

BRITISH COOL LUXE PIECES AND PLACES

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# NOBLE CALLING

Rome-based practice Lazzarini Pickering continue their ascendance with prestige design projects around the globe.

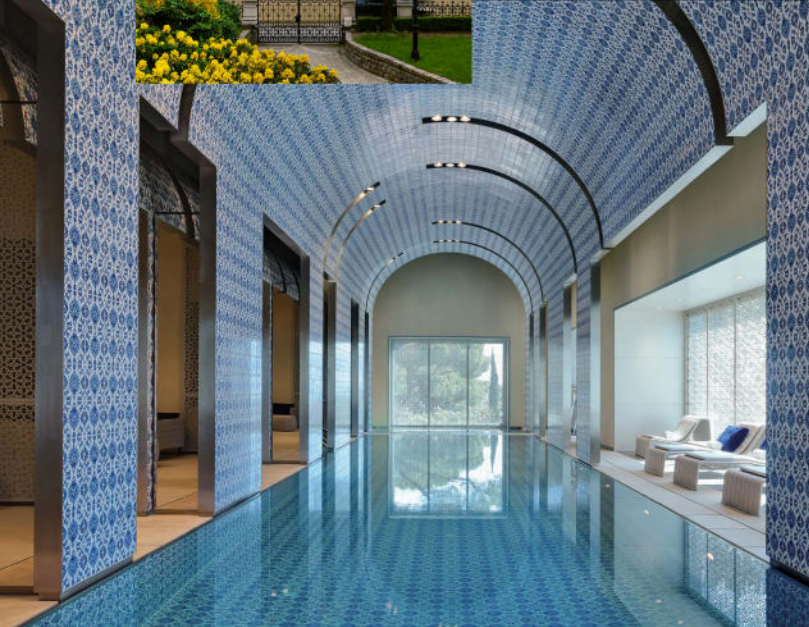
Edited by **KAREN McCARTNEY** Portrait **STEFANO COLAGRANDE**



Architects Carl Pickering and Claudio Lazzarini, photographed in their Via Giulia apartment beside a sculpture by Fausto Melotti.



From top left The futuristic design of Wallypower 118 redefined the boating genre. // Icebergs Dining Room and Bar in Bondi, revisited after 20 years, leans into the tones of its waterside location. // Fendi stores with an 'abacus of elements' in raw steel for display were revolutionary. // Sense Hotel in Sofia, Bulgaria. // An arch of tiles is all-encompassing in a Beirut spa.



PHOTOGRAPHY: GILES MARTIN-RAGET (WALLYPOWER), STEVEN WOODBURN (ICEBERGS), MATTEO PIAZZA (ALL OTHERS)

**ARCHITECT CARL PICKERING** is sipping his morning tea at his studio in Via delle Mantellate, in the famous Trastevere district of Rome, as we connect through the miracle of Zoom. He's one half of Italian/Australian practice Lazzarini Pickering Architetti (LPA) and I have known of his work with business and life partner Claudio Lazzarini since I was editor of *marie claire lifestyle* in the late 1990s. I have taken note of their trajectory with brands such as Fendi, Valentino, Montblanc, Wally and Ferrero; I visited their fascinating project, Casa Museo in Milan, and checked out Maurice Terzini's iconic Sydney restaurant, Icebergs Dining Room and Bar, which they revamped 20 years after their original design.

Carl is clear that his early interest in architecture was fostered by his formidable aunt, Beryl Guertner, who was the launch editor of *House & Garden* magazine in 1948. "She was friend to immigré architects Harry Seidler and Hugh Buhrich as well as supporting the work of locals Sydney Ancher, Robin Boyd, Grant and Mary Featherston and Marion Hall Best," says Carl. "She also believed in the democracy of design and wanted to help service men returning from WWII to build economical but architect-designed homes through the DIY kit houses she published." Beryl's library of international architecture magazines was a portal to the world of design, and on his 16th birthday, Carl asked for a subscription to *Casa Vogue*. At 20, he moved to study architecture at the University of Venice, which he notes, "Everybody thought it was romantic and glamorous, but it was really tough." It was defining of his life and career as he met Claudio, a qualified architect seven years his senior. After a brief stint with Enzo Mari, Claudio went out alone and they set up Lazzarini Pickering in 1982.

"Much of the work at the beginning was with Fendi: showrooms, fair installations, exhibitions and show scenography," says Carl. "Working with the five Fendi sisters, each with their particular area of expertise, was incredible." As well as more than 150 projects for the brand, built between 1982 and 2003, they designed the Fendi-Karl Lagerfeld show at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome (1985) and also worked on private homes for the sisters in Rome, Capri, Paris and New York.

One project that illustrates the enduring nature of their work is the Fendi flagship store in Rome (1997) – one of 80 boutiques they designed around the world – where traditional furnishings were replaced with an 'abacus of elements' to build a three-dimensional internal architecture of overlapping raw steel components (which he termed 'noble poverty') to form display shelving, counters and tabletops that could create site-specific configurations for each boutique. "We wanted visitors to have a sense of a theatrical mise-en-scène in which, there being no separation between boutique space and shop window, they act alongside the objects on display, and the experience of the brand's unique and precious products becomes more direct."

Their collaboration with Fendi lasted for over 20 years, and client loyalty has become a defining quality of their practice. "We have a current client for whom we've undertaken 28 projects, and we are also now working with the second generation of the family. Our skill is that we are good listeners and we ask our clients to talk to us in terms of sensations, not objects," says Carl. They don't have a formulaic style, rather they have an approach, and while there are linguistic elements that you can detect in their work from the beginning, the outcomes are incredibly diverse. They even call their work 'site-specific portraits of clients' and their open-ended design process yields inventive results.

For a hotel dating from 1325 – the Gasthof Bad Dreikirchen in Barbiano, South Tyrol – they introduced a flexibility of use into the traditional wooden balconies with sliding platforms that form



Clockwise from top left 'The Bluff Villa' in the Chilterns, UK, responds to its site and history with a contemporary form and classical references. // The scheme for 'Elaine' in Sydney's Point Piper didn't proceed when the client sold. // Interior of the Benetti Motopanfilo 37M with its restrained palette of materials: teak, mahogany, white lacquer and polished stainless steel. // The LPA-designed 'Murena' chair from Marta Sala Éditions. // Casa-Museo is a converted silversmith workshop in Milan – now forming an art-filled home and exhibition space.

benches and tables when pulled into the balcony and protrude from the building when pushed out. "The theme of transformation is again central: the simple repositioning of furniture modifies the facade, producing ever-different plays of light and shadow," says Carl. This project was presented at the 2004 Venice Biennale in the Italian Pavilion alongside a villa in Positano (in the Cities on Water section), where the driving idea was a collection of antique Vietri ceramic tiles threading through the two-storey house on a ribbon of steel to form horizontal and vertical surfaces.

While these point to their search for the primary idea, there is a parallel emphasis in the practice on the technical, and research into new materials, which has led to a number of award-winning innovations, particularly in the world of nautical design. "I'm not a boating person," says Carl, "but our research has allowed us to experiment in ways that have altered the course of boat design."

Their external and interior design of the Wallypower 118, begun in 1999, still looks revolutionary today. Material research and advanced technology has driven its sculptural form, and the glass and carbon-fibre prism creates complete visual integration of the outside decks with the interior. LPA designs have been recognised at the highest level, and their Wally 80 series of faster cruiser sloops won the coveted 2008 ADI Compasso d'Oro Industrial Design Prize.

From sea to land, where a focus on landscape has always been a vital element of their work, they are currently developing cutting-edge biodiversity strategies for two large working farms in Puglia and Sardinia, while an underground courtyard villa on Meganisi island in Greece is entirely covered with local flora and olive trees.

Furniture design for individual projects has also found a broader audience through their longstanding relationship with

Marta Sala Éditions, with whom they've collaborated for nearly 10 years. Working initially with the architects' archive of designs, Marta was drawn to their specific 'solution-oriented' approach. The collaboration continues with nine successful collections to date. "The architects not only respond and solve the need, they apply their signature cultural and couture approach to it, generating furniture of unforgettable significance," says Marta.

Beyond their work across Europe, Australian commissions have always played a part in the practice's output. Working on Icebergs Dining Room and Bar, they revisited the interior for the 20th anniversary with a palette that continues to echo the seascape and pool below with the introduction of hand-glazed Tuscan tile tables in turquoises, aquamarines, blues and greens. In an extension of the brand presence, they're developing a project to bring Icebergs to Sydney International Airport. "We are always careful with the precious DNA of the original," says Carl.

Architecture can be a brutal business and a recent disappointment was the shelving of their design for 'Elaine', an historic property in Sydney's Point Piper, originally owned by the Fairfax family. The LPA scheme preserved the historic core while introducing a curved contemporary facade plus a 20-metre lap pool and rooftop tennis court. It failed to go ahead when owners Atlassian founder Scott Farquhar and his wife, Kim Jackson, decided to sell.

According to Carl, though, what always survives is the Lazzarini Pickering personal and creative partnership. "We are lucky to be able to have really important discussions on ski lifts or lying in bed or whatever. Our work is with us 24/7." And with a wealth of returning clients, many of whom guard their privacy and don't want their homes publicised, what we do see is seemingly the tip of a very well-curated iceberg. [lazzarinipickering.com](http://lazzarinipickering.com); [@lazzarinipickering](https://twitter.com/lazzarinipickering)