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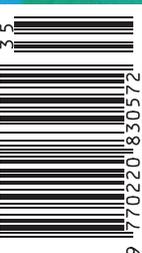


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Building a sustainable future in the architecture industry

VAULT looks at a few leading Australian architecture firms that are striving for sustainability.

WRITTEN *by* EMMA-KATE WILSON



The building industry is a considerable contributor to the climate crisis we are currently facing – luckily, sustainable architects are in the plenty.

The true success of sustainable architecture recognises three categories. The first ensures that the design is built under the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD), which requires minimum impact on the earth and the maintenance of a carbon-neutral process that continues after the project is finished. The second is based on aesthetics and practicality, ensuring that the home or office block or hospitality venue is sustainable in the long run and that the building will be one to protect rather than replace. The third factor engages the landscape and cultural heritage of the traditional custodians, the land's First Nations people. It is here that architects face the biggest challenge to sustainable design – maintaining the land as it was and actively protesting against the largest colonial project in Australia: architecture and the building industry.

Founded by Antony Martin in Melbourne, MRTN are committed to sustainable design in multiple ways. This includes using materials to minimise their impact on the earth, carbon neutral practices and following ESD principles. Their 2017 project Shadow Cottage Daylesford maintains an 8-star Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS) rating through energy-efficient appliances, solar panels and a heat pump hot water system. And even though the location of the house can see outside temperatures drop to one degree, post-occupancy testing reveals the home stays between 18 and 26 degrees for 93% of the year.

Moreover, MRTN's philosophy extends beyond simply designing new sustainable houses, aiming also to improve and renovate existing heritage homes. For example, the Shadow Cottage used two Victorian workers cottages – preserving a slice of Australian architecture history and ensuring it is liveable and sustainable for future generations while not adding to the ever-increasing colonial project.

Breathe Architecture hardly needs an introduction for those in the architecture or sustainability fields, known for their impressive efforts in working to a high sustainability code as well as their endeavours to transform the entire industry. After the horrific bushfires over the summer of 2019/20, Jeremy McLeod, the Founder and Design Director of Breathe Architecture, launched the Australian branch of the global network Architects Declare, gathering over 800 architects' commitment to acknowledging climate and biodiversity emergency, and taking responsibility for their carbon emissions.

Beyond their activism and sustainable architecture, Breathe are also dedicated to recognising First Nation communities in Australia through their Reconciliation Action Plan – a commitment to a just and equitable Australia.

In a similar sentiment, the climate is ingrained within Edition Office's practice, but it's their passionate approach to preserving First Nation cultures through collaboration with artists such as Daniel Boyd and Yhonnie Scarce that makes them stand out in a sea of sustainable architectural

Here, architects face the biggest challenge to sustainable design – maintaining the land as it was and actively protesting against the largest colonial project in Australia: architecture and the building industry.



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firms. Each project is an active effort to decolonise the Australian architectural project. Resilient architecture is at the forefront of the practice – their projects look like they could withstand any form of harsh Australian weather. But within this, their aesthetics appeal to a design sensibility. They are not projects to be knocked down and rebuilt; rather, they are designed to become part of the visual language of Australian architecture.

Deeply considerate of place, Edition Office treat landscape as a contributor, resulting in calm and tranquil homes that are at times as reflective as art galleries or churches. The materiality of the builds evokes these sensibilities, as well as providing durable homes to last a lifetime.

Likewise focused on minimising floor plans and decreasing impact on the environment, architect Ben Shields is committed to building no more than one hundred projects with his company DREAMER. Each design, known as case studies at the firm, faces strict and careful processing to ensure that it fulfils a “human-centred design methodology.” With this scope in mind, the firm promises to design buildings only after extensive research of the location; collaboration with like-minded clients and designers to ensure the vision continues post-completion; and a purposeful critical report on completed case studies to see what worked and what could be improved.

Their first case study is a vision in aesthetics. The Two Sheds project evokes a Victorian farmhouse vernacular out of eco-blended concrete with a mix of recycled materials, timber from certified suppliers, and implementation of solar, rainwater harvesting and fossil-fuel-free energy. Considering the environment, the home was built to withstand BAL (bushfire attack level) 29, while the surrounding landscape is part of a 30-year project to return to a native bushland garden.

Melbourne and Hobart-based firm Archier also design their projects to a strict code of sustainability, promising smaller and more efficient homes in return. Recognised by several awards and commendations, projects such as The Davison Collaborative challenge the contemporary architectural tradition of grand homes for small families. Instead, a multi-residential project allows for three families (including Archier director Chris Gilbert) to live in inner-city Melbourne on the one block.

In collaboration with HIP V. HYPE, The Davison Collaborative reveals an affordable carbon-neutral home that is not affected by inner-city constraints or lack of aesthetics. And this is something Archier are committed to across all of their projects – from a minimal intervention, tiny portable home in the Tasmanian bush to treehouses that make the landscape the star in Melbourne’s suburbs.

Each of these architecture firms reveals a pledge to sustainability that reaches beyond hitting climate targets. Rather, they are designing a future that responds to preservation and aesthetics – ensuring we have an industry for generations to come. **V**

MRTN — Melbourne
mrtn.com.au

Breathe — Melbourne
breathe.com.au

Archier — Melbourne & Hobart
archier.com.au

Edition Office — Melbourne
edition-office.com

Dreamer Lab — Melbourne
dreamerlab.com.au



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