



KATY SVALBE

AMBER ROAD

SISTERS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT Katy Svalbe and interior architect Yasmine Ghoniem had spent years on opposite sides of the globe, and in 2013 they combined their talents and destinies in Amber Road. With Australian homes increasingly blurring the lines between inside and out, this one-stop shop for landscape and interior design made good sense. “The inside-outside dialogue shapes every project we do, and is at the core of our practice,” says Katy.

In her formative years, Katy spent her time bushwalking, camping and fossicking around Sydney Harbour and later the shores and desert interiors of Western Australia. “Nature, a passion for biology, a love of the arts and a life spent outdoors were my first trainers,” says Katy. So landscape architecture seemed the inevitable career path. Graduating with a landscape architecture degree from the University of WA, she worked for large firms in Australia and in Europe on big-scale projects, ranging from Millennium Parklands, NSW, to parks for a new city beside Madrid’s T4 airport.

In planting style, Katy advocates mixing it up, in more ways than one, “combining natives and exotics, edibles and aromatics so that the garden not only looks good, but also smells and tastes delicious”. For her, the well-designed garden is “a feeling or an experience, which makes you forget where you are: it engages all five senses, connects you with earthly rhythms, including the seasons (and the delightful changes they bring), encourages you to slow down and surrounds you with a feeling of well-being and curiosity”. Despite the ever-expanding range of new hybrid materials, natural or raw materials still carry the flame for her. “You can’t go past a worn piece of sandstone or the greying patina of ageing hardwood,” she says.

Her plant choices celebrate the senses: “the majestic stature of a lemon-scented gum, the lingering sweetness of jasmine, the fleshy fruits and gnarly limbs of a fig tree, the arresting blooms followed by the unfurling of lime green leaves of a redbud, the lacy delicacy of a Japanese maple, a grove of casuarinas blowing in the wind”.

Now in the Amber Road boutique practice with her sister, Katy works on smaller scale residential, hospitality and commercial projects. “Yasmine’s attention to detail has rubbed off on me, and brought a new richness and level of resolution and thinking to the way landscape can enrich spaces, both inside and out,” she says.



THESE PAGES Drifts of devil's ivy in custom planters drape the conservatory. Rough-hewn sandstone blocks line the walls and the tumbled limestone floors are laid in a cobblestone format.

LORD DUDLEY HOTEL
WOOLLAHRA, NSW

photographs Prue Ruscoe / words Chris Pearson



THIS PAGE The ceiling detail, by mural artists Creative Finish, replicates a fabric used to cover the rear seat pads. OPPOSITE PAGE Painstakingly hand-painted on the ceiling to frame the void, the floral fresco is secured by dowels that were painted to mimic bamboo.





THESE PAGES Custom artworks, consisting of dried flowers and feathers, are pressed between glass and suspended in front of the textured sandstone walls.

Arts-and-crafts style and workmanship flourish in this garden conservatory fashioned by Katy Svalbe and Yasmine Ghoniem of Amber Road. Adding verve and energy to a restaurant in the Lord Dudley pub in Sydney’s eastern suburbs, the decor of the space was inspired by the flamboyant, nature-imbued works of English and pan-European artist and designer William Morris. “The space transforms a dark, underused downstairs area in an iconic pub into a welcoming, light-filled and intimate venue for all times of day, reconnecting it to nature and its English 19th-century roots. It’s a reinvention of tradition meets modernity,” says Katy. In its use of materials, luxuriant hanging foliage and natural motifs, it beguilingly merges outside and inside.

The transformation began with the removal of a timber and corrugated-plastic roof, which was replaced with an elegant, fine steel-framed conservatory roof, its clear glass luring the eye skywards. Reinforcing the indoor-outdoor connection, Katy chose external landscaping materials, re-lining the walls in rough-hewn sandstone blocks and replacing the floors with tumbled limestone in a cobblestone format, both subtle gestures to the property’s origins as a quarry. Countering the geometry of the hardscaping of the walls, floor and glass roof, lush drifts of devil’s ivy cascade from the ceiling in custom planters, installed into the roof lantern at its perimeter, which ensures fuss-free watering and maintenance.

Meanwhile hand-painted details were applied to the roof, doors and walls, the hero being a frieze that frames the central atrium and accentuates the luxuriant ivy. Amber Road commissioned mural artists Creative Finish to replicate a fabric they had fallen in love with, which covers the rear seat pads in the dining space. The floral pattern was meticulously handpainted on the ceiling to frame the void, the fresco secured by split-timber dowels painted to mimic bamboo. An array of vintage gilded wall sconces, bespoke pendants, their faceted shapes recalling Tiffany glass, and cove lighting around the edge of the room supplement daylight and provide intimate mood lighting after the sun has gone down.

Emphasising the space’s artisanal feel, a bespoke timber-panelled bar features a deep-green granite counter, strapping details and a black granite kicker for extra girth and gravitas. Its curved shape helps guide patrons to a seating area next to a fireplace, complete with a wall-mounted stuffed peacock. Highlighting natural motifs and craftsmanship, dried flowers and feathers pressed between glass are suspended in front of the textured sandstone walls. Thonet bentwood dining chairs and barstools complete the menu of natural materials.

“The project favours artisans and fabricators rather than off-the-shelf modern solutions making every detail authentic and relevant, not added for its own sake, and alluding to the building’s origins. Although referencing a period, this project has a timelessness,” explains Katy. The result, she says, is a warm, cossetting space integrating inside and out literally, through its visual connection with the outside, but also through association, with its live foliage, landscape materials and Arts and Crafts-inspired fabrics and frescoes. amberroaddesign.com.au



THIS PAGE Rough-hewn sandstone walls are a nod to the property's origins as a quarry. OPPOSITE PAGE Light pendants custom made by LightCo. Bespoke timber-panelled bar. Bentwood chairs and barstools from Thonet.