

Eastop Architects:

Liam Eastop

Interview by
Elizabeth Campbell

With a commendation in the 2020 Victorian Architecture Awards, the jury commended this residential alteration and addition for 'the sensitive utilisation of natural light and materials'. For Eastop Architects, creating a platform to test ideas and be creative has been at the forefront of their architecture practice.

Q1 Can we start with a little bit of background and why you chose to start your own studio in Melbourne?

I grew up on the Mornington Peninsula and moved to Melbourne to study communication design at Monash University before transferring to architecture. While studying, I started at Wood Marsh Architecture where I had exposure to a broad range of projects across residential, commercial and infrastructure and developed strong relationships with my peers, who I am

still close with today. Following five years at Wood Marsh, I worked at Studio Goss and Pandolfini Architects, before establishing my own practice in 2017.

I have always wanted to run my own business and I started my practice because I was looking for the freedom to control the direction of my work and have a platform to test ideas and be creative. On the side, I taught at Monash and Melbourne for a number of years. I value the balance that teaching provides, it's important to me to stay connected to



exploring architecture without the usual constraints that come with practicing architecture commercially.

Q2 How did you procure your first project?

Rose Street was our first built project and was run as a side project while working at Pandolfini Architects. The clients are close friends and I'm extremely grateful for their trust and commission. For the studio, Rose Street was an opportunity to learn, solve a brief within a budget, explore light, detailing and absorb the building process. In a way, this project kick-started the studio through the relationship with the contractor, following that project, Prolifica forwarded two new clients and allowed the studio to become a full-time focus.

Q3 What design principles do you live and work by?

A key theme in all of our work is developing a strong sense of spatial experience, through the consideration of contrasting environments, spatial sequences and relationship to site. We are particularly interested in the role that form, scale, materiality, light and connection to the natural environment plays in creating these experiences. Elm Tree Place is an example of this approach to design, where a monochromatic palette, textured materials, mirrored and transparent elements and natural light form a sequence of layered and filtered spaces, enhancing the sense of scale and providing a dimensional experience, uncompromised by the limitations of the subdivided site.

Q4 What is the process of a project from concept to completion? In all your projects – architecture, furniture, and sketches.

I usually have a compositional concept for a project early on, sometimes before I have even visited the site or had a formal briefing. I spend a lot of time exploring speculative spaces where I can experiment without constraints and these often form the starting points for project concepts. We focus on a single concept for each project and prefer to present hand-generated sketch diagrams in initial presentations to engage our clients in our process.

Q5 How big is your team? How do you see the studio growing?

We are a small and fluctuating team, currently three, including myself. While we are establishing, we bring in support as required. We have a business manager and branding designer who have been instrumental in helping me establish the studio. Lauren has been with the practice since it became my full-time focus and we have been a tight team over the last few years. I'd like to grow the business sustainably, I'm not in a rush to have a huge number of staff. My preference is to focus on quality work that we enjoy doing, not quantity of projects, and to ensure that we can maintain a culture that continues to nurture a healthy work-life balance.

Q6 There is a clear sense of contrast and contrasting experiences (light/dark, black/white, inside/outside, straight/curved, smooth/rough) in your published work (and concept sketches), can you explain why and how this is explored?

We explore the interplay and intersection of elements in our work to create thresholds, moments that shift visual or spatial perception and create a dialogue between architecture and self. To achieve an overwhelming sense of openness and lightness, a considered transition from a contrasting darker, enclosed space intensifies this experience. The same rhythm in contrasting materiality amplifies the impact of the qualities of each material.

Q7 What is your dream project?

To explore the theme of a heightened sensory experience through space making, without the usual pragmatic constraints. Ideally this project would be a commercial or public work, to engage a broader audience.



Q8 Who are your mentors?

I call on different mentors and peers within and outside of the architecture community for their different perspectives. Randall Marsh from Wood Marsh has been helpful in encouraging me to set a strong vision for my practice and I have a few friends, who also run their own practices, who I talk to frequently about day-to-day things such as projects and business processes.

Q9 Is there any architecture you're still trying to really nail? A small detail that hasn't turned out quite right?

We have been working on a series of site extractions and models exploring the relationship between site, casting and structure. We are hoping to test some of these ideas at a larger scale, with an aim of creating an enhanced sense of site-specific permanence. Also, as an establishing business and design studio, we are really focused on fine tuning our administration and project processes, to create more time for research, exploration and learning. ■

'The use of reflective and transparent material, fluted glass, textured glass brick, reflective surfaces, explore the movement of light and sense of depth within the tight-walled constraints of the site. Balanced with a secondary darker material palette.'

