

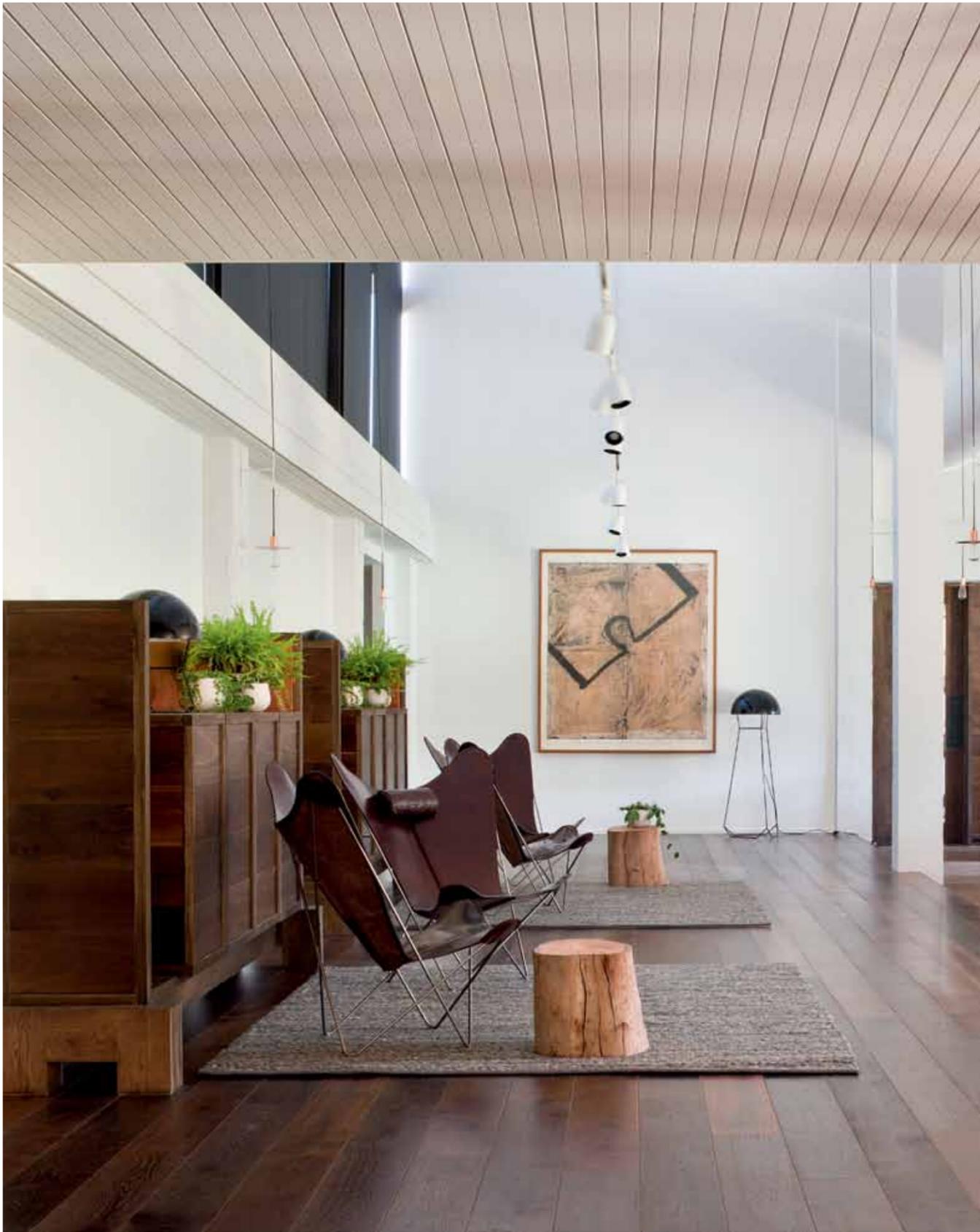
Mitchelton Winery

PROJECT

location Goulburn Valley, Australia
design Hecker Guthrie
text Gillian Serisier
photography Shannon McGrath

A natural progression Showing deference to existing architectural form, Hecker Guthrie blends a warm and natural material palette with clever sculptural details to bring a new lease of life to this 1970s landmark in Victoria's Goulburn Valley.





Left—Refreshing the winery’s interiors, Hecker Guthrie has avoided layering over the architecture – opting instead for freestanding cabinetry and furniture

Right—The existing architecture, completed in the 1970s, includes a striking tower realised by Ted Ashton



Tasked with restoring and reinvigorating Mitchelton Winery, an established and highly regarded architectural icon in Victoria’s Goulburn Valley, Hecker Guthrie found the onus on the studio was one of respect rather than the typical adherence to heritage. Originally conceived by Robin Boyd CBE (1919-1971), the architecture of the winery was completed by renowned architect, Ted Ashton, who completed the build in 1974 to much acclaim. Since then, the winery has grown, and with it the wear and tear of almost 40 years has become increasingly evident. In 2011 the winery was bought by the Ryan family, who engaged Hecker Guthrie to restore the building’s interiors.

Importantly, the Ryan family did not want the winery to turn its back on its heritage and, as a result, the original features have remained wherever possible. This is also in keeping with Hecker Guthrie’s regard for the original architecture and design. Director Hamish Guthrie explains, “At Hecker Guthrie, we have the approach: what is the piece of architecture we are dealing with? Is it worthwhile, and how do we respond to it? Our first consideration is how to respond to the architecture, to be true to the architecture and complement it with what we were trying to do.”

The external windows, for example, could have been changed significantly, but the designers felt it would shift the impact of the building too far from the original. As such, it was decided that the woodwork would be replaced rather than changed.

Similarly, throughout the restoration, any timber or brickwork was tested for integrity and restored where necessary, while a timber ceiling was installed to aid acoustics.

Ostensibly, the renewal and implementation of these foundation elements gave Hecker Guthrie a palette to expand and finesse. “When you look at the architecture, it’s on a large scale. It’s a strong, rigorous and grounded piece of architecture that has a lot of textural material through it and really generous volumes of space. For us, it was a perfect starting point for a project,” says Guthrie.

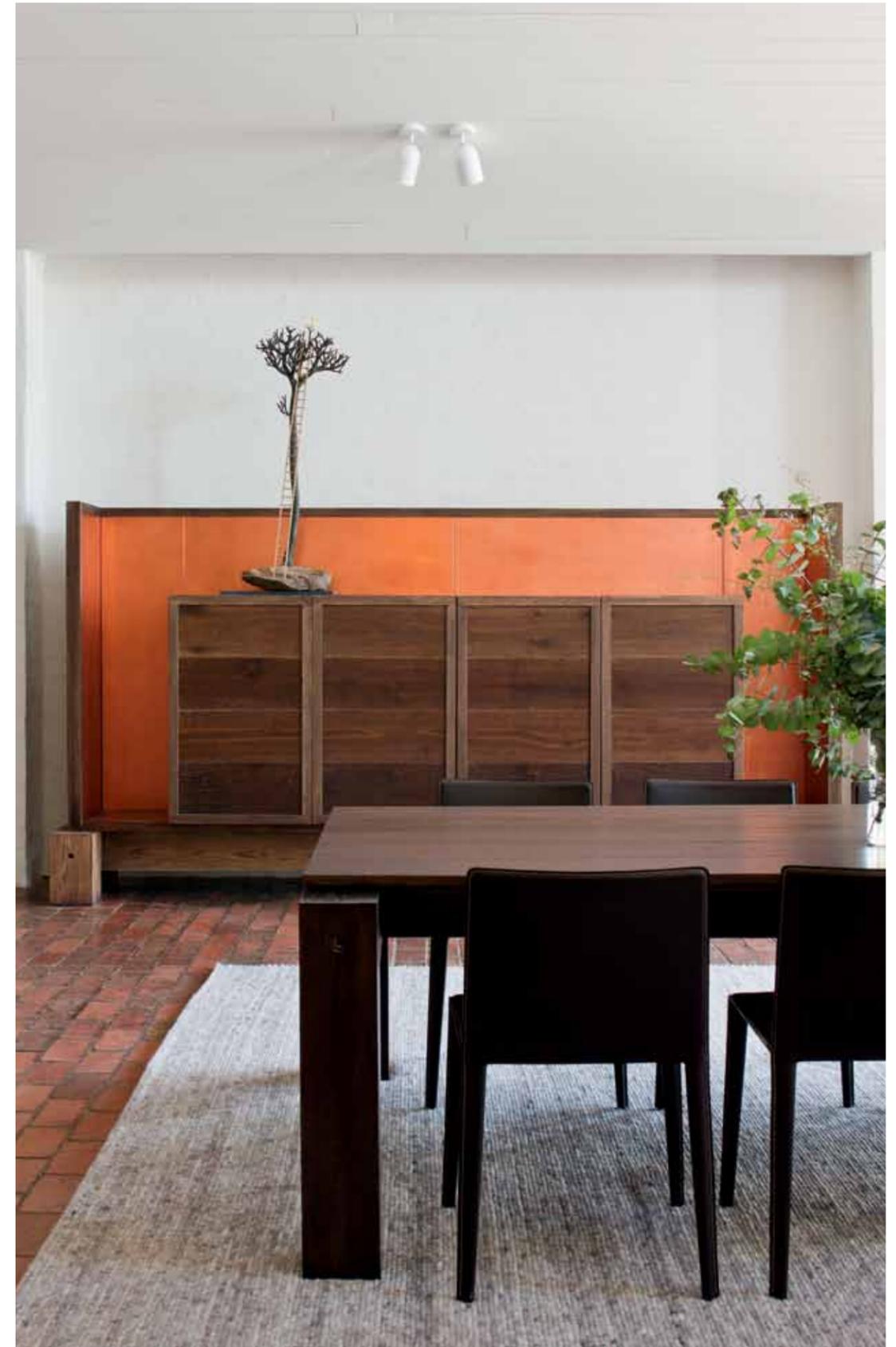
Co-director, Paul Hecker, adds, “The environment also sets the tone. It seems like a very natural progression in terms of palette, because [the building sits] in the middle of a beautiful vineyard in the middle of the country. A limited palette of natural materials seemed the right approach. Without being too academic about it, it just seemed the right thing to do.” The warm, honey tones of copper have been added to this palette to complement the studio’s refined use of robust materials.

Given the significance of the architecture, Guthrie explains that the team took “a very light and hands-on approach to the space – we didn’t want to be layering directly onto the architecture”. As such, wherever possible, the cabinetry, which was all built on-site, is freestanding. During concept planning, for example, the idea of using wine crates as strategically placed tasting stations evolved from simple stacked wine crates to an elegant display comprising

floating cabinetry within a surround of copper. Teamed with a pair of elegant leather butterfly armchairs (Great Dane Furniture), the effect is at once beautiful and masculine. These standalone pieces, completed with resolute attention to detail, reaffirm Hecker Guthrie’s design intent.

“We were trying to create these little jewel boxes,” Hecker explains. “The copper has a beautiful, warm, textural finish with a jewel-like quality. It helps to make better what we have on display. Rather than display against timber or brick, it was nicer to display against something that was warm and reflective.”

Effectively, the focus these areas attract creates a contained zone of activity within the larger space that encourages groups to gather naturally. Moreover, materials have been used to humanise scale: “We are dealing with these vast volumes, but if you bring it down to a human scale with the warmth of copper, the rugs and timber, it creates a stronger relationship with visitors,” says Guthrie. Similarly, the wine bottle display has been designed for individual engagement, rather than as an imposing feature wall. Each unit holds two-and-a-half-dozen bottles, yet the fine verticality of the cabinet suggests a lack of weight – with only a few bottles proffered for attention. Above the display, an oversized bulb set in copper (Volker Haug) accentuates the warm tones of the copper and timber. The use of vertical carpentry recurs throughout the project in various iterations adapted to suit specific needs.



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The tasting stations, for example, feature the same freestanding counters to contain an area suitable for a group, while in the bathrooms, this motif is used around the basins as a personal demarcation of space.

The renewal has afforded a further opportunity to reconsider both the flow and use of the various rooms in light of changing customer demands. Visitors to the restaurant and cellar door needed to feel nurtured, and the building also had to provide more conference and event spaces than the original design had allowed for. To accommodate this, Hecker Guthrie proposed opening rooms to one another

in a fashion that allowed areas to be used as arrival areas and breakout rooms. Effectively, large groups can now be contained and moved to specific areas without traversing the winery, while smaller groups may also experience the winery on an intimate level and access the courtyards and outdoor areas. Consideration has also been given to the winery's flexibility of use. The main cellar door, for example, has display stands designed to function as barrows with a set of wheels at one end, which can remain in place when a tourist bus visits or be removed when a wedding is accommodated.

Of primary concern was the creation of a pre-function entry that was welcoming and warm, while remaining relatively unencumbered and able to accommodate a large group of people. This has been achieved by the use of large bespoke couches of black leather that form strong horizontals within a perimeter established by large grey wool rugs. As Hecker explains, this layering creates comfort and scale. “With furniture, you want it to always have its place, rather than filling a space with lots of small pieces that get moved around [so it] always looks messy. It’s creating a device

Opposite left—The light and contemporary lounge area, which serves as an entry space before guests flow into the function room

Opposite right—The winery’s private tasting room, with the function room beyond

Right—Copper accents add warmth to the natural material palette



Left—Copper shimmers behind the wine bottle display units, illuminated by Volker Haug lights



Above left—Timber, brick and copper create a warm, textured feel in the cellar door



Above right—The strong architectural lines of the cabinetry continues in the bathroom

that is inviting and comfortable, that is also located within the space and is proportionally the right size. We want to control the space with these big overscale sofas; they have that sense of warmth, but are also these big sculptural elements.”

The lounges divide the room into smaller portions that allow groups to congregate before spilling to fill the whole organically. And, as the party assembles, the low line of the lounges permits an unimpeded view through the crowd, while the physical breaks caused by the lounges translate as a sensation of space. The choice of

materials, meanwhile, lends grandness to the winery without resorting to Edwardian tropes. Locally sourced tree sections provide occasional tables (and a surprising note!), while the black domed lamps by Arik Levy for Forestier and Oscar armchairs by Matthew Hilton in tan leather (both Hub Furniture) are a simple, refined addition. The end result is light and contemporary, with a robust sophistication in keeping with the winery’s ambience.

Describing the brief as “relatively fluid”, Hecker Guthrie has explored the renovation as a process within a wider evolution that

will allow Mitchelton’s owners to explore commercial options as they develop. Big picture elements such as flow and room usage have been addressed with flexibility, while attention to materiality and scale bring warmth and human scale to the architecture. Hecker Guthrie’s signature attention to sculptural form as a means to demark and focus space brings to this extraordinary building an element of visual nuance and intrigue that is at once arresting and elegant. 

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