Words *David Congram*

The Doors are Open

Step inside Schiavello's new Melbourne retail showroom by Hecker Guthrie.

It must be the work of ghosts. After all, it appears divinely effortless as though no human hand had intervened in its realisation and no bead of sweat had perspired from a brow. Naturally, of course, this grace is entirely expected – it's that elegant sleight of hand so inherent in their design ethos. They make linen appear to have the lubricious swish of silk cashmere. Glass pendant lamps seem to twist into sculptural chrysalises. Light from every direction is purely aureate – carrying the golden afterglow for which Melbourne has always been rightly famed. Such is Hecker Guthrie's latest triumph and Schiavello's new chapter: retail.

Having just thrown open the doors on their new retail showroom in Melbourne, Schiavello and Hecker Guthrie's collaboration stands forth as one of our country's best exemplars of design-thinking unfurling in real time. Akin to a hedge maze, the attenuation of space teases and intrigues one to navigate spaces and peek around corners. Not dissimilar to a jewellery box, spaces are apportioned into more spaces, rooms subdivides into more intimate rooms, achieving a drama of spatial revealing – an architectural striptease (if you will). Eventually, what appears initially as a meditation on exploring becomes an intricate saga of the space's essential form: the power of design to ignite our consciousness into total sensory profusion.

"We sought to bring an architectural sensibility to the interior of the new Schiavello retail showroom, enhancing and augmenting the existing space with a play of different shapes and forms to draw attention to its contemporary context." – Hecker Guthrie.

Fresh off the back of celebrating fifty-plus years of design excellence in Australia, this launch of Schiavello's latest venture is an important milestone in the brand's legacy. Worldwide, the Schiavello name is synonymous with serious design credentials: amassing an impressive portfolio of high-profile projects over the years, having worked with a number of architecture and interior design heavyweights. With the opening of Schiavello's new Melbourne flagship retail space, the brand establishes an all-new visual and design language.

Over the past fifty years, Schiavello has been uniquely positioned on the global design stage, infusing big international design trends and innovation with a distinctive Australian pragmatism and flair. Consequently, it's little wonder that for this significant new project Schiavello sought the expertise of a likeminded brand. As such, Hecker Guthrie could not have been a more perfect choice. As one of this country's most vaunted design duos, Hecker Guthrie have remained at the top echelon of Australian design since 1999. Known worldwide for an unmatched attention to detail, a dynamic approach to eclecticism and grandiosity, and their signature note of wit, the studio's latest collaboration with Schiavello is every bit an impressive feat.

"We recognized two streams within the Schiavello brand: the corporate side for which the brand is best known, and the hospitality and domestic side in which they're becoming increasingly influential. As a result, the showroom location is separated into streams for ease of use – thus carefully curating spaces to ensure easy navigation for customers throughout." – Hecker Guthrie.

From seating to shelving and tables, Schiavello's retail offerings are on par with their commercial and contract lines, bringing the world-class style, functionality, and innovation that designers already know and love into the contemporary Australian public. For the new showroom, it was only natural that such design excellence be met with further excellence in Hecker Guthrie's inimitable approach. Clean design lines and volumes nest together in a layered assemblage of luxe materials including leather, velvet, glass, and timber. A natural palette of white rendered walls and natural oak flooring is offset by moss green and light grey carpet, cream leather, and a meticulously curated collection of new Schiavello pieces. Thanks to full-height façade and a corner frontage, the entire space is bathed in warm, bright natural light.

Light is a key feature in the showroom's design, which avails of a variety of light sources to capture different moods throughout its different spaces. Directional spotlights highlight the furniture, their strong beams softened by ceiling pendants and wall lights that offer a soft, decorative ambience. Cutting cleanly through this ambience are local glass blower Mark Douglass' colourful, voluptuous glass lighting and objects, some of which designed specifically for Schiavello, which generously punctuate the interior.

What is surprising, however, is the degree of design thinking that underpins this otherwise elegant, unflustered and confident space. Understanding that the core values of the Schiavello brand touch an important emotional note for the Australian public, Hecker Guthrie sought to build unique competitive advantage in an otherwise oversaturated and highly disruptive landscape of consumer-driven

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HECKER GUTHRIE

design. While the future of bricks and mortar retail for the consumer space continues to look forward to an uncertain future, this showroom proves that intelligent design thinking can generate elite customer experiences. As the new frontier of competitive differentiation, customer experience doesn't 'sell' products, it 'is' the product.

At the heart of the space, a kitchen anchors the showroom firmly to the Schiavello culture, of which coffee making is an integral part. White marble bench tops contrast natural timber joinery and floors, while suspended pendant lighting accentuates the height of the space. Potted plants add bursts of colour and vitality to the space, as do paintings and photographs hung on the wall and mounted on shelves. Elsewhere throughout the showroom, this counterpoint to the neutral palette is provided by way of vertical gardens laced with tropical greenery.

From Melbourne to the rest of Australia, and now in Dubai and Beijing, Schiavello is an enduring champion of Australian-made design. The showroom's emphasis on natural light and open plan living is attuned to the direction in which residential design appears to be headed: bright, airy interiors in which spaces melt into one another. And the memory? It's the discrete charm of creative, thoughtful design. Design, that is, to articulate the future.