Flaminia
Studio Gram

Location Sydney, Australia
Words Sarah Webb **Photography** Timothy Kaye

Vying for attention alongside Sydney's glistening harbour is no easy feat. At Flaminia in Circular Quay, however, Studio Gram has created a dining space where the experience is as engaging as the views.

Located in the Pullman Quay Grand Sydney Harbour hotel, the 262-square-metre restaurant is the latest venue from Giovanni Pilu and Marilyn Annecchini, the couple behind the award-winning Pilu at Freshwater on Sydney's Northern Beaches. Their history provided the starting point for the design, with Flaminia taking its name from the ship that had brought Annecchini's grandparents from Italy to Sydney in 1959 (a black-and-white photo is displayed at the entrance).

"The migration story became the foundation of our design response, not as something to illustrate literally, but as a narrative to guide the experience of the space," says Tess Sporn, associate interior designer at Studio Gram. "It speaks to a journey between two coastlines, carrying traditions, craftsmanship and a deep sense of hospitality into a new setting."

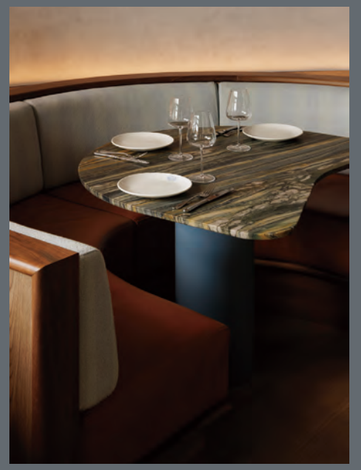
References to the Mediterranean can be seen throughout. Veined quartzite recalls Sardinia's eroded limestone cliffs (a nod to Pilu's Sardinian heritage) and mineral greens, ocean blues and sun-warmed neutrals effortlessly conjure images of the Italian coast. "The challenge was making it feel layered without becoming overwhelming," Sporn explains. "We aligned finishes tonally and used timber, leather, rope and woven elements to bring warmth and tactility, resulting in a palette that feels rich but calm."

The same restraint has been applied to the nautical references at Flaminia. Curved banquettes, dark timber and columns wrapped in thick rope, plus a sail-inspired fabric installation above the bar, allude to Flaminia's maritime backstory without being overly thematic. Instead, each one of these elements "contributes to an atmosphere that feels relaxed, timeless and connected to its setting," Sporn notes.











The curved banquettes are practical, too, helping Studio Gram negotiate a long, fragmented footprint within what was originally a rigid commercial shell. They soften its geometry and help define spaces that shift in scale and mood as diners ebb and flow through the restaurant like the changing tides.

Though the harbour views remain an important part of the dining experience, Studio Gram was deliberate in the way it handled the setting. “The design wasn’t simply about framing the view,” Sporn notes. “We used spatial planning, materiality and lighting to carefully control the views and mood throughout, creating moments of connection with the harbour while giving the restaurant a strong identity of its own.”

During lunch service, floor-to-ceiling glazing floods the main dining room with natural light; at night, lights twinkle on the harbour. Still, the experience remains mostly inward-looking. For example, at the centre of the plan, a monolithic crudo bar adds a different kind of theatre; here, chefs shuck oysters and prepare seafood within the diners’ view, reinforcing the origins of the menu, which is shaped around Italian port cities.

Elsewhere, private dining areas pull away from that energy, becoming quieter and more intimate. However, the same material palette has been carried throughout, allowing each zone to develop a distinct atmosphere while maintaining a sense of continuity.

Nearly seven decades after the journey that started it all, Flaminia is settling into itself. Its vivid character is most obvious when the seats are occupied and service is in full motion. As Sporn concludes, “It’s only when the restaurant is operating – when it takes on a life of its own and becomes the backdrop to the experience the Pilu family has created – that the design feels complete.”

The Commercial Project



N°22

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