



Drift AWAY

THE SEAFARING TALES TOLD BY A HISTORIC HOME
IN VICTORIA'S PORT FAIRY ARE CAREFULLY
PRESERVED FOR ITS BOUTIQUE HOTEL CONVERSION.

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A simple timber stool by Mark Tuckey is set against Colleen Guiney's mixed media mural, *Mr Mason's Relics* (2012) in apartment two of the Drift House. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** the mural, encircling a bathroom pod that separates living from sleeping rooms, abstracts both the colours of the surrounding coastline and items belonging to one of the historic home's former residents. The table is also by Mark Tuckey and the chairs bought from eBay and reupholstered by Clifton Upholstery in a Warwick Fabric. **Details, last pages.**

Apartment three of the Drift House occupies the ground level of the new addition. The hotel's architects, Multiplicity, recycled hardwood from a demolished 1960s extension to create the apartment's wall lining and shelves. The dominant striping of timber kept the bedroom's decorative scheme similarly neutral with Muuto bedside lamps and a vintage chair found on eBay.



When the Victorian coastal town of Port Fairy pipped such beautiful boltholes as Baishihu in Taiwan and Abbeyleix in Ireland for the 2012 title of the World's Most Liveable Community (population cap 20,000), the locals responded with a short film (promptly uploaded to the Internet) that hazards a guess at why the honour was bestowed. "Quiet place... Norfolk pines... heritage buildings... magnificent lifestyle... strong community ownership," they serially gush, rationalising their residency far from the big cities (an almost four-hour drive from Melbourne, seven hours from Adelaide) in a town that was first established as a whaling station in 1835.

It reveals an extraordinary pride in place and local provenance and in part explains why the conversion of one of its oldest, most prominent residences into a boutique hotel went through the protracted process. "It's been a five-year-plus effort," says architect Tim O'Sullivan of Multiplicity, the firm engaged to re-imagine the two-storey, heritage-protected house that had served as home to a rollcall of professions and trades: undertaker, stonemason, architect, publican, doctor, timber merchant, auctioneer, saddler, accordion player and a captain of the militia. "It's the most important building in the most important street" of Port Fairy. He trails off with the 'heritage' hyperbole as his partner, interior designer, Sioux Clark takes over the story. >

Reflecting the wider bushland of national parks, Multiplicity spaced timber battens (facilitating the transmission of light to inner space) to create a forest floor-like separation between kitchen and sleeping rooms in apartment three. The battens were literally pulled from the rubble of the demolition work carried out on site and only given a light sand to retain their sense of history. The floor is polished concrete.

Occupying the entire ground floor of the original bluestone building, **RIGHT**, apartment one features a 'Zuri' bath from Rogerseller in a master bedroom that overlooks a lounge, **BELOW**, set with Jordan's 'Nook' sofa and vintage furniture found on eBay. **OPPOSITE**: known for their creative recycling and wild ways with colour, Multiplicity flipped the original mantelpiece mirror in apartment two then painted all in Dulux 'Garden Pond'. **Details, last pages.**



< The house was invested with so much seafaring history that the couple developed a '*Ghost and Mrs. Muir*' mindset for its redevelopment — the past coexisting with the present in a romantic narrative. In architectural terms this translated to the heritage house being replicated in a new structure — same shape and scale, stripped of high Victorian embellishment — sited directly behind 'the old', such that the bulk of the 'new' was hidden from street view. O'Sullivan and Clark were all for minimising the room count, but maximising the spatial experience and so planned for four self-contained suites (one-apartment-per-floor across the two double-storey structures), requiring that the old house be gutted, its stair re-sited and a hole hammered in its rear wall for connection (via glassed-in entry link) to the new building. While they envisaged the additional structure as a 'shadow' — literally plunged into the black of Butynol (the stuff of swimming pool lining) as both a concession to shipping's everywhere colour and the closed introspection of the Victorian era — the local planners requested more design deference to the old structure. So a compromise was reached with an enveloping metal skin (expressed on one side as louvers to counter overlooking), the perforations of which now make for a wild interior shadow play.

"Thankfully, this property had been bought by former clients who were completely *au fait* with the problems of adapting old architecture," says Clark, recalling the 2005 renovation of the owners' 1940s Richmond warehouse. "That project threw up all the problems that we thought it would and while we initially had reservations about [the clients'] capacity to see it through, they pulled it off."

Applying that project's magpie resourcefulness to what would become known as the 'Drift House', Multiplicity reworked discard from the existing structure while allowing for the modern revolution in regional tourism (far-flung context with five-star form). They also left enough blank canvas for the creativity of one of the clients — a visual merchandiser — who expressionistically channelled local history onto the walls and fabrics in some of the suites.

"We set out with one simple aim: to build the best accommodation in regional Victoria... and we think Drift House is a special place to stay," says the client of the now complete hotel of 'contrasts' that exacted an extraordinary commitment. "It doesn't represent five-star opulence, nor doily-wrapped Victoriana. It is unique, individual, entirely bespoke... and far enough from the city that you can slip into an alternate reality." Invested with the same eccentricity and charm that underwrites the impossible relationship of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* — this too is a love story born of an old spirit meeting modern self-sufficiency. **VL**



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