

# VISION



Prima Donna  
Pole House,  
Great Ocean Road, Victoria

House Style  
Prestige Retail, Melbourne





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## Prima Donna

One of Australia's best-known houses has finally fulfilled its promise as a house of international distinction. Faceted in Viridian glass, it soars towards notoriety with an artful makeover that finally embraces its sublime location.



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## House Style

One of Melbourne's newest retail stores also happens to be one of its grandest. It reprises rather than replaces one of the city's classic Victorian-era boom style buildings.

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HIGH TRANSPARENCY IS KEY TO A HOUSE QUITE UNLIKE ANY OTHER. ONE GRAND NEW RESIDENCE ANCHORS THE SITE WHILE ITS CELEBRITY PARTNER DOES ALL OF THE TALKING. ONE IS SHRINKING VIOLET, THE OTHER...

# PRIMA

Pole House, Great Ocean Road, Fairhaven. Victoria

Principal glazing resource:  
Viridian ThermoTech™ E Double Glazed Units  
incorporating EVantage™, VTough™ Clear

Architect:  
F2 Architecture

Photography:  
Peter and Jennifer Hyatt

Text:  
Peter Hyatt



CORE PRODUCTS



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NOISE



CLEAR VISION



DECORATIVE



BUSHFIRE



STRUCTURAL



STORM



SECURITY

# DONNA



ONCE THE  
SEMI-ENCLOSED  
MODEL OF SUBURBIA  
ON A STICK, THE  
NEW VERSION IS THE  
GLASSY PAVILION  
WITH SHTICK.

**Right**

House thrusts towards ocean while disguising the cinematic surprise to the south.

The Pole House at Fairhaven on Victoria's Great Ocean Road is a landmark structure in any language. Politically incorrect in almost every way, it is the triumph of audacity over courtly good manners. It's the structural exclamation mark with a grin. In some people's eyes its rude and crude. For others it's the welcome rule-breaker.

It emerged in the mid-1970s as a stunning climax on a treacherous, unstable site. Born again with more glass and sharp technology, its recent transformation fully capitalizes on a peerless vantage point.

Once the semi-enclosed model of suburbia on a stick, the new version is the glassy pavilion with shtick. Forget ideas of anonymity, here is the extroverted breeze-catcher and sun-baker revealed to the world. Part fishbowl on a pedestal, the effect isn't purely vanity. It commands magisterial views east and west as far as the eye can see, which in this instance happens to be a very long way.

Architect Franco Fiorentini knew tampering with iconoclastic design was to tempt fate. Plenty of great work has been brought to its knees in the name of home improvements and he was in no mood to trash his own good name in the process.

The original pole house initially attracted scorn with its rocket-like construction that seemed to fly in the face of planning regulations. The house gradually settled in the psyche of travelers like an old friend and as an unofficial exclamation mark to usher in the Great Ocean Road.

News some six years ago that the house faced re-development aroused fears that its eccentricity could be lost. Perched 15metres above its vertiginous ridge position, the pole house is the house that could never be built today. Height restrictions would see such an idea shot out of the sky.













#### **Above**

Living area now exploits full site potential with sliding glass doors and minimal balustrade of glass.

How to make something new, how to respect the original, how to maintain the original's tour de force? Franco Fiorentini of F2 Architecture and his clients looked, listened and clearly interpreted possibilities. Their response pays off spectacularly. Its previously cramped interior and a layout focused around a quaint cruciform core instead of the views, were out of step with contemporary needs. What's more, his clients decided to include a two-storey counterpoint residence that sits unobtrusively at the rear of the site amongst the vegetation, yet rises to the occasion in subtle ways. Charcoal steel cladding and Viridian glazing package both client residence and the extroverted satellite rental property pole-house.

Using the skeleton of the original, Fiorentini worked like sculptor and surgeon to re-focus the project. The result finally fulfills the promise of the original gesture. The result, save new solid walls upon approach from the footbridge, offers a cinematic take on the coast, ocean and sky.

**Fiorentini discusses the re-birth of a landmark and how materials were the key to full environmental connection.**

#### **What was your immediate site visit response when the idea was mooted six years ago?**

I remember the experience from the balcony of the original house was sensational, overwhelming, yet from within, the experience was underwhelming. I wondered how it could be so good on the deck, yet so disappointing inside. It was a very suburban response with a spectacular idea about freedom. I remember the original balustrade had textured glass so that when seated, most of the view was lost.

#### **How did that initial experience influence your thinking?**

The house just shouted potential. It felt constrained and unfulfilled. The original house was evenly fenestrated on all four sides with limited views towards the sea and land. We decided to make the north facing, land-side reasonably solid to maintain privacy from the footbridge approach. I could definitely see this brilliant opportunity to enhance what already existed.





**Below and Right**

Bedroom forms part of open plan with views towards Lorne township and Otway Ranges. Central core contains key services.





**Narrow but serviceable balcony permits  
360 degree access with Viridian EVantage™  
Double-Glazed Units offering stunning clarity.**





**Yet it's not really a radical re-working of form.**

We wanted to alter the experience of approach and occupancy. More importantly, once across the bridge and threshold through the front door, the visitor is really detached from the land and floating as it were. Those two key walls facing the ocean are now fully glazed. We wanted to enhance the architectural experience rather than overhaul its essential design. Substance rather than style was really the aim.

**Were you tempted to stray from the original to make your own mark?**

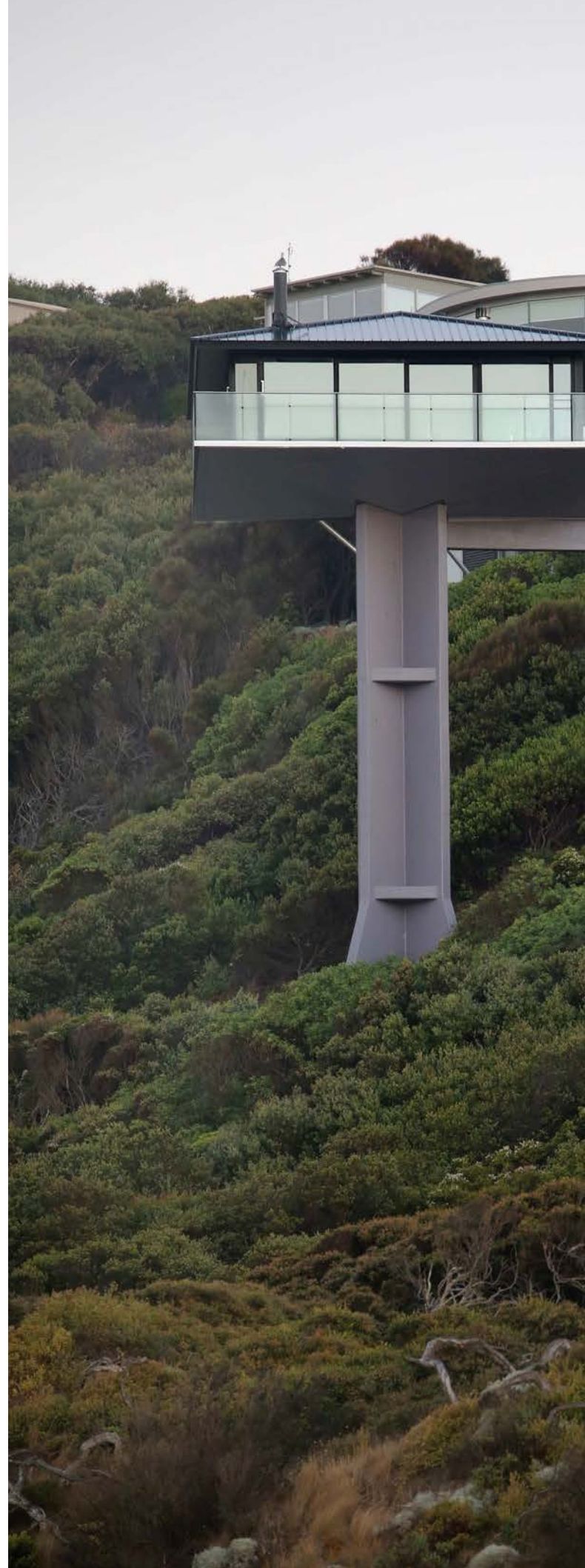
We were conscious of the elements that made this house so expressive and singular. It's a politically incorrect house and yet it is an act of great bravado. It's probably three times the height limit of what would be permitted today. We made the choice to maintain the profile but re-work that original gesture with new materials. A whole forest of these structures along the coast may not be great, but the fact is someone did this and it's worth celebrating.

**Were you daunted by the prospect of re-working such an iconic structure?**

It's so well known and there's an expectation that comes with working on iconic buildings. In the end you have to knuckle down and bring design rigour. That was ultimately the best way to maintain design integrity.

**It has always been a very polarizing statement from the outset, attracting and repelling in equal measure.**

We saw it as a very iconic part of popular culture. It's a brilliant act of bravado. Looking at it closely there wasn't quite the quality you would see with one of the great architectural masters, but we were deferential to the original idea. We were also adding a new house to the site as a background house and not competing with the visual impact of the original.







**It's a very specific object – barely touching the ground and yet having this impact because of the way it projects like a piston or piece of sculpture as the centre of attention.**

The clients had aspirations that said 'look, it's fun, but we want it to be truly spectacular'. That's what guided us. It is spectacular. It has this incomparable aspect and sense of place equivalent in impact to many of the great architectural landmarks anywhere in the world. I'm not claiming it to be one of those, but the experience is truly memorable and perhaps comparable with some of those great landmarks.

**You've respected the original yet given it this entirely new life. What are the essential changes?**

From a distance the two angled walls to the ocean let you see right through. Great houses have a promise and that promise is there on the approach. So that promise of an experience is important. The promise here has been increased. The footbridge for instance, appears even more precipitous than before. Glass really helps in that shedding of structure and substance yet heightens the sensory experience. There is just enough sense of vertigo there. Most people will love it. Some will possibly feel uncomfortable. Visitors crossing the footbridge effectively walk towards two dark walls with a narrow entry. Once they enter the doorway they are really sprung out into this other space and that's a pretty exhilarating space to be.

**Is there a key architectural test?**

The memorable parts of that house are the pole and platform first and then a silhouette of the house on top. Both of those are retained. That wasn't because we were forced to, but because we felt that was the best response to this site. As you drive past it's much more transparent and it now has that heightened sense of promise.

**Left**

Renovation retains the pole house structural bones and plan while blending layout efficiencies around cruciform column and glazing program.





View north to main residence reveals modernist sensibility with undercroft for guests' vehicles.



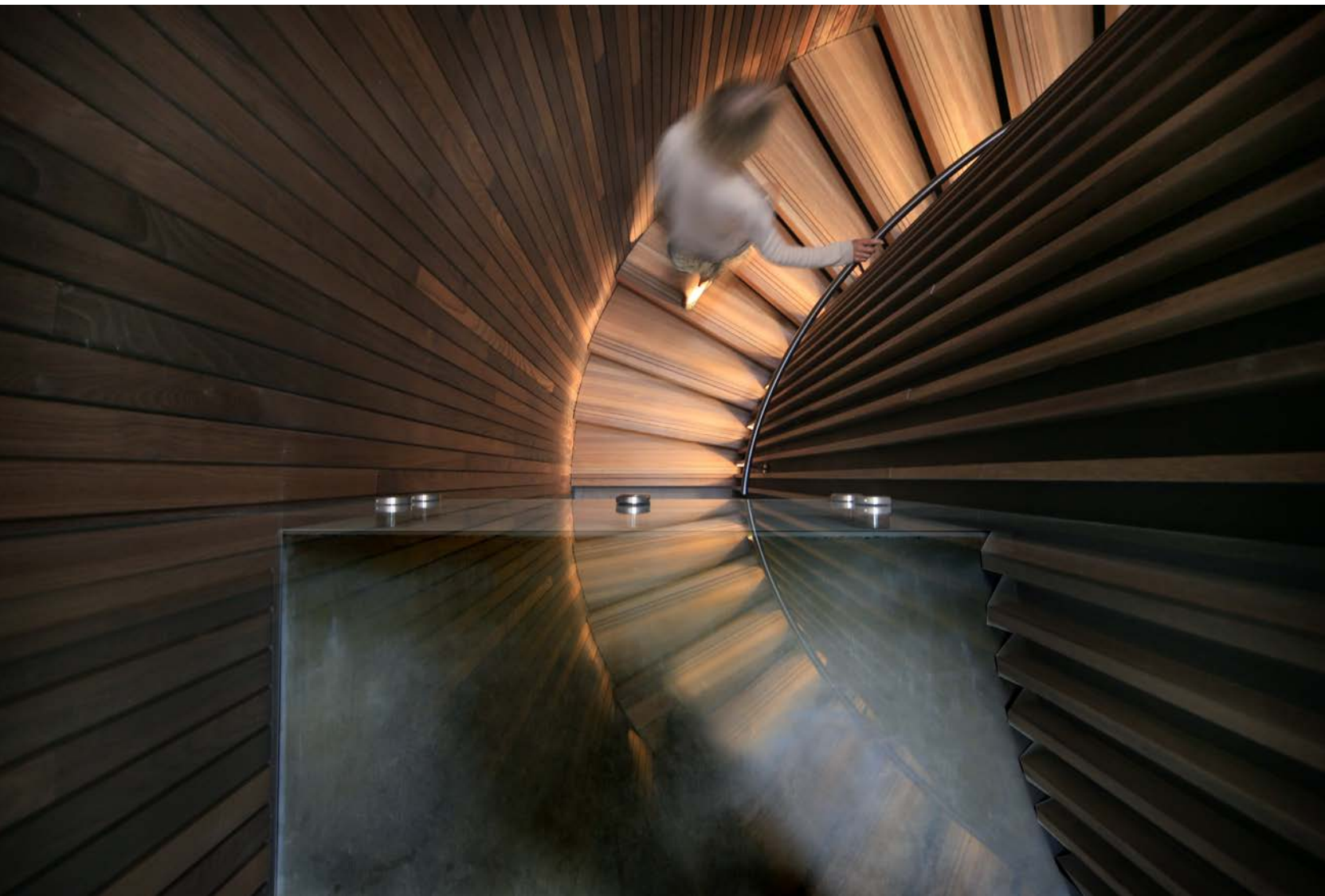




**Above and Right**  
Main living volume and bedroom towards north reveal a materiality of anchored concrete, refined timber and disappearing glass.







**The Pole House gets all of the attention, but the main house is hardly any slouch.**

As houses go it's possibly an even nicer house than the pole house to live in. They're different. Both are quite dramatic. Each has a certain bravado and glass is at the heart of that heroic connection to place while also offering more intimate spaces for day to day living.

**Did you select local sourced glass for a specific reason or philosophy?**

Our preference is local whenever possible because of technical back-up and quality assurance. There are really a couple of reasons. One is the longevity of supply and service but also the continuity of technical service. It's very easy to go out and buy cheap, imported glazing but if you want to use glass in well-detailed, long-life and well-crafted assemblies, you need quality technical back-up. The only way the technical team can be there to help you to achieve those outcomes is to use their product. Sometimes tenderers substitute glass. We try to clearly specify what is required. We've used Viridian's product with confidence over many years.



**Left and Below**

Dramatic armature of central staircase and lift. Glass balustrade repeats staircase and reveals polished concrete flooring throughout key living areas.



### **How about technical assistance from Viridian?**

Our criteria was that the glass had to meet comfort issues so we used double glazing and LowE to reduce heat gain and glare. Weather conditions are often severe so windows were treated as an ensemble. The visual performance was equally important to our clients. They didn't want tint to alter the colours and light so that our choice of glass should appear as natural and as clear as possible. In other words 'disappear' as much as possible. Some glass appears green, or pink, or blue and it detracts from how a building sits in the landscape and how the landscape appears from the building. Standard glass doesn't have the performance we needed but Viridian provided us with that exceptionally clear rendering of the view inside and out.

### **Are there other qualities glass contributes?**

In such a harsh environment glass is a relatively low maintenance material. Both houses have also been designed so that all of the windows to both houses are easily accessible for cleaning. The hillside, larger house has identical glazing specifications so again it offers excellent visibility. The pole house offers the freedom and escape of a classic weekender while the main house is somewhere to retreat. In effect one is the ultimate tree-house, the other a little more cave-like, but still with those wonderful windows that remind you of why you live in this part of the world.

### **What about the bushfire risk?**

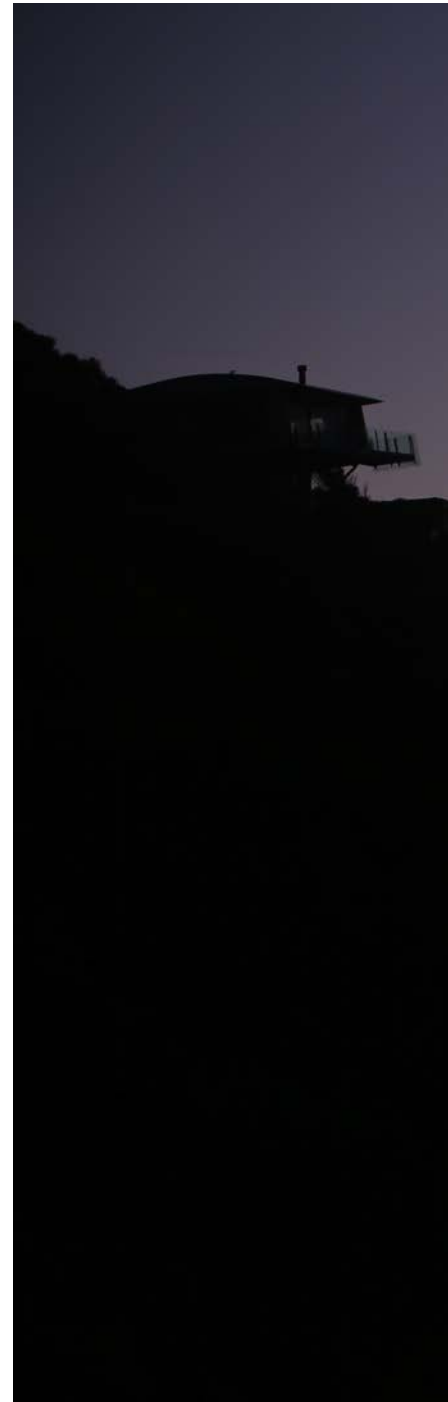
The pole house sits above the flame zone and so the glazing didn't require shutters. The glass sits well back from the edge balustrade to protect the box while any up-draught will carry embers straight past. The previous house used timber cladding so we won approval without too much drama. Concealed metal shutters can close off all exposed glazed areas of the main residence.

### **Do you have a standout project moment?**

It sounds like the cliché but it was the owners' faces when they laid eyes on the completed project. It was a six-year process from brief to completion. When you work through all of the regulations, bushfire and building issues, that moment of completion and overjoyed client is hard to go past.

### **Below**

Iconic by day and night. The pole-house silhouette as unofficial marker of a dramatic connection between land, sea and sky.





## Credits

### Project

Pole House  
(and principal  
residence)

### Architect

F2 Architecture

### Design Team

Franco Fiorentini  
Frank Marioli  
Vivienne Mackley  
Gim Ong  
Matt Sime  
Jeremy Schluter

### Builder

Go Construction,  
Dragovitch

### Structural Engineer

Meyer Consulting Engineer

### ESD Consultant

Blue Lotus

### Windows

AWS

### Principal Glass Provider

Viridian

### Principal Glazing

Viridian ThermoTech™  
E Double Glazed Units  
incorporating EVantage™  
Balustrade: VTough™ Clear







S



# HOUSE TYLE

VIRIDIAN'S HIGH-END ASSAULTGUARD™ GLASS PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN A TRANSFORMATION OF DISPLAY WINDOWS AS DESIGN SET PIECES IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. A DIVERSE RANGE OF HIGH TECH. GLAZING DELIVERS PERFORMANCE AND TEXTURE ACROSS ALL FIVE LEVELS TO ENSURE THE STORE'S SAVVY FIRST AND LASTING IMPRESSION.

Retail Store, Cnr. Flinders Lane  
and Russell Street, Melbourne

Architect:

Trethowan Architecture

Principal Glazing Resource:

Viridian AssaultGuard™, ThermoTech™ E Double Glazed Units  
incorporating EVantage™, ComfortPlus™ Grey, VTough Clear,  
DecorMirror™ Clear, Seraphic™ Standard

Photography:

Exteriors – Peter Hyatt, Interiors – Steve Young, Young & Percival

Text:

Peter Hyatt



CORE PRODUCTS



ENERGY



NOISE



CLEAR VISION



DECORATIVE



BUSHFIRE



STRUCTURAL



STORM



SECURITY



**Left and Above**

Conversion from gloom and congestion to sleek simplicity.

**Right**

Developer and architects artful understatement retains historic motifs and kind modernity.





This fashion retailer is a byword for haute couture whose founder championed simplicity. Her philosophy of quality before quantity shaped unprecedented brand recognition. So much so she was the only fashion designer in Time magazine's list of the 20th century's 100 Most Influential People.

The empire continues to remain true to its origins of classic perfumes and fashion apparel. Its retail stores have plenty to live up to reflecting a 105-year history with a timeless heartbeat.

The firm's new Melbourne storefront on the corner of Russell St. and Flinders Lane is in the classic mould and almost anti-fashion with its preference for the golden age of elegance and grandeur rather than busy geometries, or giddy facades.

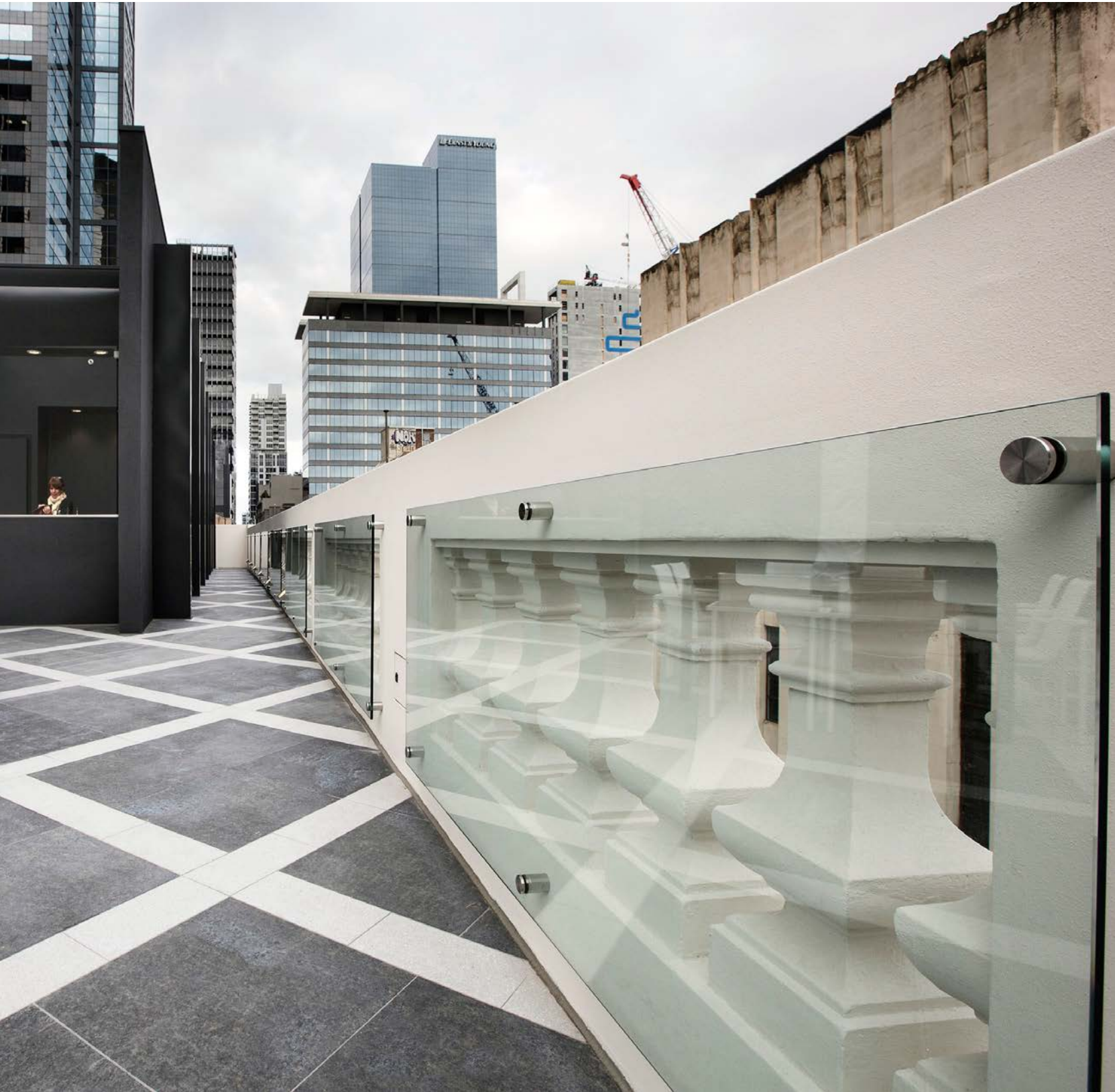
This former bank building most recently Scientology headquarters, appeared to be stumbling towards oblivion, or party mask. Developer extraordinaire David Marriner saw potential not readily apparent to others and realised a sharp connection with the Paris-bred brand.

In the process, Marriner sought the services of Melbourne's Trethowan Architecture to help reinstate a building that had fallen on hard times. Working with New York interiors architect Peter Marino, Trethowan capture the grand, boom-time Melbourne prior to Flinders Lane transition as rag-trade strip.

Classical façade elements are punctuated with Viridian's AssaultGuard™ impact resistant glass to protect the store's high-end merchandise without compromise to clarity.







**Below**  
High fashion feature windows beautifully  
protected by Viridian's AssaultGuard™







Project architects Richard Wood and Bruce Trethowan explain the challenge of a project highly tailored for client and clientele.

**Why the Flinders Lane address with most prestige labels in Collins St.?**

BT: The location is interesting because the parallel in New York for instance, is that the more edgy retail isn't located in Fifth Avenue, but in areas such as Soho. That's one of the benefits of being on the back of Collins St. It has the breathing space here for it's own sense of place and as architects we wanted to highlight that position.

**The city is bursting with development – much of it expedient. It's encouraging to see a project so attuned to and respectful of the original urban texture.**

RW: There was an opportunity not to simply stack the top of the building with a heap of additional floors. The result is much more in context with the way the city was, so it does have a terrific sense of scale and respect for history.

**How challenging is it to create a store with a much more authentic relationship to the city?**

BT: It was important for the architecture to fit the store. The result looks as though it could be in Paris, or Melbourne as it once was. That classical façade gives clients the opportunity to just come along and slot right in so it offers this really accessible, wonderful fit. There was quite a challenge about installing a retailer because it originally had so many columns on the ground floor. We had to eliminate columns and that required some pretty complex strengthening of ceiling beams.

An ensemble of Viridian performance glass delivers the perfect project gift-wrap.







**Were there issues about working with a demanding client that made your job especially testing?**

RW: This retail is certainly different from almost any other store. It's configured as a series of interlocking rooms for display, sitting and changing rooms. There isn't that open archetypal space full of clothes racks. Customers proceed through a sequence of rooms that offer very specific experiences of style and quality.

**Can you elaborate on the new circulation strategy that frees up the previously congested space?**

BT: The building now has three entrances – Flinders Lane, The Hyatt Hotel and Russell St. This didn't concern us because the ground and first floor were very much something the retailer would manage. They proposed a staircase in a quite pivotal position and once this was located the rest of the design coalesced. It addressed access and this felt like the way it should have always been. The interior design role and our role were very separate.

**What signal is the design intended to send?**

RW: The building has been respected. It's very rare to see that in Melbourne. This was a very run-down building. I think people recognise that a pretty neglected classic building has been brought back to life.

**How important is the role of glass in creating that seductive storefront given the importance of attraction to and the invitation for the passer-by?**

BT: Natural light levels inside were extremely poor and window-sills were considerably above floor level which meant quite obstructed views into and from the ground level. Changing the sill height levels improved the whole ambience of the interiors. There are wonderful views into and from the street at ground level for instance and the steel framed windows above add a lovely verticality in those horizontal spaces with views towards the street trees.

**Given the prestige brand and value of goods, you selected Viridian's AssaultGuard™. Can you explain that choice?**

BT: It provides a barrier to forced entry, being designed to resist attack from a variety of hand tools typically used.

**Are there any tell-tale signs that the glazing is such an impact resistant, high-performance glass type?**

RW: One of the nice things about the glass is that it doesn't immediately stand out as some specialty type of glass nor compromise views in either direction. Clarity and light transmission is fantastic.

**What were the main energy issues?**

RW: The challenge of the main elevation is the heat loss with such big glass panels that had to be double-glazed and insulated with argon-filled glass on the upper floors. Ground floor uses AssaultGuard™. Because of orientation and over-shadowing, heat gain isn't really such an issue. The main Russell Street elevation is relatively narrow and the bigger presence along Flinders Lane is south facing.

**What assistance did Viridian's technical team provide?**

RW: Viridian's website is very good. It has the performance characteristics and technical data easily accessible. What else would you use but Viridian glass? The product range is really extensive. When you consider that, why would you go anywhere else? They also installed all of the glass throughout the project and did a flawless job.

**The low and high points of the project?**

RW: Excavation of an entirely new sub-floor was a huge test. It required perimeter piles and concrete slab laid on top without disturbing the structure. Opening up the floors and allowing daylight to enter was pretty special.

BT: There's a new roof top garden. The building could have been lost, but now has a whole new lease of life.





**Right**

Unobtrusive, elegant glazing performance to match the Parisian-bred label.

**Credits**

**Project**

Retail Store, Cnr. Flinders Lane and Russell Street, Melbourne

**Architect**

Trethowan Architecture

**Retail Interior Design:**

Peter Marino

**Design team**

Richard Wood, Bruce Trethowan

**Builder**

APM Group

**Principal Glass Provider**

Viridian

**Principal Glazing**

Display Windows – AssaultGuard™, ThermoTech™

E Double Glazed Units incorporating EVantage™, ComfortPlus™ Grey

Balustrade – VTough™ Clear

Internal Mirrors – DecorMirror™ Clear

Bathroom Frameless Doors – Seraphic™ Standard

Roof Glazing – VLam™ Clear custom laminate

**Project Cost**

\$10 million

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