

BENTWOOD, FITZROY

Bentwood's Red Blue brick tiles create a wonderful synergy in Fitzroy



There's a whole lot of history behind the walls of Fitzroy's Bentwood café in Napier Street. Not only paying homage to its namesake, being the space once occupied by Thonet, but also thoughtfully referencing the heritage surrounds, in the C.F. Row apartments above, the adjacent laneway of red pavers outside and the exposed heritage wall within.

But what sets Bentwood apart is the clever and deliberate fusion of rich heritage with striking contemporary design. Even before you walk through the doors, you know you're in for something special. And, when you do, the design doesn't disappoint. It delights the senses and ignites the soul with its sea of deep red hues that warmly invites you in.

In fact, it's no surprise that RITZ&GHOUGASSIAN are the pair behind this thoughtful, integrated design, being recently named 2018 Emerging Interior Design Practice at the Australian Interior Design Awards. Because what they delivered is simply spectacular.

"We wanted to honour the past through a contemporary design approach. We maintained the idea of the heritage façade as an outer layer, a wrapping creating a layered response to the space within. Walking through the space you experience the unveiling of something different, something new," comments Gilad Ritz, Director, RITZ&GHOUGASSIAN.

So the selection of material palette began with red bricks, referencing the Krause Red/Blue bricks, supplied by Robertson's Building Products, on the C.F.Row apartment façade, and the Red/Blue brick tiles in the laneway. RITZ&GHOUGASSIAN decided to use the tiles as a floor solution throughout the space. Gilad says, "By referencing the adjacent masonry of the laneway, the apartment's façade and the masonry of the heritage wall, what we're really creating is a holistic project. We're building upon the past and present history of that site."

And, from a practical viewpoint, being built on a suspended slab over the basement car park, weight was a deciding factor in material choice. "We realised we had to make lightweight structures, which still have the

impression of mass,” says Gilad. So, choosing the Red/Blue brick tiles for Bentwood’s flooring was a great fit. Gilad continues, “The floor’s got a great thickness to it. You want it to read like a brick paving floor, and I think a 30mm tile allows that. You can still create a recess to the mortar joint so it still has that same feeling.”

The Red/Blue brick tile flooring works beautifully with the exposed, heritage brick wall, which was left untouched, adding to the rustic, yet sophisticated feel of the space. Gilad explains, “We wanted to create a distinction between the uniformity of our design and the existing wall, so we left the back of the wall as it was, with its original paint, to disengage on some level with our design, and maintain its own identity.”

The remaining design elements are magnificent; they integrate well with the rich history, and maintain the monotone hue, while presenting something new and exciting. The primed steel wall cladding and a suspended gridded steel ceiling make bold statements, reflecting Fitzroy’s industrial heritage. The ceiling is particularly striking as it seemingly soars, mid air, floating away from the heritage wall, helping to create that distinction and giving the wall prominence. Primed in red oxide, both the wall and the ceiling pair well with the red palette, and create lovely pockets of glowing light and shade throughout. Gilad explains, “We just saw this red oxide and thought it would be a fantastic combination with everything. It paired really nicely with the red bricks and we matched some leather to that as well creating a consistent palette throughout.”



There is some relief to the monotone palette, giving balance to the whole design, in the exquisitely designed shelving units and coffee bench, and the exposed original concrete columns, which arise throughout the space. These elements cleverly compartmentalise the space, clearly defining the entrance, the side and the middle, essentially forming little pockets of space, which invite visitors to create their own little nook.

Bentwood really is a remarkable project. It is immaculate, thoughtful detail at its best, which now sits, rightly so, as the jewel in this clever architect’s crown of hospitality projects.

Architects: RITZ&GHOUGASSIAN
 Product: Red/Blue brick tiles (230 x 76 x 15mm)
 Builder: UWOOD Projects
 Tiler: Melbourne Tile & Stone
 Photographer: Tom Blatchford