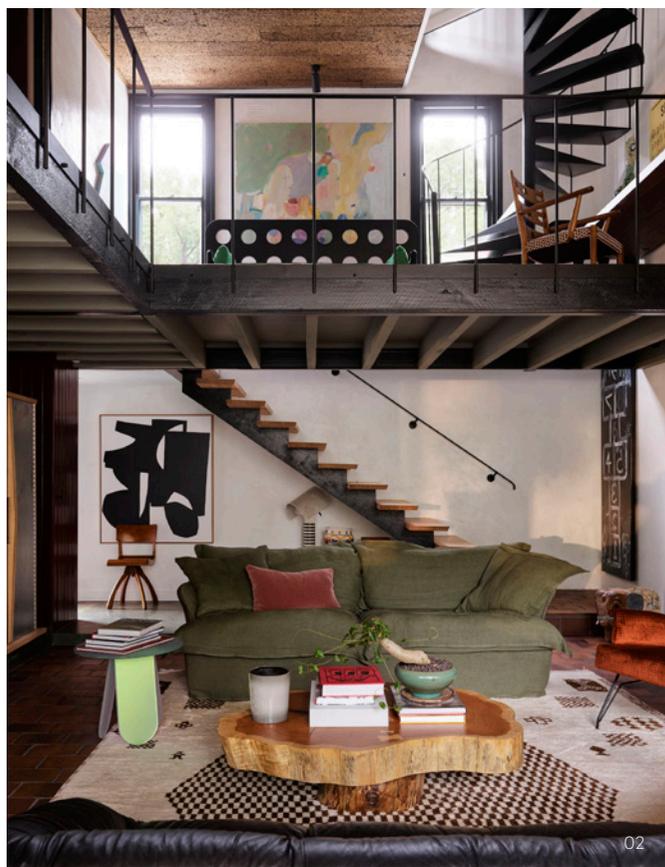


FLACK TO THE FUTURE

A decade of vision and craft converge in Flack Studio's latest project: the neighbourhood hotel Melbourne's been waiting for. By Hannah Ralph



O rwell, Kafka, Flack. It's rare that a name becomes shorthand for an entire aesthetic – but then not everyone has the signature vision of David Flack. To be 'Flackified' is to feel the transformative touch of David's studio: the masterful knack for mismatching, for layering unexpected colour, luxurious materiality and art. It's what's seen Flack Studio – currently celebrating a milestone 10 years – become a five-time *Architectural Digest* 'AD100' laureate, and turn David, the son of a builder from Bendigo, into the most in-demand designer in Australia.

The very architecture of his acclaim unfolds in a series of winning one-two punches. In 2021, his work on global superstar Troye Sivan's Melbourne home went viral (the *AD* house tour has more than 10 million views), quickly followed by the reveal of his first hotel, the enduringly cool Ace Sydney. Now, another double whammy: the release of a debut coffee table book, *Flack Studio: Interiors*, and the team's second hotel, its first in Melbourne, the hotly anticipated Hannah St. Hotel.

"We wanted Hannah St. Hotel to feel like Melbourne," David tells us one sunny Monday morning from his Fitzroy studio. "And that's an interesting task, since the



city doesn't try hard to be any one thing." Whatever Melbourne is, or isn't, this hotel will certainly come to shape many a visitor's first impression of it. "That's what's so exciting about hotels," David adds. "They're this interesting sort of 'third space'. I love that sense of suspension, of observing how different people interact with these spaces once they're in the fabric of it."

David's mastery of this suspended reality – the uncanny way he eases you into a living work of art – is inseparable from his talent. After all, to be Flackified is to ascend several sartorial echelons in the time it takes you to open a door. Guests of Hannah St. Hotel will be transported temporally, too: to 20th-century Italy, when Milanese architect Gio Ponti and the Memphis Milano movement were at the heights of their respective powers, and to New York in the '20s, as Art Deco began turning skylines geometric.

Milanese apartment buildings, in particular, are a presiding influence on David (one of his favourite books is *Entryways of Milan*), while the triangular shape of the hotel, reminiscent of the Flatiron Building, helped

usher in the New York of it all. On the guest room shower doors, a scalloped brass handle could be a detail from the Chrysler Building, or a nod to Ponti. As for where Melbourne fits into all this, just look to the rose pink carpets in the guest rooms and the flourishes of brassy, high '80s glamour – both are a wink to David's love of Melbourne's own brutalist glamazon, Hamer Hall.

Our designer's favourite space in this hotel, though, starts outside of it. "We've created this incredible tunnel that leads from Queens Bridge Street through into the lobby," he says. "It references a similar space in the headquarters of the Banco Popolare Di Verona by Italian architect, Carlo Scarpa – except ours is lined in black steel, totally stripped of detail. It's one of many moments where you're propelled into a moment of compression and pause, all before being catapulted into the next space."

Here, that means a beautiful butterscotch lounge that opens out in the tunnel's chic centre – another of David's favourite moments in the story of Hannah St. Hotel. Spanning 10 levels of Southbank's landmark



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Queensbridge Building, the hotel is in an ideal position – and local David should know. “It’s a nexus to everywhere,” he says. “You can go down to South Melbourne, Port Melbourne, the beach; there’s also the city right there and the arts precinct and Royal Botanic Gardens. Everything is around you.” It’ll also be a destination within its own right thanks to The Clubhouse – several floors of wellness, co-working, wining and dining, including a 25m lap pool, rooftop terrace, and even sound-proof podcast booths.

Six years in the making though it may be, Hannah St. Hotel didn’t quite make it into the studio’s new book, which is full not only of beautiful photographs of the team’s residential projects (and Ace), but of stories. “For each property, we asked the client to talk about the journey and what the house has done to their lives,” David says. “It’s quite beautiful, actually.” One day, we suspect, the same could be done with stories of Hannah St. Hotel, Flack’s next chapter, as told by the guests who moved within it. Flackification complete; the story belongs to them now. ♦



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HOW TO DESIGN A HOTEL FOR THE INSTAGRAM AGE

David and team reveal the three golden rules for crafting interiors that click.

Design for something long term, not just now A hotel should photograph well, but more vitally, it should feel like home and stay with you. Guests want an atmosphere that lives on. Layer materials, lighting and unexpected details so that each space rewards repeat encounters, rather than just a passing scroll in a social media feed.

Make the ordinary extraordinary Elevating the ‘in-between’ spaces – corridors, lifts and lobbies – creates surprise and coherence for guests. Think of them as a stage set: rhythm, proportion and small acts of drama can transform circulation routes into moments people want to share, online and off.

Be welcoming – and transporting Guests should recognise certain comforts, but design must offer something new to discover. Use local references, craft and art (emphasis on local) as anchors, then contrast them with bold gestures or contemporary interventions that give the property its own distinct identity.

01 Terrace House revival project in Melbourne © Anson Smart 02 Happy Haus project for Troye Sivan © Anson Smart 03 & 04 Hannah St. Hotel room © Shannon McGrath 05 Pettigrew-Boyd project in Melbourne © Anson Smart 06 David Flack at Hannah St. Hotel