

Concrete Ideas

Neometro's 9 Smith Street is a recent example of their approach to the material. Struck right from its mould or formwork, off-form concrete has a bold, raw and tactile finish that expresses a memory and only improves with time.

Brunswick is a neighbourhood with so much character. It's diverse, urban, connected and communal—and its rich history is evident in much of the architecture. We wanted to create a building that would resonate with Brunswick, serve as a benchmark for contemporary architecture in the area, and age just as well as the buildings around it.

One Wilson Ave is a distillation of Neometro's longstanding commitment to a singular material. In the years since Jeff Provan founded Neometro in the mid-80s, concrete has become a signature design element for the company, used across a range of projects—all of which have developed their own unique character since completion. Having worked with Milieu across a portfolio of projects, this is my first collaboration with Neometro, and the process of working with Jeff has been a fruitful and memorable experience. He gets architecture. He understands the impact that time has on a building. And when it comes to concrete, he's a master.

The façade is a combination of smooth, finished concrete and exposed aggregate. Strong and durable, the concrete nods to the brutalist post-war buildings found throughout Brunswick. But at various points we've peeled back the top layer of concrete to reveal elements of quartz and bluestone—a reference to the local Victorian terraces with bluestone foundations. This reductive palette makes the subtler details all the more important. A lot of love has gone into those moments of delicacy, such as the slender gaps between balconies and precast, the various pockets of greenery included for contrast, and the timber-framed windows at street level. The cloth awnings are a Neometro signature too, but here they've been made monochromatic to match the reductive palette, which speaks to the collaboration with Milieu. Collectively these elements form a palpable response to place that's central to Milieu's design philosophy.

My fifth project with Milieu, this building marks the next step in an ongoing process of designing for modern living. The minor details do more than just fit within the local context of Brunswick—they resonate with people, they make sense and they feel authentic. And underpinning all of this is the concrete. It's practical and enduring, stark and subdued, and striking in and of itself. It doesn't just age, it matures. It subtly shifts colour and tone over time. It responds to its environment. And it stands proud throughout its lifespan.

