

THE LOCAL PROJECT



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Off-Grid House ANACAPA ARCHITECTURE • Matagouri FEARON HAY ARCHITECTS • Daylesford Longhouse
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IN CONVERSATION WITH PLACE — JAMES TAYLOR AND PETER KNIGHTS OF TAYLOR KNIGHTS

Words by Aimee O'Keefe • Photography by Peter Tarasiuk, Peter Clarke and Derek Swalwell

Drawn together through the shared experience of their rural upbringings, Taylor Knights Co-Founders James Taylor and Peter Knights's similar interests and values converge to form a unified creative studio. With an approach to architecture grounded in a tangible connection to place, Taylor Knights creates beautiful, highly sensitive residential and commercial architecture that eloquently converses with the land.

It was whilst working together at a design-focused studio in Melbourne that James and Peter realised the potential of their shared backgrounds growing up in rural Victoria to inform their practice – a connection to land and place being integral to their design process. “We really believe architecture can transform the way you experience a space through connection to place,” says Peter. “This is something that is derived from our upbringing, where we had a strong connection to the seasons, the landscape, natural light and a sense of community and belonging.” Also sharing similar approaches towards materiality and craft, James and Peter have harnessed these parallels to create a cohesive, progressive architectural practice.

Yet an appreciation of difference also forms a significant foundation of Taylor Knights. They take a fiercely collaborative approach when it comes to each project, valuing flexibility and creating spaces that adapt to

the land, the context, the passing of time and the people who live there. Collaborating with the client and a diverse design team creates depth. “The project becomes much richer from having many hands involved in the process,” says James.

Thus, rather than being characterised by a specific approach or pattern, Taylor Knights focuses on designing on a project-by-project basis. “Each project is a reflection of the client as well as the particular connection to place,” says Peter. For example, Northcote House is defined by a flexible approach to thinking about the individual spaces as multi-functional entities for the family living there. The use of double-height volumes, skylights and highlight windows allow the house to be in constant connection with the surrounding landscape, whilst also allowing the client to control the aperture and motion of the outside world.





Fitzroy Terrace (left) and Malvern Garden House (right) showcase the architects' reverence for light, space and landscape.

James explains how for each project they ask, “how do we use the site and the context and tie that in with some of the natural beauty that already exists? And how do we create moments that help heighten that connection?” Malvern Garden House, for example, seeks to reposition the home within its immediate, lived-in landscape by utilising the birch tree on site. A triangular skylight that sits above the kitchen welcomes frequent glimpses of that tree as one walks through the space. Concrete is also used, its robust and tactile nature evoking the ruggedness of the land as well as a sense of permanence.

As such, sustainability is an inherent consideration in their design process. James comments, “we are always thinking about the lifespan of the building” and affirms that “the world and the environment in which our work sits are just as important to us as the building itself.” This extends not only to materials used but also to taking a rigorous approach in terms of how they work with space.

Fitzroy Terrace House, for example, contains a large curved concrete ceiling that faces north to let light into the heart of the home, which is accompanied by a 4.5-metre void. This sits next to the dining room, which has a much lower 2.4-metre ceiling, immediately creating a more intimate space. There is also a skylight over the dining room, working almost like a visual clock. Peter reflects on the thoughtful use of space,

“even though it’s essentially an open plan space, you’ve got very different experiences over a very small area.”

Materiality is also a key facet in the way Taylor Knights designs with sustainability in mind. “We appreciate there is a lot of embodied energy in concrete, but it also has longevity, which is an equally important consideration,” says Peter. Taylor Knights favours materials that age well and are durable; it is these types of materials that also typically lend a solid connection to the land. Brickwork is a strong example, the highly traditional material executed in interesting and spatially engaging ways. Hardwoods and natural timbers are also favoured, predominantly internally, as they bring warmth into the interior and tend to weather in the harsh Australian environment.

Much like the foundations of James and Peter’s partnership, a connection to place and regard for preservation and longevity grounds their approach. It is their similar experiences and, in turn, creative attitudes that echo a joint appreciation of speaking to what already exists – the original home, the site, the surrounding context and the client. The magnetism that drew James and Peter together many years ago endures as they reach their 10-year milestone in 2023, continuing to create, fortify and reconnect architecture to the land.

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