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From Federation Square to the cellar

DIVINE INSPIRATION

door for a biodynamic winery,



architect Lucy Clemenger

celebrates the beauty of form.

LUCY CLEMENGER
OF LUCY CLEMENGER
ARCHITECTS AT DELATITE
WINES CELLAR DOOR IN
MANSFIELD, VICTORIA.

Portrait **TIM O'CONNOR** Edited by **KAREN McCARTNEY**

PHOTOGRAPHY DEREK SWALWELL (ALL PROJECTS)



This page, clockwise from top left The kitchen and living room (both pictures) at Gascoigne House revitalise a heritage property. The raw and robust interiors of Delatite Wines. The rear extension at Gascoigne House has strong elemental forms. At Jacoby, the structure seems to float above the glazing. The Delatite biodynamic winery and cellar door is sited for landscape views.

AN ARCHITECT'S CAREER ARC at a certain stage becomes the sum of a number of accrued life decisions: a fortuitous mentor, a first job, the capacity for taking up opportunities, risks and relationships – each experience layering in to shape their philosophy and hence how their buildings look and perform.

Take Lucy Clemenger. Between the first and second parts of her architecture degree at University of Melbourne she moved to London, working at Trevor Lahiff Architects for Carolyn Trevor. “She did very beautiful houses. I worked on display shelving for the Duke of Westminster son’s helmet collection. She was a wonderful mentor.” Back in Australia, an early opportunity to work on Melbourne’s Federation Square brought her in contact with Dutch practice Karres en Brands who designed the landscape for the project. “I was a smoker at that time and bonded with Bart Brands over many a cigarette break,” she confesses.

An invitation to come and work with this innovative practice saw her pack her bags at 25, take Dutch classes at night and stay in the Netherlands for a formative four and a half years. She worked with other architecture practices, including Mecanoo and Claus en Kaan, before the pursuit of love took her to Athens.

“The cultures couldn’t have been more different. The Dutch are very rigorous and straightforward and there’s no mucking around, while in Greece the work could be fluid in its approach – one scheme for approvals – one to be built,” she recalls.

Returning to Australia in 2005 she reconnected with the ‘Federation Square gang’ and a subsequent stint at NH Architecture as a design director working at home and Asia, ensured her experience was big in scale, broad in its geography and rich in culture. The pause came with having her children, designing her own house and the setting up of her own practice. “I’d put the name Lucy Clemenger Architects up on LinkedIn and a friend, who liked what I had designed for our family house, became a client and we were off,” she says.

A scale shift to the domestic didn’t compromise her approach. “A single house has all the complexities of a more sizeable project. If you’ve been well-trained and have had the experience of working at different scales, you approach constraints and opportunities in a different way,” she says.

Her projects certainly illustrate this. Jacoby, a Federation house two streets back from the beach in Melbourne’s St Kilda West, has the benefit of a great parkside location but had the downside of previous clumsy interventions. “When it comes to renovations much of what we do is deciding what to let go of and what to embrace, and how to give the clients a wonderful relationship with the ground level while maximising the sense of space and also delivering something dynamic and sculptural,” she says. The result is a glazed ground floor with recessed, concealed window frames giving the structure the appearance that it floats.

Gascoigne House, a heritage project on the Gascoigne Estate in Malvern East, required a ‘recharge’ by eliminating a number of rear additions while creating a sense of flow and functionality. “The vestibule space has a relationship to a courtyard garden and that really does separate the old part of the house from the new; we like to have this very clear demarcation,” says Lucy.

Working with landscape designer Fiona Brockhoff on this and other projects, the practice takes a holistic view of built form, landscape and interior design. “We tend to shy away from any project we can’t deliver in its entirety. If we oversee every aspect the client gets the best, most considered outcome,” she says.

A project that has won 21 awards, the prestigious Harry Seidler Award for Commercial Architecture in the 2023 AIA National Architecture Awards for one, is the Delatite biodynamic winery cellar door in Mansfield, Victoria. “This is dear to our practice because of the alignment with our clients’ values in the approach to the land and their commitment to sustainability,” says Lucy. “They championed everything we were trying to achieve.”

Tapping into a reduced palette that included timbercrete (a mix of cement and recycled timber chips), timber linings and raw steel, the buildings – tasting bar, retail space, commercial kitchen, dining room and landscaped terraces – have a robust, generous vibe that goes hand-in-hand with the winery’s philosophy.

With a slew of near-complete residential projects, and more regional ones on the horizon, and a 30-year-old cruiser from the Caribbean to fit out, there is no shortage of diversity in the practice, and no end of ingenuity to meet these challenges.

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