

IL TRIDENTE

MASERATI AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

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Hotel Hotel

CAPITAL OF COOL

Canberra is no longer simply a boring haunt for the nation's politicians and public servants. With new cultural and creative developments like the Molonglo Group's Hotel Hotel and the New Acton precinct, it is a destination well worth revisiting.

Il Tridente gets behind the wheel of a Quattroporte Diesel for a short break to explore the new cool Canberra

Words and Images **Russell Williamson**



SHINE DOME

Despite being the nation's capital, Canberra has never had a reputation as a particularly exciting place to visit.

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It is perhaps, a consequence of the city itself having been somewhat artificially created. Unlike Australia's other major centres that have grown and evolved organically over the past 200-odd years, Canberra came into existence via Section 125 of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900 and an X marks the spot location.

Basically, because at the time of Federation, Melbourne and Sydney were never going to agree on which should be the country's capital, the powers that be decided to build a new city from scratch somewhere in between.

By 1911, the ACT was mapped out and the following year, US-based landscape architect

Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion won the international competition to design the city. Needless to say, there was criticism of the design so the final approved design for the city combined elements of Burley Griffin's plan, along with some from the Finnish and French teams that rounded out the top three, together with the Australian design team of Griffiths, Coulter and Caswell.

The end result was actually a very well-designed city for its purpose with its distinct zones and efficient road system. Griffin's vision also took advantage of the natural surroundings complete with a massive man-made lake to give it all a very pleasant outlook.

One hundred years on, the city remains a superb example of efficient, well ordered and aesthetically pleasing urban planning but up until recently, it still seemed to lack soul. The sort of soul that comes from people coming together to eat, drink, and enjoy culture and the arts.

Canberra may be home to many magnificent cultural institutions with plenty housed in internationally recognised buildings showcasing the cutting-edge architecture of their time like the Shine Dome (1959), High Court (1980), National Gallery of Australia (1982) and new Parliament House, but it has struggled to actually develop a culture of its own.

But in the past decade the winds of change, have blown through Canberra with areas like Braddon sprouting cool cafes, bars and microbreweries and bespoke fashion boutiques.

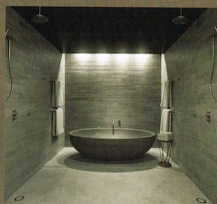
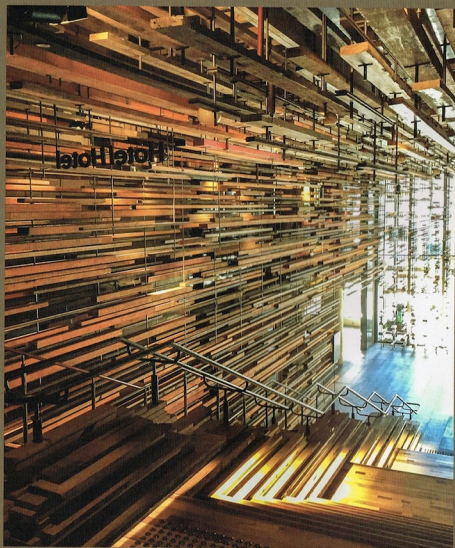
The crowning glory of Canberra's new cool attitude is perhaps, however, the nearby New Acton development by the Molonglo Group on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin.

Home to apartment and office developments, restaurants, bars, galleries, a Palace Cinema and the designer Hotel Hotel, the entire development is an outstanding example of what can happen when serious creativity and commercial development come together.

Not simply a collection of inspired architecture and planning, the whole area and especially Hotel Hotel, showcases the efforts of a massive collaboration that has created a fascinating designer space just made for socialising.

There is nothing clean and minimalist about this designer space however, and from the minute you walk through the airlock with its perforated metal cladding into the main reception/bar/lounge area, you are greeted by the warm buzz of life being lived.

According to Tracy Atherton, General Manager of Hotel Hotel, that was very much the idea with the hotel designed not just for guests, but also as a public space for





the community, bringing together people from all walks of life. And the success of this approach is evident with informal breakfast business meetings, mums and toddlers doing morning tea, students from the nearby ANU in for a drink after lectures, and cinema-goers enjoying a pre-film bite, all making the most of the hotel's public areas.

Far from being a space that appeals only from an aesthetic perspective, its eclectic mix of largely Australian reclaimed mid-20th century furniture, original artworks, artisan-made furnishings, collected objects and raw textures that result from the collaboration of more than 60 artists, designers, architects and other creatives, have made this a truly inspirational environment.

'The original idea behind Hotel Hotel was that it could be more than just guest rooms,' Atherton says.

'A series of public spaces – the lounge, the library, and the Monster kitchen and bar have been designed to encourage guests, visitors, students and locals to engage with each other. We are interested in diversity and pluralism and from the outset we designed public spaces and programming that supported

and fostered these interactions.

'The philosophy is based on a re-evaluation of the consumption culture that dominates much of contemporary design and manufacturers. It favours the work of designer-makers, artists and curators who are invested in the authenticity, integrity and care of the well made.'

That same aesthetic that Atherton describes as being inspired by the 'idea of an Australian shack and the dry bush landscape' flows through from the public spaces into the 68 guest rooms.

'It's a re-imagination of the textures and layers that make up this landscape, channelled with raw materiality,' she says.

'In the rooms, the beds are made from reclaimed oak, the walls are a mix of concrete, cork, earthen clay, and natural fibre wallpapers.'

The hotel's Monster kitchen and bar that dominates the main public area and adjacent Salon and Dining rooms likewise, showcases a creative collaboration and not just through its design. The food created by head chef Sean McConnell, the younger brother of celebrated Melbourne chef and restaurateur

Andrew McConnell, places a firm emphasis on shared plates with ingredients sourced from small local producers.

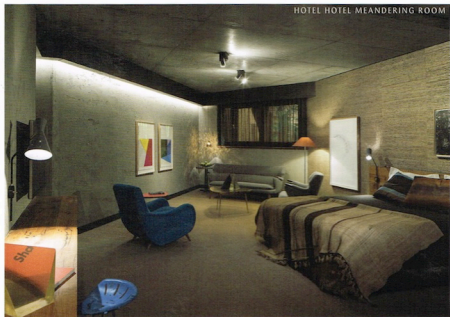
The level of creative collaboration highlighting artisan producers extends beyond the furnishings – that include original commissioned pieces by Australian designers including Lucy McRae, Charles Wilson and Adam Goodrum – and artworks too. The library, for example, is stocked with art, design and architecture books from small press Melbourne publishers Perimeter Books, and even the hotel's bikes for guests to use were designed and manufactured in Canberra by Goodspeed Bicycle Co.

Central to the creation of this unique hotel and the surrounding New Acton development was the vision of the Molonglo Group's directors, local Canberra-born brothers Johnathan and Nectar Efkarpidis.

More than developers, Molonglo Group has evolved into a property and creative production house that oversaw every aspect of the Hotel Hotel development and many of the artworks and curios come from a collection accumulated by Nectar while travelling over the years.



MONSTER KITCHEN AND BAR



HOTEL HOTEL MEANDERING ROOM

But despite Molonglo Group having a hand in every part of the development, the end result is very much the work of a vast team of collaborators that, in addition to the many individual artists and creatives, includes Fender Katsalidis Architects, March Studio, Oculus landscape architects, Japan's Suppose Design Office, Craig Tan Architects, aesthetic curator Don Cameron and vintage curator and collector Ken Neale.

'Collaborators were selected after we had a good understanding of, and appreciation for, their work and whose practices resonated with our own narrative of making a place that matters,' Atherton says.

'We took the time to get to know them and to understand them properly, and we expected them to do the same with us. Our approach to collaboration is non-linear, and is not a typical client-creative brief format. This approach takes longer and is messier. But we think it's worth it.'

Having spent a few days soaking up the atmosphere in this extraordinary hotel, we would definitely agree and the strong sense of culture, art, design and community doesn't end at the front door of the hotel either.

The entire New Acton development with its boutique retail shops, restaurants like A Baker, and Mocan & Green Grout, the Nishi Gallery and the arthouse cinema all maintain the feeling that Canberra is alive and well.

Beyond this small pocket of the city, there are other indications of a capital that now offers its own spin on edge and

excitement with cutting edge contemporary exhibitions at the NGA like the recent James Turrell retrospective. Or the new National Arboretum where you can not only explore one of the largest tree conservation projects in the world, but also enjoy lunch in an architectural masterpiece with stunning views across the city.

Being only a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Sydney, Canberra is easily accessible for a weekend away and when you have a new Quattroporte Diesel for the trip, it becomes an effortless and luxurious experience.

Like its petrol siblings, the stylish sedan features a spacious and extremely comfortable cabin with its exclusive appointments, superb leather-trimmed finishes and the latest technology to keep you entertained and fully connected for the drive.

With its smooth and refined 3.0-litre V6 Turbo Diesel powerplant delivering a massive 600Nm of torque via the eight-speed automatic transmission, it offers effortless ability to eat up the kilometres and deliver the necessary urge for quick overtaking.

As a Maserati, its sporting performance is assured with a 0-100kmh time of just 6.4 seconds but at the same time, the efficiency of the turbodiesel produces outstanding fuel consumption for a large luxury sedan, with our round trip of just over 600km using diesel at the rate of 6.1/100km.

Sustainable, stylish and exciting, it's the perfect car for a drive to Canberra to rediscover a city that appears to be at last, discovering itself and finding its soul. Ψ





NEW ACTON PRECINCT



HOTEL HOTEL LIBRARY