

Studio Gram

Words Sarah Webb **Photography** Timothy Kaye, David Sievers and Jonathan VDK

It was the alphabet that first brought Studio Gram co-founders and directors Dave Bickmore and Graham Charbonneau together. Charbonneau arrived midway through the first year of an architecture degree at the University of South Australia and was told to sit with someone whose surname fell close to his own – which happened to be Bickmore.

The pair studied beside one another, tackled group assignments and developed the kind of creative shorthand that would eventually underpin their shared practice, Studio Gram. “There were never any qualms about saying, ‘Maybe you should try something else.’ And we never took it personally,” Charbonneau recalls. “It certainly wasn’t a competition between us; we just pushed each other.”

More than 12 years after founding their Adelaide-based studio, that candid, collaborative dynamic remains central to the practice. Bickmore and Charbonneau are different enough to challenge one another yet closely aligned in their work ethic and values. Today, Studio Gram is an 11-person architecture and interiors practice working on projects across Australia and internationally, with its founders still very much involved.

Their early ambition was simple: to do good work and keep getting better. Both had played competitive team sports – Bickmore football, Charbonneau ice hockey – and Charbonneau believes that experience instilled an instinct to keep improving.

“From the outset, we never wanted to just have a run-of-the-mill practice,” he says. Rather than strive for a particular aesthetic, they wanted to produce the best work they could as a collective. It also partly explains the thinking behind the chosen name: “There’s a reason it’s not Bickmore Charbonneau Architects or anything like that. It’s a studio and it’s a team-wide initiative.”



The transformation of Rose Park House, a Queen Anne-style villa in Adelaide, is considered one of the studio’s landmark residential projects.







Adelaide Italian restaurant Oggi was one of the studio's earliest hospitality projects, and went on to garner global acclaim. "I still recall the opening lunch – people were just blown away," Bickmore recalls.

The practice first took shape through hospitality projects. While still at university, the duo worked together on holiday park cabins before graduating and going their separate ways to work for larger commercial practices. Their paths crossed again when Charbonneau secured opportunities with Sydney's Hotel Harry and Motel Mexicola in Bali, bringing Bickmore in and drawing the pair back together to establish their studio – just as changes to South Australia's small venue licensing were transforming Adelaide's hospitality scene.

Oggi was completed when Studio Gram was just over a year old, and became an early turning point. It was the first project Bickmore and Charbonneau worked on closely together from start to finish, with the Italian restaurant located across the road from their then-studio. They were on site every day.

"It wasn't just a pivotal moment for our practice," Bickmore says, "it was a pretty big moment for the South Australian dining scene in terms of hospitality and design-led restaurants. I still recall the opening lunch – people were just blown away." Oggi went on to receive major international recognition, including at the 2016 World Interiors News Awards in London for Best Restaurant Design, and helped cement a client relationship that continues to this day.

Since then, Studio Gram's portfolio has continued to broaden across houses, hotels, workplaces and other commercial projects, including Rose Park House, Monarto Safari Park Visitor Centre and, more recently, Flaminia in Sydney. Its work now takes the team around Australia and further afield to Indonesia, Hong Kong and the United States. For a studio that once named New York as an almost deliberately unrealistic five-year goal, completing its first project there this year – ThisBowl in Tribeca – has been particularly surreal. "Now we're like, 'Shit, the first one we've done in New York is about to open,'" Charbonneau says. "It's kind of crazy."

Despite this, the studio's growth hasn't forced a single, recognisable style. Instead, projects begin with a narrative: the client, the place, the people who will inhabit it and the experience the project needs to foster. For Bickmore, this is "what underpins the design direction in all our decision-making".

What does recur is an appreciation for natural materials and considered detail, with timber, stone and





For its Adelaide headquarters, Studio Gram embraced the building's industrial heritage while introducing its trademark refinement.



metals chosen for their ability to gather marks, patina and develop character. "We like spaces that change over time," Charbonneau explains. "We don't like static stuff. Embedding time through materiality is important to our work."

There's also a real willingness to take risks, whether it's pushing a material beyond an expected application or pursuing a detail others might think too difficult. Beneath the variation in style is a particular interest in how things go together. "We like to really design from a functional perspective before we start to make things look beautiful," Bickmore adds.

That attention to detail goes beyond the design work itself. One important lesson the duo learned early on is to recognise what Studio Gram does best, and to bring in specialists for the rest. Branding, photography and digital work have long been entrusted to experts. In the early days, that meant spending about $2.50 per business card on thick cotton stock while on a tight budget. "I think it showed people that we were serious," Bickmore laughs. Charbonneau offers another interpretation: "Or stupid."

Their humour is telling and is part of what makes them and their team so easy to warm to. For all the studio's recognition and accolades – including being named Designer of the Year at the 2025 Interior Design Excellence Awards (IDEA) – its directors remain open about how much they've learned on the run. The business has become more structured with time, but its underlying values have sharpened rather than changed.

Perhaps most meaningful is the way they challenge the idea that exceptional creative work has to come at the expense of a balanced life. Both directors have gone part-time at certain points to spend more time with their families while ensuring that everyone who works at Studio Gram has the opportunity to have a life outside the studio, too. "I think the happier people are, the better work they produce," Charbonneau says. Bickmore believes the proof is already there: "In some ways, we're producing better work than we ever have because the team is growing and the people who we're working with are so skilled."

Their Brompton office, a former mechanic workshop they purchased and transformed, makes many of Studio Gram's values tangible. It's a workplace, gathering space and real expression of the practice on its own terms. For Charbonneau, it may be the project that most clearly represents Studio Gram – not because it establishes a style but because it reflects the people and culture behind the creativity.

Looking back, both directors seem surprised by how far they've come. What began with two students sitting beside one another has become a practice with growing international reach and a distinct position in Australian design. But Bickmore resists any sense that the story is nearing its conclusion. "I still feel like we're emerging," he says. And when reflecting on what lies ahead, he puts it more simply: "I think we're just hitting our straps."

The Commercial Project



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POUTx Studio Author **Uchi DC** Islyn Studio **Flaminia** Studio Gram **SIR. at The Strand** Studio Kennon
Moby's Whale Beach Pattern Studio **Stars** Studio Valle de Valle **Piccolo House Gore Street** Woods Bagot
Cinderella YSG **Chief Post Office** Cheshire Architects **Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library** Snøhetta