room. Compositions of colour, material, reflection, texture and light can animate a space, providing a rich and stimulating 'set' for life to play out in. Introducing theatrical devices of stage and spectacle can add dynamics to an interior.

Theatre invites an audience to witness and experience the telling of a story. Our living spaces set the scene for the telling of our own stories. The difference in a domestic environment is that the occupant plays the role of storyteller, performer and audience.

I am interested in the ways design can heighten our living experience and set the conditions for a home life that actively fosters daydreaming, imagination, intimacy and expression.

Designer Danielle Brustman with her project 'The Matlock House', Photo by Emma-Jane Johnston

(below)
Flack Studio director David Flack



DAVID HICKS

Historically, domestic interiors have been designed to meet basic human needs, but we now live in a time where needs can be superseded by desires. Can you shed light on how desire is both informing and influencing interiors and domestic living?

The home has become more than just shelter; it has become a sanctuary. Like palaces and castles of yesteryear, the home has become a place to retreat, a place to feel protected and a hub of social interaction. In this fast-paced life the desire to create an oasis for living has become so strong that homes are now integrating more and more facilities. We have seen the popularity of bars, cinemas, infra-red saunas, steam rooms, ice baths, gyms, massage rooms, temperature-controlled wine cellars, golf simulators, panic rooms and the list goes on. Along with this requirement for private amenity we are also seeing a new level of finish and detail sought. Exotic timbers, rare marble, custom-made carpets and furniture, along with vast collections of art, cars and clothing have all combined to lead interior design into a whole new realm. We are now designing with people's desires in mind and creating some amazing private spaces in which people can unwind and enjoy the company of family and friends in a safe and nurturing environment. In our current culture the importance of this lifestyle is very strong and something that people are willing to spend money on to perfect.

Designer David Hicks

DAVID FLACK, FLACK STUDIO

We're experiencing unprecedented media coverage on home renovation, design and decoration. In your opinion, what is it about the design and decorating of domestic interiors that has captured the public's attention?

It's an exciting time for the design industry due to demand and awareness; however, shows like *The Block* have watered down the craft at the heart of our industry. It has set up unrealistic expectations on time, budget and the expertise required to design the spaces the public yearn for.

Our job as designers is to craft custom homes that get better with age; this is only possible through care, consideration and respect for the design process.

Clients often come with preconceived notions of what 'their' interior or 'an interior' should look like, calculated and formed by years of pinning [using Pinterest] or trailing through Instagram. When working with our clients we will flip through books and discuss the greats like Gio Ponti and family memories in the exploration of what their home can be.

I think it's our role as a leading designer/architect to continually educate and push this notion further with clients, and never to succumb to designing an interior that does not challenge. The space should offer something the client has never dreamed about. They are spaces of detail, layer, texture and depth; spaces that make you feel something upon entering, spaces that make you dream, spaces that make you tingle all over. That is good design.



PAUL HECKER AND HAMISH GUTHRIE, HECKER GUTHRIE

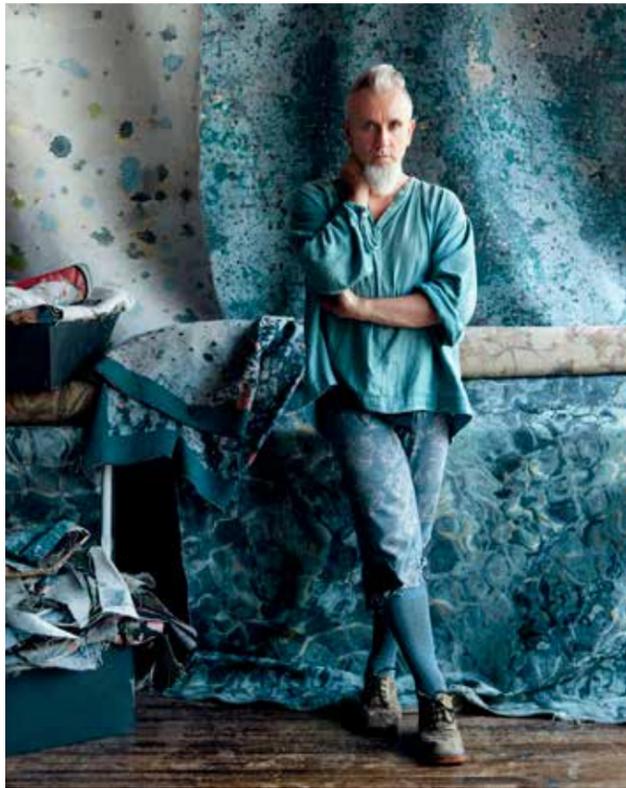
In recent decades we have seen a resurgence in craft production, with greater demand for handmade furnishings, fittings and goods for the home. Why do you think this is, and how do craft values enrich the domestic landscape?

Our studio has always focussed our energy on creating spaces that evade notional trends and we have purposely not given audience to ideas and pieces that are mass produced. To us, the home is the last vestige of personalised expression, in a clamorous and digital world. It's our collection of stories, textures and the nostalgia of our own lives. We are all so connected and globally accessible, more now than at any other time in history, and carving and curating our own personalised safe harbours is paramount.

Our muse has always been an idea of authenticity, in all its forms. This exists in each of our projects. Craft embodies this in the most truthful way, with an honesty that is becoming rare. It's not so much about creating an aesthetic, but more about conjuring an experience, creating stories and letting a narrative take its own form. Design has skills that can transport a space and experience to a certain point, and then it's the layering of others – artisans, craftspeople and artists – who then take ideas on to the next chapter. In such a unique and unparalleled way, it's a discovery – through process, through making, through reacting to materiality in such an intimate way – that then has the potential to advance our own stories, and ultimately our experiences with our spaces.

Hecker Guthrie's Paul Hecker and Hamish Guthrie, Photo by Christine Francis





MARTYN THOMPSON, MARTYN THOMPSON STUDIO

For many, the domestic interior is also a place of work. The home office is typically out of view of living spaces, as if to deliberately separate work and life. But you have a different take on this convention and advocate for an integrated space seamlessly blending life and work. Can you share with us what this looks like and your experience of it?

Creating a world to live in is what I do – whether that is something I am capturing momentarily for a photograph or a more permanent interior. Environment is key. How that looks, feels and sounds evolves through being present with it, so I tend to live in my work. I like to be surrounded by beauty. I often find new ideas in my old ideas. Being surrounded by work is at once maddening and fantastic and at times I can't locate my personal on/off button. I don't always work at a desk – my desk is a source of clerical chaos ... a paradise of procrastination. Sitting in bed is the best, and can be much more inspiring and productive. I tend to divide my space into messy and neat areas, and this really helps me to live in it. There is calm, quiet and repose in the clean space and elsewhere a sense of the ongoing pulse of creativity. The two sides of my coin.

Designer Martyn Thompson

(below)
Scott Weston from Scott Weston
Architecture Design



SIBELLA COURT, THE SOCIETY INC BY SIBELLA COURT

How do sentiment and memory figure in the domestic interior, and what role do such notions perform in the concept of home?

All objects, once held, have a memory or story of where, when and who you were with when you found them. I have a better memory for such things and none for last week's incidents. I am renowned for my extensive collections that line the walls of my design studio, as I enjoy having my things around me, out on show and ready for their story to be told, as rotating objects and treasures that are available to touch and turn over.

Similarly, a home is like a museum without the cordoned art works and signs saying 'do not touch'. I think of all the things I own that have an emotional or historical significance or come with a memory or tale. I find ways of incorporating these objects into my surroundings as three-dimensional reminders of my life for my family and friends to experience. It allows my home to be distinctly mine: it evolves over time rather than being locked into a specific era or decorating genre.

I believe it's these elements of memory and storytelling that make a place enriched. The way that colour, materials, furniture are paired with a family's life souvenirs that prompt memories of holidays, shared history, celebrations and good times, layered over the top with a scent and soundscape that only belongs to that particular space, makes it special and full of soul.

Designer Sibella Court, Photo by Steve Baccon,
styling by Sheree Commerford

SCOTT WESTON, SCOTT WESTON ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

Why do you think characteristics such as ornament, colour and decoration endure in the practice of interior design, in contrast to other design fields that uphold modernism's 'less is more' principles of good design?

Modernism's principles of 'less is more' were adopted and preached by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. He believed architecture should be pared back to its essential qualities to achieve simplicity. Ornamentation was considered; however, it appeared as simple details and the rigour of reduction was applied. Anything extraneous was considered obsolete. Minimalism flourished in the 1980s, was adopted worldwide by designers and continues to be taught today. Long before modernism, ornamentation, colour and decoration were equally enduring principles of interior design and quite evident in both Eastern and Western civilisations, from the rich stuccoes and mosaic details of Roman villas to the highly decorated Middle Eastern mosques.

The design principles of embellishment, embroidering and washing spaces in rich colour have continued, evolving through the history of design. Some individuals don't want to follow the path of 'cookie cutter' reductionism, looking to a more colourful design religion where 'more is more' or 'less is a bore', creating a design language that does not necessarily have such strict principles. As an architect that straddles architecture and interior design I believe in creating spaces that are tailored to 'individualism', and if that means overlaying and adding a richness to a white space then I'm walking that untrodden path of uniqueness.



KIRSTEN STANISICH AND JONATHAN RICHARDS

In your opinion, how is the domestic interior of today different from those designed prior to the digital era?

The digital era has had an incredible effect on our domestic living space – from the intangibility of how we immerse ourselves into the digital space, which in turn subdues our experience of the physical, to the way we experience light, colour, texture, sounds and communicate with others.

The mobility of digital devices has brought about the biggest changes to how we use our dwelling spaces, which is with increasing flexibility. The concept of a single-purpose space has changed, and we are no longer connected to fixed pieces of communication or entertainment. Now that those connections are broken, a space that may at one time have had a single purpose, like a dining or living room, could well be an extension of a corporate office. This in turn has affected how we might respond to designing and occupying these spaces.

Evidence is also suggesting that the over-exposure to our digital devices may be influencing our natural circadian rhythms.

Our studio has been thinking about the simplification of space and the exploration of handmade details and the depth and texture of natural materials. We hope that our work responds to some of our basic sensory needs and brings an instinctual clarity to how we respond to the spaces we inhabit.

Jonathan Richards and Kirsten Stanish

