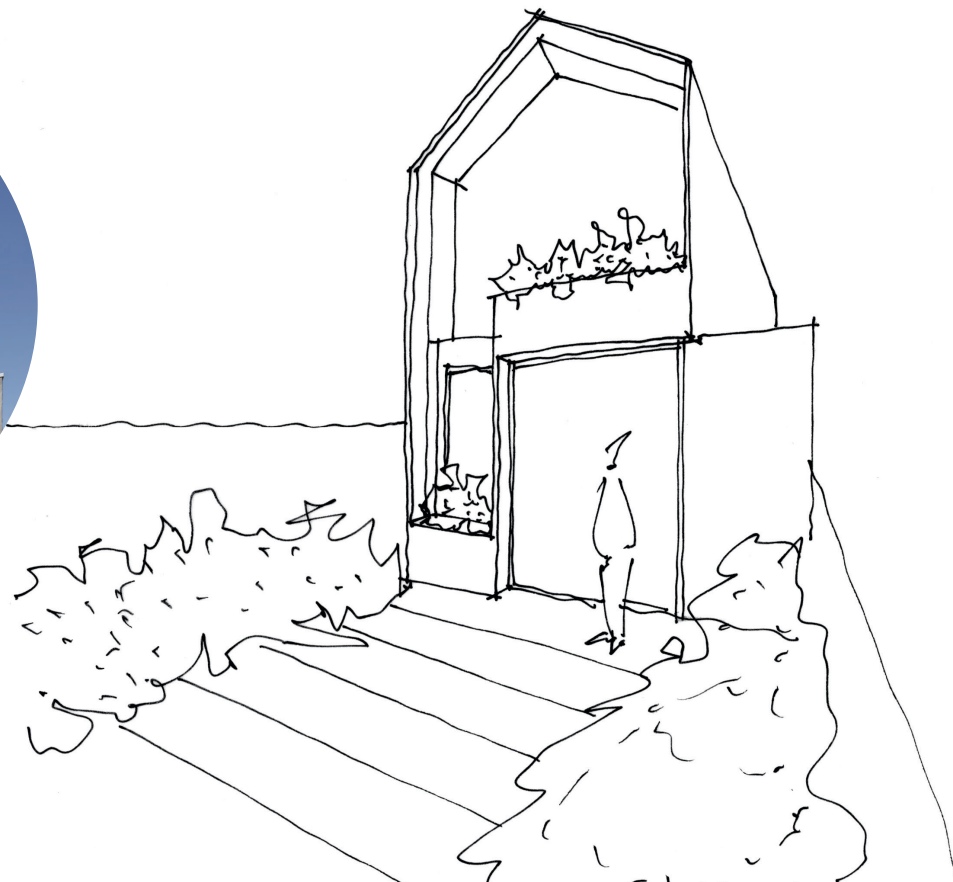




Architects of the month a tailored service

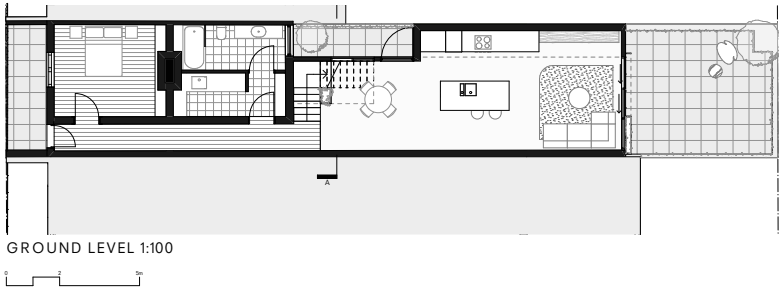
Motivated by an altruistic desire to turn a client's vision into the reality they long for, Tom Robertson opened his own practice in Melbourne six years ago



Contemporary treatments to a humble weatherboard cottage transformed Armadale House into a light-filled, open family home. The architects were unafraid of using vast white spaces to highlight the unique angular structural form and extension to the property



he journey to realising your dream home is unquestionably an exhilarating one, but also one that is inexplicably bound with risk and financial investment. So carefully choosing the right people to help and advise you along the way is imperative. An architect who truly understands the power of these decisions is Melbourne-based Tom Robertson. After finding his feet at revered Fender Katsalidis Architects, Robertson drew on his hard-earned international experience and formed his own practice in a considered effort to tailor a personal and flexible experience for clients. Since its launch six years ago, the innovative architectural firm has built up an impressive portfolio that reflects a range of both residential and small-scale commercial projects. While these differ in form, a controlled material palette unifies their body of work as well as a “central belief that good architecture brings joy”. As a client it can almost seem like the safe option to opt for an architect based solely upon an aesthetic that resonates with your own preferences, but interestingly, Tom Robertson Architects disagree. Rather they endeavour to adapt and attune to each individual clients’ vision without the constraints of a particular aesthetic. As such, every one of their projects stands alone, each “sympathetic to their context and environment,” an eloquent articulation of their brief executed with an unwavering zeal. Arguably, it is this certainty in their own decisions and a natural aversion to trends which has led to their ongoing pursuit of enduring, timeless design and unhesitating commitment to their clients.



What are your greatest influences?
We are inspired by a wide range of architects, both internationally and those local to us. There are so many amazing designers to draw inspiration from. However, we are continually drawn to the simplicity of the mid-century styles.

How does this manifest in your work?
The mid-century era successfully balances refined high design with restraint and a strong sense of order.

What originally inspired you to become an architect?
I became interested in architecture because of its close connection with design and mathematics, as well as the range of social issues it confronts.

What is your favourite project?
We are currently building a house in Melbourne that is already our favourite. It has been a long and emotional journey with an incredible client. They have fully supported our design approach and we are excited to see the built outcome.

What has been your career highlight?
The highlight so far is the development of a small but strong team, which has enabled Tom Robertson Architects to work with great clients creating great designs.

How old were you when you decided to become an architect?
18, medicine wasn’t an option and I didn’t get the school marks to commence aeronautical engineering. The first three years of university were cumbersome, but during my year of practical experience I worked for Gabriel Poole. He enabled my self belief and showed me a side of the industry which I never knew existed. He was bold, but humble, full of innovation and architectural delight.

Why did you want to start your own architecture firm?
I wanted the freedom of working for myself. Despite working within large commercial firms, I craved the connection with clients and others involved in the building process.

Do you prefer to work in cities or the countryside? Why?
I enjoy both as they have different distinct challenges and exciting opportunities.

What’s your approach to a project?
We typically commence with a broad analysis of the client’s brief to test varied compositions. Once a preferred concept is selected, we refine the forms to establish the building’s identity. Through rigorous



testing, the composition of form and materials is formalised. We always welcome the input of our clients.

How would you describe your relationship with clients?
A mixture of communication, trust, patience and fun.

And what’s the atmosphere like in your offices?
Fun. Busy. Loud. Casual. Green.

Do you prefer residential or commercial work?
We predominately work on residential projects. This is our focus as we feel a strong connection between ourselves, the client and the personalisation of their homes.

Would you say you have a particular design aesthetic? If so, what is this?
We are not defined by one aesthetic or style, but by an approach that is sympathetic to context and environment. Every project is unique yet founded in the central belief that good architecture brings joy. Working with a restrained palette of natural materials, we find elegance in simplicity. Employing

refined design that is rooted in pragmatism and driven by beauty, the practice is focused on creating enduring, contemporary architecture.

Do you have a favoured material?
Timber is a common theme throughout our projects. It brings a sense of warmth into homes to create a friendly and inviting space.

What is your approach to sustainability in design?
I believe we should be building smaller. Clever and efficient use of space is an important sustainable contribution. In addition, buildings should instinctively consider the age old ideas of passive solar design including orientation, thermal mass, natural ventilation and insulation.

What do you think residential homes will look like in 50 years?
Smaller. Prefabricated. 3D printed.

What are the most exciting technological inventions coming up that can support your work?
Computers when combined with augmented realities. This enables clients to clearly visualise the design.



- FAVOURITE BOOK?**
Catch 22
- FAVOURITE FILM?**
Black Cat White Cat
- FAVOURITE CITY?**
Barcelona
- FAVOURITE MUSIC?**
J.J. Cale
- YOUR FAVOURITE ARCHITECTS?**
Fearon Hay; Kennedy Nolan
- FAVOURITE ARTIST?**
Eduardo Chillida; Ryoji Ikeda
- FAVOURITE FOOD?**
Tapas
- FAVOURITE CAFÉ?**
Alimentari in Fitzroy, Melbourne, Australia

What is the biggest challenge architecture is currently facing?
Sustainability, water, space, density. Currently in Australia, architecture is considered a luxury by most. Due to the large available land areas, there isn’t a significant pressure on efficient spatial design, which has created a complacency within the built environment. Also, there isn’t yet a culture that supports successful public and civic spaces.

tomrobertson.com.au

Photos Derek Swalwell; Tatjana Plitt; Lillie Thompson