

Sustainability Spotlight— Architects and Developers

Words by Millie Thwaites



Whispering Smith

Perth-based architecture firm Whispering Smith's portfolio, which spans residential and commercial architecture, champions sustainability and local craft. The firm has long advocated for better infill and worked with the state government to facilitate better development. Frustrated by Perth's lack of high quality and architecturally designed medium density developments, Whispering Smith has launched its own development arm, New Resident. In a mission to retain Perth's suburban fabric and tree canopies, New Resident aims to deliver sensitive, leafy and character-filled micro-communities that are sustainable and ethical.

South Fremantle, Western Australia, Australia
Photography by Ben Hosking



Breathe

As Australia's most awarded sustainable design firm, Breathe has cemented itself as a leader in the fight for climate justice and in building a better, more environmentally friendly future. All Breathe buildings are designed to be holistically sustainable with a focus on 100 per cent electrification, as well as removing natural gas, reducing carbon through construction, and eliminating carbon in the operation of the finished building. And this commitment goes further; Breathe helped lead the campaign to have Australian architects commit to carbon neutrality by 2030; the office is powered by 100 per cent renewable energy and operates in a building with a photovoltaic array and energy storage; and there's a range of free guides on the website covering sustainable building design. In 2016, Breathe Co-Founders Jeremy McLeod and Tamara Veltre established Nightingale Housing – a not-for-profit organisation creating socially, financially and environmentally sustainable housing steered by excellent design.

Brunswick, Victoria, Australia
Photography by Tom Ross



Neometro

Founded in 1985, Neometro isn't the new kid on the block but an established leader in the realm of design focused, socially led and environmentally friendly development. Neometro believes sustainability should be a key consideration at every stage of a project's lifecycle – from design and construction to maintenance. On top of implementing the latest energy efficient technologies and striving for the highest environmental ratings, Neometro sees the value in beautiful, enduring, healthy and flexible design. Nine Wilson Ave is the company's fourth addition to Jewell Station; scheduled for completion in 2023, it promotes wellbeing, prioritises sustainability and is engineered to last. Some of its key sustainability considerations include a 7.5 star NatHERS rating, solar panels, 100 per cent green energy, a productive rooftop garden and recycled water for landscape irrigation. As is true for Neometro's wider portfolio of work, Nine Wilson Ave promises to improve wellbeing and foster a sustainable urban community through purpose and place.

Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia
Visualisation by M.R.P Studios



Studio Nord

Led by Thom Gill and Helle Westergaard, New Zealand-based practice Studio Nord integrates sustainable design principles into its projects through efficient planning and optimal low energy solutions. Cohaus, a European-inspired medium density residential development in Auckland, is an exemplar of the studio's work and was awarded the SEANZ Best Environmental Impact award in 2021. Cohaus's dual-aspect homes need minimal winter heating and no cooling thanks to passive design principles and clever site master planning, coupled with enhanced insulation. Rooftop photovoltaic panels feed power to a central system where all services (power, water, internet) are optimally distributed to residents. What's more, with limited carparking, most residents utilise the large cycle store and six hybrid and electric shared cars, revelling in the resident-led connectedness of this environmentally conscious community.

Auckland, New Zealand
Photography by Adam Luxton

Alma

by Jack McKinney Architects

Britomart, New Zealand

Words by Camille Khouri • Photography by David Straight



Milieu

Melbourne property developer Milieu aims to facilitate healthy and sustainable lifestyles through strong architectural outcomes, simultaneously cultivating the everyday culture of design. Breese Street in Brunswick demonstrates the company's deeply ingrained philosophies surrounding sustainable, medium-scale development. Designed by DKO and Breathe, the interiors feature reclaimed timber floorboards and Australian-made rumpled brass organic fixtures, and residents enjoy a communal rooftop with sustainable garden plots. There's even a rooftop beehive managed by ethical inner-city beekeepers, Honey Fingers. With a 7.9 star NatHERS rating, this building is fossil fuel free, and all energy is 100 per cent sustainably sourced via wholesale GreenPower purchasing and rooftop solar panels. Clever orientation, external shading and efficiency of thermal mass promise to reduce residents' energy consumption and increase general wellbeing.

Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia
Photography by Tom Ross



Koichi Takada Architects

Koichi Takada Architects takes a diverse and rigorous approach to sustainability. Through empathy, curiosity and education, the practice aims to turn sustainability from an abstract concept into a positive and restorative experience. By harnessing the latest technologies, including artificial intelligence, Koichi Takada Architects designs "smarter" buildings and cities, striving to not only save energy but generate and store energy. The practice's recently approved project, Urban Forest in Brisbane, incorporates solar panels, rainwater and grey water harvest, and is targeting a 6-star Green Star rating. The apartments enjoy three-metre-high ceilings and benefit from natural light and ample cross flow ventilation. Most notably, the building is draped in greenery; this natural insulation helps to keep the building cool and mitigates the heat island effect of built-up urban locations. It also directly connects residents to nature, as does the on-site Urban Farm – the first of its kind. This project promotes a sustainable future whereby nature and human wellbeing sit firmly at the forefront, even within densely populated, inner-city locations.

Surry Hills, New South Wales, Australia
Visualisation by Binyan Studios



Hip V. Hype

Melbourne property developer HIP V. HYPE believes in having a positive impact on our cities and regions through ethical, socially conscious and environmentally focused design and development. The team's housing development, Ruskin Elwood, presents best practice in sustainable design and construction across four townhouses. With architecture by Fieldwork, the project is 100 per cent electric and run from 100 per cent renewable energy. Targeting a 7+ star NatHERS rating, with onsite solar panels, electric heat pumps for hot water and Tesla Powerwall batteries, Ruskin Elwood marries human-centred design with an informed environmental approach.

Brunswick, Victoria, Australia
Photography by Tess Kelly



Despite spatial difficulties presented by a heritage listed building, Jack McKinney Architects has created a vibrant and enticing place to be with Spanish restaurant Alma in Auckland's bustling Britomart precinct.

Due to the historical importance of the 1930s building, its original fabric could not be altered. The interior is interspaced with exposed concrete columns and has two narrow openings onto the surrounding streets, further dividing the space. The architects approached this challenge with clever planning – by placing the kitchen along the length of one wall, with a facing bar that makes up around half of the restaurant seating, a dynamic sense of drama is created for diners, furthered by the open-fire cooking style of the restaurant.

Highly decorative tiled surfaces and a complex palette of complementary colours are used to embrace and heighten the historical elements of the building, which includes the original wood floors as well as the exposed concrete columns. Custom seating elements see built-in banquettes set on the glazed verandah, featuring walnut dowels and a steel frame to reference park benches.

With its authentic historical touches and Spanish colours – perhaps fortified with a glass or two of Sangria – the space has a transportive ability for patrons, who are embraced by the soft lighting and vibrant atmosphere of this little Auckland restaurant.

