

THE AUSTRALIAN

# The List: Australia's top 20 interior designers of 2020

With an extraordinary diversity of styles, these designers have one thing in common: the ability to intuit a client's desires.

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**W**ith an extraordinary diversity of styles, these [designers](#) have one thing in common: the ability to intuit a client's desires. Below, the [Vogue Living](#) edit of the 20 best in Australia.

## SYDNEY

### TAMSIN JOHNSON

With antique dealer parents, Sydney-based interior designer Tamsin Johnson's work is informed by a deep knowledge of, and enviable access to, interesting and often sculptural pieces from far-flung corners of the world. With a bona fide sense of joy and play, and irreverent use of texture, print and colour, Johnson's aesthetic proves she doesn't take herself too seriously. She's behind the much-buzzed-about [Rae's on Wategos](#) revamp, and a handful of stores for designers Lucy Folk and P. Johnson tailors (run by her husband). But it's residential projects where her sense of leisure and living well come to the fore, perhaps best evidenced in her family home in the eastern beaches enclave of Tamarama.

[@tamsinjohnson](#)

### ARENT & PYKE

Principal designers Juliette Arent and Sarah-Jane Pyke and their team are responsible for some of the most celebrated spaces in the country, with countless projects and almost as many awards under their belts after more than a decade in partnership. Though they have a knack for letting statement, sculptural pieces bring a sense of delight, their spaces are grounded and invariably well considered – based on a holistic approach to the way a client lives and exists within a space. While this

ethos lends itself best to residential projects, commercial fitouts such as the Alex Hotel in Perth put their expertise on full display.

*@arentpykestudio*

## **YSG**

Principal Yasmine Saleh Ghoniem leads this unapologetically bold full-service firm with a truly singular vision. While the studio itself is nascent – Ghoniem founded it just this year after several years in partnership with her sister, landscape architect Katy Svalbe, at Amber Road Design – she has an impressive body of work under her belt. In a material-led approach, textures do the talking, and spaces are layered with dense design elements fit for the truly visionary. It's an approach that's garnered them countless awards, and along with residential projects they've pioneered spaces for hip eateries Edition Coffee Roasters, Four Pillars Laboratory, and Sydney's new Hotel Collectionist.

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*@ysg.studio*

## **ALEXANDER & CO**

A collective of architects, interior designers and furniture makers, Alexander & Co creates residences that feel light and liveable but never trivial; grounded in usefulness and practicality without forsaking serious design credentials. Principal Jeremy Bull has said that his approach is first and foremost to work to a brief, not to the studio's "house style" or design speciality, so you can expect a result that's truly tailored and purpose led. For an insight, look to restaurants such as Sydney's beloved Watson's Bay Boutique Hotel, plus the inner-west Sydney icon [The Imperial Hotel](#) and Sean's Kitchen in Adelaide.

*@alexander\_andco*

## **RICHARDS STANISICH**

Often entrusted with renovations of esteemed heritage-listed buildings and those with serious design clout – such as a sprawling 1928 Spanish mission-style villa in Elizabeth Bay – Richards Stanisich is known for paying respect to form and retaining the integrity of their forebears. Founders and design directors Jonathan Richards and Kirsten Stanisich are renowned for their extensive work, which ranges from Art Deco darlings around Potts Point, Bondi and Elizabeth Bay all the way through to new builds, and restaurant projects including Sepia, Barangaroo's I2 Micron and Kingsleys Woolloomooloo.

*@richards\_stanisich*

## **DECUS INTERIORS**

Decus' portfolio spans several high-end residential projects across some of Sydney's favourite suburbs, lending a decidedly polished aesthetic through its interior design, decoration and styling services. Founder and managing director Alex Donohoe Church oversees the creative direction of each project (using an on-call architect for select ones), balancing her classical sensibility with a modern, informed design

practice. The result is without exception an elegant and dignified aesthetic that somehow also feels incredibly inviting.

*@decus\_interiors*

### **THOMAS HAMEL & ASSOCIATES**

With a refined aesthetic honed over three decades, the firm is helmed by its namesake, US-born Thomas Hamel, whose extensive work overseas means theirs is an internationally informed practice. While they specialise in stately residences in some of Sydney's most exclusive postcodes, their niche lies in lavish spaces that never give in to austerity. They're also adept at creating and sourcing bespoke furniture, lighting, rugs and window treatments in order to fully realise a home's immaculate design.

*@thomashamel*

### **DYLAN FARRELL**

The boutique design firm operates out of a quiet Paddington terrace, and its location speaks to its approach. Partners in life and business, Dylan and Nicolette Farrell have a discreet *modus operandi* that affords them the luxury of offering a totally immersive and end-to-end service, from the nitty gritty of DA submissions down to custom furniture. Theirs is a decidedly maximalist aesthetic that's informed largely by international design (and Farrell's background in the US), making it hard to pin down to one style or frame of reference but resulting in grand designs that are far from the expected.

*@dylan\_farrell\_design*

### **HANDLESMANN & KHAW**

Architect Tania Handelsmann and interior designer Gillian Khaw take a personal approach to their firm's projects, imbuing them with a certain whimsy and romanticism that never feels confined to a certain period or style. While they've undertaken a handful of quiet commercial projects, their work is mostly in residential, which means their personable approach with owners is well honed. And with previous projects including an eclectic array of Federation houses, Art Deco apartments and Arts and Crafts-style homes, they have a knack for bringing new life to builds of decades past.

*@handelsmannkhaw*

### **BLAINEY NORTH**

Known for her instantly recognisable, elegant take on geometrics and an inclination to all things cerulean, Blainey North has created a name for herself both here and overseas, and is the go-to for a celebrity set that includes [Nicole Kidman](#) and Keith Urban. While she's responsible for such luxe spaces as the Conservatory restaurant at Melbourne's Crown and The Spa at Crown Towers Perth, perhaps her *pièce de résistance* is the apartment of John and Marly Boyd, which sits atop the city's ANZ Tower (at one point the most expensive apartment listing in the country). Now with an architecture arm led by Tim Browne, and furniture and lighting designed under Blainey North Collection, North has extended her polished touch to reach as far as your whim.

*@blaineynorth*

## ALWILL INTERIORS + ARCHITECTURE

Sisters Romaine and Nadine Alwill operate Alwill Interiors and Architecture respectively as two distinct entities, though they regularly collaborate on projects from offices in Surry Hills and on the Northern Beaches. A leaning toward natural form and materials is preeminent in their work – thin :plenty of wood, stone, marble and polished concrete – so that spaces feel unpretentious and ever aware of their surroundings. Perhaps most notably, they were behind the celebrated Bannisters in Port Stephens, including its in-house restaurant helmed by none other than Rick Stein, lending it the sense of elevated nonchalance that's made it a weekender to flock to.

*@alwillinteriors*

## MELBOURNE

### FLACK STUDIO

While in lesser hands their stylistically contrarian hues and plays on geometry could make for a cacophony, [David Flack](#) and his team display an intuitive way with colour and form. Calling on a wide array of local and international artists and makers means their projects are truly disparate, but often have nostalgic nods. They've been drawn to buzzy restaurant and bar projects that embrace a similar sense of panache, such as Fitzroy eatery Lagotto, Gabriel Cafe down the road, and South Yarra's Entrecote – so you've likely already marvelled at their work while dining. The studio also has signature furniture, lighting and textile pieces in the works, so watch this space.

*@flackstudio\_*

### HECKER GUTHRIE

Directors Paul Hecker and Hamish Guthrie have a commanding presence in the local design scene, which means the practice is often called on for new residential developments around the country, as well as exciting hospitality projects and even the odd health club, such as the conceptual Maddox Fit on Flinders Lane. Nonetheless, the inviting feel they give to a space lends itself as well to buzzy wineries and restaurants (including Nagambie's moody Mitchelton Hotel, Red Hill's Polperro Winery, even Dubai restaurant GIA) as it does to homes. A stay at Melbourne's new Downie Street Hotel will give you a sound taste for their restrained design.

*@heckerguthrie*

### KENNEDY NOLAN

With a design team led by architects Patrick Kennedy and Rachel Nolan, and based in Fitzroy, Kennedy Nolan has been operating since 1999. Working primarily on residential projects, its approach is utilitarian, resulting in unfussy and quotidian Melbourne residences that often feel sparse but are never light on design philosophy. Specialising in modernist styles and with a love for the Arts and Craft movement, its MO involves plenty of robust natural elements such as concrete, brick, timber/wood.

*@kennedy\_nolan*

### FIONA LYNCH

Lynch's approach is highly artistic and at times abstract, with a distinct sculptural feel and a keen awareness of light. She doesn't shy away from connectivity and emotiveness in her work and that of the company's, which results in stirring spaces that owners can likewise feel something for. Lynch's way with form has been tapped for public spaces such as Healesville's TarraWarra museum, plus the 80 Collins development, down to the more intimate, such as laneway wine bar Smalls in South Melbourne and Richmond's minimalist Anchovy Restaurant.

*@fionalynchoffice*

## **DOHERTY DESIGN STUDIO**

With designer Mardi Doherty – who's quietly worked with everyone from Madonna to Melbourne's very own NGV at Federation Square – at the helm, the studio spans residential, multi-residential, retail and hospitality projects for a result that's truly fit for purpose. Its knack with retail has been realised in fitouts for the likes of Diesel and Paul & Joe, as well as a conceptual take on kids' store Marquise that has earned plenty of attention and accolades of late, and that same sense of playfulness can be felt in its residential projects too.

*@dohertydesignstudio*

## **TRAVIS WALTON**

Responsible for Bali hot spots Expat Roasters and Bikini, along with Perth's Tribe Hotel, and several Melbourne spots such as bar Pretty Please, Sibling Espresso, Laneway Greens and Threefold Eatery, Travis Walton and his team are as well versed in creating buzzy after-dark spots as they are in producing highly liveable homes. With a modern leaning, their approach leads to spaces that are celebrated no matter their purpose.

*@traviswalton\_architecture*

## **KPDO**

With outposts in Melbourne and Hong Kong, Kerry Phelan Design Office specialises in high-end luxury homes and new multi-residential apartment builds, and is responsible for hospitality linchpins such as Sydney's Establishment, Ivy, The Beresford, Bistro Guillaume, and Melbourne's Langham Hotel. Its namesake, Kerry Phelan, is a legend of the Australian design scene who was recently awarded a IDEA (Interior Design Excellence Awards) lifetime achievement award. She runs KDPO with her architect partner Stephen Javens, resulting in lauded and highly respected work around the country that by its own description aims to "[seek] the balance between restraint and exuberance" – to great success.

*@kpdo\_studio*

## **BRISBANE**

### **ANNA SPIRO DESIGN**

Characterised by an ebullient use of colour, pattern and contrast, Anna Spiro's designs are wildly inventive and fanciful. It's a spirit that's perhaps best realised in Cabarita hideaway Halcyon House, and the fabulously retro Brisbane bar Mr Percival's, both masterminded by Spiro and her team. With a full-service interiors offering, plus a range of bespoke textiles and wallpapers and a Designer Rug

collaboration to her name, Spiro has an aesthetic that can be dialled up or down depending on your fancy.

*@annaspiro*

## **PERTH**

### **CHRISTIAN LYON**

Offering everything from architectural consultation down to furniture design and art curation, Christian Lyon specialises in a striking maximalism that is the epitome of artful opulence. Collaborating with Japanese furniture maker Matsuoka, for whom he's also served as creative director, Lyon has a knack for filling spaces with conversation-starting pieces. His firm's flair for design and bold vision will result in a space that's as unique as you are.

*@christianlyondesign*