

"EAT AT A LOCAL RESTAURANT TONIGHT – GET THE CREAM SAUCE"

Kiin by Georgie Shepherd Interior Design reveals an adoration for food, community and serendipity.

TEXT HELENA MORGAN PHOTOGRAPHY JENNA PIWANSKI



It is clear to see the influence of the late and great Anthony Bourdain on Ben Bertei and David Wickwar, co-owners of newly opened Asian-Australian fusion restaurant Kiin. Patrons are greeted by an audio recording of Bourdain singing out to them through the speakers in the restaurant bathroom.

When the eponymous founder and director of Georgie Shepherd Interior Design (GSiD) first met Bertei and Wickwar, she was sent a Bourdain quote by the pair to not only help guide the design process, but also communicate their mission, and love of food and people.

“The idea was to create a modern Asian-Australian restaurant with a really strong sense of memory. In the design we were guided by questions of what does it mean to sit down to a meal, and how does it make you feel?” recalls Shepherd.

The end result is a relaxed, vibrant and warm restaurant that skilfully marries elements of Thai and Australian design – earthy tones, natural timbers, raw plaster, exposed concrete and terracotta that boasts similarities to Thai cooking pots.

Patrons are enticed to linger and lounge at Kiin as the sights, smells, sounds and aura of the kitchen waft around both inside and outside the restaurant. You will be drawn in by the food and hospitality, and intrigued by the theatre.

GEORGIE SHEPHERD INTERIOR DESIGN

Shepherd founded the proudly Adelaide-based practice 11 years ago, and is now represented by a small but vigorous team of six interior designers.

The practice primarily specialises in hospitality and residential projects, and promotes a company and design ethos grounded in honest, warm and inviting interiors.

“We like to be as natural and connected to materiality as possible,” says Shepherd.

The practice has collaborated with numerous artisans and designers in championing an innately narrative-driven approach to design. Shepherd explains that determining what story is begging to be told via design is the first step the team seeks to achieve when embarking on a project.

“Narrative is a key underpinning to all our designs – we always return to what we’re doing and why we’re doing it,” she says.

KIIN'S GENESIS

Shepherd first met Bertei and Wickwar when they were searching for vacant shopfront spaces in the Adelaide CBD.

The restaurateurs were enchanted by GSiD’s look and feel and enlisted the practice to design the interior fitout for their local eatery that would pay homage to the colour, chaos and spectacle of street food markets in Thailand.

Shepherd reflects on how the team drew inspiration from Bertei’s knowledge and experience gained from working at renowned Melbourne restaurant Longrain, taking the post of head chef at Spirit House and opening his own restaurants Longtime and Same Same in Brisbane’s Fortitude Valley.

Bertei’s business partner Wickwar is also no novice to the hospitality industry, having founded the Melbourne wine bar Vaporetto, which was then sold in 2021.



ABOVE Kiin is a relaxed, vibrant and warm restaurant that marries elements of Thai and Australian design – earthy tones, natural timbers, raw plaster and exposed concrete and terracotta.

BELOW Owners Ben Bertei and David Wickwar wanted to create a theatrical dining experience that includes patrons in the behind-the-scenes of a fast-paced restaurant.





LEFT Kiin thrives as both an energised daytime destination and moody and sultry space at night.

RIGHT The interior fitout glows due to touches such as linen covered seating and locally sourced handcrafted timber.



THE FACTS

PROJECT KIIN

PRACTICE GEORGIE SHEPHERD INTERIOR DESIGN

LOCATION ADELAIDE / TARNTANYA

Ceilings were moved, walls pared back and the front of the building opened up to not only foster a connection to the urban streetscape, but to also imbue the space with a sense of warmth and vitality. The interior fitout glows via such touches as linen covered seating and locally handcrafted timber furniture.

“We brought in as many authentic and pared back natural creamy tones, textures and layers as we could,” says Shepherd.

A FLOOR PLAN ENHANCING THEATRICALS AND CHARM

The GSiD director also speaks of how the floor plan reflects Bertei and Wickwar’s desire to create a theatrical dining experience that includes patrons in the behind-the-scenes of a fast-paced and high-functioning restaurant – guests can feel as if they’re working through the motions of creating a meal alongside the chef.

This demonstrates the power of design and space in transforming a standard dining experience into something that is immersive, engaging, exciting and connects people from all walks of life.

Shepherd emphasises the importance of hospitality spaces inviting the user in via a concoction of music, design and lighting – guaranteeing comfort, intimacy and also togetherness.

FROM DAYTIME TO AFTER-HOURS

Another facet of Kiin’s charm is that it thrives as both a vibrant and energised daytime destination and a moody and sultry space at night. Shepherd rejoices in how the design allows the space to shine at any time of the day.

“I think that’s really successful when you can achieve something like that – when you walk in there and you’re always surprised at how warm and welcoming and fun it feels,” she says.

The idea of a modern Asian-Australian restaurant with an inextinguishable connection to memory and place began to form – the envisaged atmosphere would be akin to a bustling and open street market, yet reimagined in an Australian vernacular.

WHAT IS AUSTRALIAN DESIGN?

Although a dark, narrow and derelict building nestled just off Adelaide’s Angas Street awaited GSiD, the team quickly unpacked the tenets and bedrocks of Australian design to fulfil the ‘Australian’ component of Kiin’s offering as a modern Asian-Australian eatery.

“We considered what Australian design is, and how do we pare it back and strip it down in a hospitality setting?” says Shepherd.

The team were inspired, not discouraged, by the building’s lack of character and flair – deciding to interrogate the potential and spirit of the building, and what could be done to reinvigorate and transform the space into an 80-seat capacity restaurant.

“We pulled back the stone on the side of the building because it fired onto an alleyway, and just tried to restore as much as we could to give it that character – but that was a big challenge,” admits Shepherd.



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GEORGIE SHEPHERD

lessons learned

01 Adelaide-based interior design practice Georgie Shepherd Interior Design designed the interior fitout for Kiin, a modern interpretation of an Asian-Australian fusion restaurant. **02** Design is grounded in heartiness, togetherness and the theatrical element intrinsic to cooking and dining. **03** Owners Ben Bertei and David Wickwar cite the late and great Anthony Bourdain as a major influence. **04** Patrons are enticed to linger and lounge at Kiin as the sights, smells, sounds and aura of the kitchen waft around both inside and outside the restaurant. **05** Kiin demonstrates the power of design and space in transforming a standard dining experience into something that is immersive, engaging, exciting and connects people from all walks of life.

OPPOSITE ABOVE Ben Bertei and David Wickwar saw Kiin as paying homage to the colour, chaos and spectacle of street food markets in Thailand, yet reimagined in an Australian vernacular.

ABOVE The team were inspired, not discouraged, by the building's lack of character and flair and they decided to interrogate the potential and spirit of the building.

BELOW GSID brought in authentic and paired back natural creamy tones, textures and layers.





TAKING THE PLUNGE

This project was also based on deep trust and respect, according to Shepherd. Bertei and Wickwar were newcomers to Adelaide and diving head-first into a new adventure and project in a city with which they were wholly unfamiliar was no mean feat.

Investing resources and time into something with a hazy and uncertain outcome is always daunting, yet Shepherd confirms how much it paid off.

“We really had to be smart with how we approached the design and eventually designed the space – we just had to justify everything,” she says.

ENHANCING WHAT YOU HAVE

It would be an understatement to say that engaging with practices of sustainability in a project is now instinctive for designers and architects.

Shepherd perceives sustainability in design as now involving a process of enhancing what you have and eliminating unnecessary steps and actions, which was the case for Kiin.

“We were obviously sustainable from the get-go by working with a pre-existing building. And we retained the concrete floor and pulled back the ceiling to spotlight a real and raw feeling – you also then don’t have to put another filing line on top, so it’s sustainable, but also cost-effective,” she says.

The team relished the fact that this design choice meant some parts were patchy, as it only further added to the charm and rustic appeal of the space.

AESTHETICALLY TIMELESS

Sustainability also didn’t just emerge in terms of the materials and processes used by GSiD, yet also in the name of aesthetic timelessness.

GSiD adamantly avoids plucking the low hanging fruit of design trends and instead opts to design something that will endure, and only increase in beauty and sophistication with age.

“It should never just be a ‘design at the moment’ – it should be something that will age and that you hope will not be turned over in the next five years,” says Shepherd.

SHEDDING THE CULTURAL CRINGE

Shepherd concludes by saying she is pleased that the Australian design community is shedding the ‘cultural cringe’ and the once insatiable desire to imitate trends from Europe and North America.

There now seems to be a willingness to instead promote a design that is quintessentially Australian – an aesthetic that can manifest in many different ways, such as co-designing with Country, interrogating the memory and history of a place, or even designing a fresh interpretation of an Asian-Australian eatery, which Kiin has accomplished.