

FJALL

"As you know more about an area of design, you become more confident about spending more money." According to Paul Hecker, this is a notion that rings true across all industries and forms of retail. "It's not about financial uncertainty, most people are just plain uncertain," claims the interior designer, one third of multi award winning design firm Hecker Phelan & Guthrie (HP&G). How, then, do we approach the concept of interior design as the financial clouds gather and trends move faster than our ability to stay in touch? Hecker believes it's all in the separation of what is timeless and what is merely a fad.

Hecker's collaborative design practice with Kerry Phelan and Hamish Guthrie was established in 1999, with each designer bringing more than fifteen years of industry experience. Working with major architectural firms, the primary concern of HP&G is the production of high quality interior and furniture design, specialising in residential, retail, hotel accommodation and hospitality projects. A brief flip through the practice's thick portfolio of work suggests the level of expertise and creativity that emanates from their Melbourne studio. In considering the style of the designers' work, no apt description can encompass the plethora of projects and the vast differences that exist in their aesthetic. As Hecker tells of the practice, "we're always evolving, and as you get older you find it harder and harder to pinpoint your style. Fifteen years ago, I would have said my own style was modernist, but now I try to talk less about what I am and instead try to create interiors that people like – it might be with antique furniture and period accessories, or a paired back, minimal space." True to his word, the designer's portfolio features such projects as the chic Los Angeles-style Ivy precinct of Justin Hemmes' hospitality empire, the luxurious, cavernous interiors of Arthur Galan's AG retail stores, and the playful quirkiness of Alannah Hill retail stores.

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IN THE FALL

In stark contrast, yet again, is HP&G's most recent project: a ski lodge in Falls Creek, Victoria, transformed into six residential apartments in association with Salter Architects for Rise Developments. "The existing building was pretty ordinary," says Hecker, continuing to explain that the project was to turn it into five apartments that would be sold and to create a one-off penthouse for the owner. One-off is perhaps the only way to describe the space, which embodies the traditional elements of a Scandinavian chalet while remaining modern and responding to the surrounding environment of North West Victoria. "You want to feel warm and cosy," says the designer, as he explains that it is his practice to ask a client how they want to feel as opposed to what they want of a space.

The inspiration for the space is instantly obvious, with tongue-in-cheek references to the quintessential ski lodge scattered liberally throughout. Yet Hecker is quick to point out that everything has been adapted and recontextualised to suit the modernity of the building. "We didn't want to slavishly make it identical to the images from movies," says the designer, noting that there are no pine chairs with love heart cut outs in their backs. "Instead, we have used a solid timber dining table with classic, designer chairs." The chairs, in fact, are the classic Eiffel base plastic

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type designed by Charles and Ray Eames, available in Australia through Living Edge. Combined with deer skins, cow hide and timber wall panelling, it is the addition of such timeless designer pieces that gives the space its contemporary feel. "It creates a dialogue between the traditional and the new," exclaims Hecker. Other classic pieces in the space include custom-made tables from Mark Tuckey, chess-like Zeus stools from Space Furniture, and the famous Butterfly Chair – an icon of the mid 20th Century. "The leather Cab chair by Casina (through Space Furniture) is my favourite," adds Hecker.

Colour is purposely kept neutral to maintain the idea of being immersed in the surrounding nature, with views filtered through curtains that add a sense of protection. As a result, the surrounds of the building become the focal point for the residents. "So many people try to create a city feel in their holiday homes," tells Hecker of client requests. "In my mind, if you want to create a beach house, it should look like it's at the beach – it should be at the beach." The idea augurs well for the Fjall apartments, with the images alone fuelling a craving for hot chocolate and marshmallows. The neutral colour palette is dispersed by features such as the timber panelling, which are a testament to the high quality of HP&G's work. As the designer tells, "we're not one for just painting a wall; if it's going to be a feature, it needs to stand up to close scrutiny, and so beautiful woods and stones are used – it is about the quality of the materials."

Investing in quality has never been more important as today, and Hecker agrees that it is important to spend money on classic, timeless furniture and

update styles with cheaper, trend driven accessories. "As designers, we wouldn't worry about spending large amounts of money on furniture we can see is just a fad," says Hecker. "Instead, everyone should spend as much as they possibly can on the perfect sofa, because you'll potentially have it for years and it is sat on every day – it is an investment piece!" Timeless need not mean old or boring, either. Any designer will note classic Italian brand Edra as a prime example, which has remained avant garde and of the moment whilst simultaneously transcending time. "I think you're better able to distinguish transient, fashionable products and those that truly have substance as you become more educated about design. You become more discerning."

So why has the building been named Fjall? "It was simply a sly way of making the apartments sound Scandinavian," explains Hecker. "It has raked ceilings, a pitched roof, and is clad in timber – there is no mistaking what it is". With that and a pair of deer antlers, it seems that Falls Creek is the new Finland.

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