

WOWOWA ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIORS

Fat gold letters stamped across an otherwise unassuming frontage spell WOWOWA, announcing the emerging practice's North Carlton headquarters. Behind the glass, a small team of architects congregate around a communal desk, working in full view of the street and passers-by.

Monique and Scott Woodward, partners in both life and practice, have made an impact with their determinedly open, honest approach since establishing WOWOWA in 2010. Harboring a tenacious sentimentality for suburban Australian kitsch, their work is, in their own words, "radically conservative", reevaluating Heritage and cultural significance within a contemporary framework.

Their much-lauded Forever House draws directly from the language of the original 1930s bungalow. Projecting boldly towards the street, the angular new facet to the triple-fronted dwelling is clad in a variegated skin of glazed and regular bricks – a jazzy modern replica of the over-fired clinker bricks in the existing house. Completed in 2012, the house made the shortlist for the Australian Institute of Architecture's Residential Architecture – Houses (Alterations and Additions) Award. Notch House, due to be completed this December, continues in this vein of reappropriation. Drawing from the notched weatherboards on the original Heritage facade, WOWOWA echoes the motif in new timber cladding, as well as iterating it on a large-scale through rhythmic indentations in the oversized roof layer. Their approach, in both cases, isolates the key detail in the existing residence and amplifies it through recontextualised form and complementary materiality, placing the appeal of the old at the fore.

While many young practices cast a wide net by presenting as multidisciplinary studios, Monique Woodward believes that part of WOWOWA's ongoing success is in determining their value to a specific client base and concentrating their efforts. "We know who we resonate with the most – Gen X mums and professionals who are looking for something more playful, custom and highly personal. People willing to go on that design journey."

In actively pursuing its ideal clients, WOWOWA is given the creative freedom to approach works with humour and imagination. One concept in the works for an extension to a Californian bungalow takes a cue from the heavy, tapered twin pillars adorning the original, to inform the divided roofline of the rear pavilion, creating a pair of off-centre pyramids or 'Picasso boobs' as they are irreverently known in the studio. A more adventurous client has engaged the practice for a project that appears decidedly more speculative than realistic – a monolithic glass tower on a rural Victorian dairy farm, to house his own bedroom, study and bathroom (town planning phase).

Beyond its built work, WOWOWA is committed to improving Melbourne's living standards through outspoken dialogue. Backed by the Australian Institute of Architects, its ongoing #buildquality campaign calls for the development of primary standards for apartments to be interpreted by architects, subject to peer review.

"Sydney has minimum apartment standards and design incentives to deter developers from building future slums and so should Melbourne," Woodward says. The practice's architectural

activism, disseminated through social media and enforced by lectures and forum appearances, is an ambitious attempt to turn the conversation to quality in a climate of rapid densification.

WOWOWA embraces the communicative power of marketing, with the overt intent to make architecture approachable to the majority currently excluded from the conversation. Its tongue-in-cheek 'If You Were Mine' online video series makes a case for preserving and celebrating the distinguishing features of iconic suburban typologies. Championing boom style and cream brick, WOWOWA's kerbside reviews work to make the language of local architecture and built Heritage palatable to an untrained audience, providing an opportunity for the practice to suggest its own hypothetical renovation.

WOWOWA publicly advocates the concept of tax-deductible architect fees, recognising the value added to property through qualified and considered spatial work. "The Australian fiscal dream revolves around money made from renovation after renovation but so few use an architect," Woodward says. Certainly, the financial commitment remains a key deterrent, but WOWOWA believes it is also a question of cultivating wider awareness and education, to engender a cultural shift away from production-line urban sprawl. "The most popular Metricon house is worth \$700,000! We could do a lot with \$700,000. There's a whole gap of people in the middle who could be inspired to do something with an architect."

Case in point, one of WOWOWA's first civic projects: the Kalora Park Narre Warren Football Club extension. Over nearly a decade, the coterie had made several attempts at council level to revamp the overworn facilities. WOWOWA worked pro bono to develop conceptual imagery, demonstrating the potential of an architectural solution, which the club then used to campaign to both sides of government. Successfully securing funding, the studio is now occupied with documenting the project for an October 2015 start, when the members – comprising mainly tradesmen – will rally together to build their club.

Having just completed a first round of projects, WOWOWA is pushing through a second wave of residential works, with a view to pursuing other work in the smaller civic realm. Though it is a rewarding time for the practice, recipient of this year's Dulux Study Tour prize, Woodward says, "It took so long to get to a place that we're able to do this." As with many young practitioners, WOWOWA lectures in design at both RMIT University and Monash University, alongside its business, imparting its particular brand of buoyant, politically engaged, market-savvy practice to the next generation of architects. **ar**

01. Members of the Kalora Park Narre Warren Football Club will commence construction on the club's extension in October. Render courtesy WOWOWA.
02–03. Contrasting angular geometry in WOWOWA's 'predator mongrel' extension in Elsternwick is deftly camouflaged in the material of the

Edwardian original. Renders courtesy WOWOWA.

04–05. The subtle notch detail of the original weatherboard is iterated inventively in the oversized roof layer at WOWOWA's Notch House. Renders and drawing courtesy WOWOWA.