

Fabulous in the City



EXTRAPOLATING TROPES OF '70S POP CULTURE, FUTURISM AND THE
JETSONS, OVOLO IS EXACTLY WHAT A POST-COVID WORLD NEEDS – FUN.

TEXT GILLIAN SERISIER PHOTOGRAPHY SEAN FENNESSY



Studio's Lona Miso, featuring the phrase 'Metelo en la boca': Spanish for 'put it in your mouth' rides proud across the restaurant wall.



Designed in 2019 and constructed throughout 2020, “The original intent for a micro hotel of shared room-type accommodation quickly went out the window as we waved goodbye to backpackers,” says Luchetti Krelle (LK) principal Rachel Luchetti. Instead, LK recognised the cachet of South Yarra as far better suited to bespoke rooms catering to individual travellers with the ability to opt up for a suite or larger room.

Effectively, what has been designed is a public and private world. In the public arena, a bar, restaurant, lounge bar and lobby engage a deep-seated sense of fun. Art is a driving force with the owner’s collection drawn on and expanded. The accommodation is also fun, but of a low key, groove train ilk. “We wanted there to be a really amazing space at entry level in a design hotel that is mostly about the social areas and value-add that Ovolo does so well. The message is ‘your room is great, but don’t hang out in your room, come and hang out down here,’” says Luchetti.

The 123 rooms are an exercise in precision more commonly seen in yacht design, with absolutely no space wasted. The bathrooms are sensibly minimal, comprising toilet and shower, and were made off-site by SYNC and craned into place. The sink is in the room itself, which has the nice side benefit of not having to fill your kettle from the bathroom basin. The idea is for guests to leave the bathroom door of fluted glass open (unless privacy is needed) for a flow-through whole. High cabinetry in the room gives additional nooks for stowing items without taking up space, as does the under-bed drawer. Within the single rooms the custom beds are as wide as a double, but as long as a queen. It’s a luxurious size for one, but not quite big enough for two, unless you happen to be a pair of skinny teenagers.

Round bedheads with a concentric motif and rail are framed by long hung pendants, sheer drapes and large framed windows. Beautiful, concealed and with a full reveal are automated block-out blinds that leave the room in such inky blackness that movement activated lighting is required. Indeed, the whole of each room is technically savvy with Alexa on call for all needs. Even the television is pre-set to cast from your phone. “The new luxury is all about tech ease, with everything in your control,” says Luchetti.

The room aesthetic is hip with the concentric motif and various ’70s wallpapers compounding the mood. As Luchetti explains: “With the ’70s leaning, it is in fashion now, but it also has a place in time.” It is also exceedingly clever, however, to have provided the main ’70s mood through vinyl wallpapers, which can be stripped out for a neutral palette or changed up to something more flamboyant as fashions shift, thus giving the solid aspects of the room an extended life.

The suites are similarly hip, but more so. In fact, the four suites — John, Yoko, Sonny and Cher — are rock star suites. Velvet lounges, sunset orange cabinetry, more fabulous wallpaper and, of course, larger beds and more room. Regardless of entry level or suite, the experience has been considered to an astounding degree. Corridors, for example, where most hotels have run out of budget and just look bland, are instead treated to a custom continuous flowing



THE FACTS

PRACTICE LUCHETTI
KRELLE
PROJECT OVOLO
LOCATION SOUTH YARRA,
VICTORIA/WOLWORUNG/
WURUNDJERI PEOPLE



PREVIOUS TOP A podium-like reception counter brings *The Jetsons* to mind. Assembled from poured concrete components, the LK-designed reception and pods were created off-site by SYNC.

PREVIOUS BOTTOM The tanned leather and deep green walls provide moody corners within the ostentation.

ABOVE The totally sensational sunken pit with neon fire and art by Jisbar, *Super Punk Mona*, 2020, *Entertainment Queen*, 2010 and *Space Gallery* (POP), 2020.

ABOVE INSERT Velvet lounges, sunset orange cabinetry, more fabulous wallpaper and larger beds reign in the four suites.

LEFT Bespoke furniture and Monika Nowak's three artworks, *Brandy*, *Pandora 3* and *Sugar Darling* all 2017, signal the seventies mood, while one is a secret door...

NEXT Wallpapers give each room a fashion hit but can easily be removed for future looks.

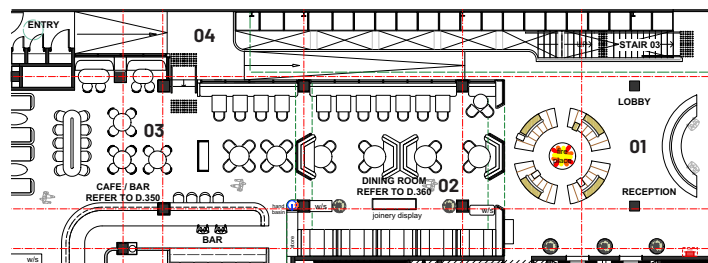
stripe. Party walls in the light well have also been activated with a light wash that gently shifts hue.

The site's footprint is tiny, so transparency is given at all opportunity. Timber louvred blinds, for example, give hallways a visual continuity with the restaurant, bar and stairwell. Pink and blue tiling in the corridor is custom designed as a version of the vintage car mirror wall piece designed by LK and THERE Studio and running from the stairwell opposite the corridor through to the lounge. Interactive moments such as angel wings (*Wings of Freedom*, Joel Amit, 2020) for selfies are pop artworks (*Pop of the Top*, Patrick Rubinstein, 2020) that change as you walk by, providing additional activation.

lessons learned

01 Ovolo infuses retro-plush, with accents of chrome and colour. It is a heady mix of 'mod' and retro futurism.

02 The tension between past and future is emphasised with integrated modern art installations by local and international artists such as Mr Brainwash, Punk Me Tender and Ben Tankard. **03** The hotel features the largest lightwell in Australia, which showcases a digital art display that's a throwback to the golden era of 8-bit arcade games. **04** Melbourne chefs Shannon Martinez and Ian Curley lead the hotel's vegan bar and kitchen.



THE PLAN

01 Lobby/Reception

02 Dining Room

03 Cafe/Bar

04 Entry

Now to the public areas... "Our client loves his art collection, so we mined the very pop aspects and tailored the design around the collection, so that the art remains the primary," says Luchetti. To this end, the design elements are nearly entirely bespoke with more than a nod to Eero Saarinen's TWA of 1962 (recently revived as a hotel by New York-based design firms Lubrano Ciavarra, INC, Beyer Blinder Belle and Stonehill Taylor) and Hanna-Barbera's *The Jetsons* (1962-1963 and 1985-1987). "Things like a podium instead of a reception give a welcome to a different reality. And [it's] all a bit outrageous. Back to an era when fun was the name of the game — music, laughter dancing and having fun," says Luchetti.

The restaurant explodes into view with the extraordinary wall artwork, *Lona Misa* by THERE Studio, 2020. Here LK has allowed the artwork full rein with the restaurant details subtle and complementary. Mid green walls, timber and peachy red velvet act to engage the art rather than mute or compete with it.

The lounge bar, however, is wow, really wow. A mock sunken lounge in butter soft tan leather on cement podiums surrounds a neon fire. Atop this is a giant inverted orange funnel and a broken ring of neon light. Jisbar's *Wow! Entertainment Queen*, 2010 was the starting point with two additional works from the French pop-street artist sourced, *Super Punk Mona*, 2020 and *Space Gallery (POP)*, 2020. Ben Tankard's *Pop Series* (2020) was also well commissioned to complement this futurist dreamscape.

Three more works bought specifically for this installation, *Brandy*, *Pandora 3* and *Sugar Darling* — all Monika Nowak, 2017 — form the third wall of the lounge. Launching in March 2021 in a tiny COVID-free window, it was the party everyone needed. A drag queen Cher, roller-girls in Afro wigs and gold jumpsuits, DJ and a pimped-up roaming sax player were the perfect crazy antidote. Weaving his way through the crowd, the latter pushed a concealed button and, pop, one of the artworks slid aside to reveal a multi-hued lit dance floor and secret bar. Everyone was dancing by 9pm!

"When given a brief to create fun, you can't play it safe," says Luchetti.

Luchetti Krelle never would, but what it has done is create an exceedingly strong language through the loose aspects and an exceedingly refined aesthetic through the bones. More than that, it's fun, bright, smart, irreverent and hotter than hot.