SURFACE Edition
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Slow conversations for our built environment with —
Patricia Urquiola on the future of materials. **North Interiors** masters the art of detail in **Kin House**. The remarkable colour investigations of **Josef Albers**. Architecture meets landscape in **Ora House** by **Archier**. **Studio Gram's** blueprint for success, and more.

Left-right, Studio Gram directors Graham Charbonneau and Dave Bickmore

An Appetite For Evolution

What began 12 years ago in Adelaide has grown into a national studio with global clientele. Studio Gram may not ‘do’ a signature house style, but their deliberate approach to materiality has remained constant, and become their calling card worldwide.

"It's not about a particular material but how we use and handle it, and the qualities we seek in materiality."

Omada restaurant in Adelaide

A contemporary temple to Greek food

Artedomus Travertine Avaria is stacked like Grecian masonry, with Chef Andy (Ferrara) commanding the altar at the room's end

Words by Charlotte Huston
Interview by Alice Blackwood
Photography by Timothy Kaye (Omada restaurant), Jonathan VDK (portrait), and AFTER MOOD

Founded in Adelaide, Studio Gram has steadily and surely extended its national portfolio, including the opening of a small Sydney studio alongside a catalogue of hospitality and residential work across Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Western Australia. The studio's range of typologies is also widening, with projects such as a Sydney physiotherapy practice reflecting the studio's interest in looking beyond the familiar.

The client was clear that the space shouldn't resemble a typical clinic. As director Graham Charbonneau recalls from the brief, "If you imagine what a physio looks like, that's not us." Instead, the client wanted an interior closer in character to a fashion retail environment while still accommodating the necessary functions.

"We're seeing that in a lot of the work that good practices are doing," observes Graham. "People are moving outside the idea of what a workplace can be, and it's starting to permeate other industries. That's where we see the value we can add to those projects and, in a more selfish way, where we become interested in them. We don't want to do cookie-cutter design."

This expanding definition of hospitality also encompasses wellness, which director Dave Bickmore describes as "the new hospitality". "In terms of community and where people go to hang out, people are drinking less, so they're finding other ways of connecting," he says.

This thinking is embedded within Studio Gram's own workplace through Groundwork, an internal initiative that creates regular opportunities for staff wellbeing. Once a month, the team steps away from project work for half a day to take part in activities such as walks in the Adelaide Hills, yoga, breathwork or clay workshops. "We're trying to create space for people to do something different and, through that, encourage the industry to be a little better too," adds Graham.

The Parthenon's rigid grid has been redrawn into a flexible dining plan

Space for snacks and drinks by the window at Omada

Hector's Outdoor dining chair for AFTER MOOD

Pipe Dream vessel for AFTER MOOD

Studio Gram's appetite for evolution has translated successfully to an international stage, with projects under way in New York, Miami, Hong Kong and Indonesia. The practice is not randomly "going international". Rather, trusted relationships and a resonance with its collaborators are carrying Studio Gram past Australian shores.

For Studio Gram, materials create a fabric that tells a story beyond the practice's involvement, allowing spaces to evolve through use and reveal changes over time. "The one thing that has tied our work together is our use of material, and that's probably never going to change," says Graham. "It's not about a particular material but how we use and handle it, and the qualities we seek in materiality."

The practice's latest Adelaide hospitality project is an exemplar of this method. Omada is a contemporary Greek restaurant within a heritage building on Currie Street in Adelaide. Rather than reproducing the familiar imagery of a "kitsch" Greek taverna, Studio Gram oriented the design narrative around monumentality and mass. The intention was to create a "temple to Greek food" that could elicit the nostalgia of yiayia's cooking without compromising sophistication.

Dave describes Omada as exhibiting a monastic quality. "There's something about Omada, more than any other restaurant, that feels ceremonial." The layout draws on the plan of the Parthenon and its repetition and symmetry. "At one stage, we overlaid it onto the plan to understand what that could mean for the space," Graham explains. Natural stones, including Artedomus Travertine Avorio, deepen this narrative. The stacked blocks offer a contemporary take on ancient Greek stone structures that are "very different in form, but similar in the way the elements are assembled."

Studio Gram has also been quietly developing AFTER MOOD, a furniture and lighting company established with Adelaide designers Daniel To and Emma Aiston of Daniel Emma. "We've always designed custom pieces for projects," says Dave. "But they would then sit on the shelf, and we wouldn't do anything with them. Now we're putting them into commercial production."

A project for Hector's Deli provided the catalyst. The hospitality brand needed to replace the outdoor furniture across its existing venues and source pieces for new locations. Studio Gram initially explored products already on the market, but the requirement coincided with its ongoing conversations with Daniel and Emma.

"We're keen to keep exploring that space and see what comes from it," says Graham. "We've always designed these pieces for our projects, and people have always asked whether they could buy the chair or the light."

It adds another string to Studio Gram's creative bow and suggests that, 12 years into practice, its most established ideas are continuing to generate new opportunities.