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It's bold, bright, and beautiful
– Motel Flinders has been
reimagined, and what a
transformation!

Transformation complete

Motel Flinders
Studio Tate
Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation / Flinders, Victoria
Words Jan Henderson
Photography Tom Blachford





While motels were ubiquitous in the 1980s, passing decades saw them lose patronage and most simply disappeared. However, with the bold and stylish refurbishment of Motel Flinders, it's clear that this motel is back in business and certain to become the accommodation venue of choice for discerning travellers.

As the name indicates, Motel Flinders is located in Flinders, a seaside village on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Australia. This charming town sees an influx of visitors over the summer months, and while there are many places to stay in the area, none are as perfectly positioned as Motel Flinders, which is situated in the very heart of the village.

The motel was in much need of revitalisation and Studio Tate has worked its magic, transforming the 26-key property from dated to desirable.

Lead on the project Emily Addison, Associate Director, along with Senior Designer Jessica Lucas and the Studio Tate team, have delivered the ultimate makeover that sees Motel Flinders as artfully designed and supremely comfortable, embracing the future while paying deference to the past.

With a clear brief and defined budget, the designers worked hand in glove with their client and delivered the completed project within a very short 18-month time frame.

As an adaptive reuse project there were constraints such as the prevalence of brick and timber, and there would be no structural changes. However, Studio Tate has turned these challenges into opportunities, creating a master plan for the project using colour, pattern, and texture to make a singular statement.

"This was fundamentally a refurbishment project with a reasonably light touch. However, through the application of new

finishes, joinery, and furniture, with a strong emphasis on colour and pattern, we were able to create spaces that feel brand new," reflects Addison.

In the heart of the village, the motel stands as it always has, a two-level brick structure with two exterior timber staircases and a large car park. But what catches the eye is colour. A large graphic in blue and pink has been painted on the car park asphalt and there are pops of colour within a recent addition, an open pergola positioned to the side. Greenery has also been included, with shrubbery planted along the perimeter of the building and under the pergola, where bench seats and tables have been installed.

The yellowish brick, which features inside and outside remains, and exterior timber railings and stairways are painted light grey to soften the bulk of the building and the mass of materiality.

The small reception area is to the side of the site and delivers the promise of what design surprises are to follow. The desk is clad with timber battens and capped with terrazzo; the back wall is wallpapered and features Walmajarri Aboriginal artist Jimmy Pike's design; and objets from the era sit on cabinetry with tomato coloured laminate doors and tiled tops.

There is also a small seating group comprising bench and ottomans arranged around a coffee table with a mirrored base – and everything sits on baby pink and burnt orange striped carpet. While it's a wild combination of textures and colours, it's totally fabulous and absolutely works.

Motel Flinders offers 22 king rooms, two split level rooms with two king beds, one double or family room, and one three-bedroom apartment, and throughout there is a continuum of colour and materiality.

Previous: Setting the stage for 80s chic, the reception counter is clad in timber battens and capped with terrazzo.

Above left: Square blue tiles, blue cabinetry and a blue ceiling, counter the yellowish brickwork.

Above right: Objects and artwork mix the design eras to excellent effect.



The yellowish brick, which features inside and outside remains, and exterior timber railings and stairways are painted light grey and soften the bulk of the building and the mass of materiality.

“The rooms are generous in size and, as is consistent with the era, the existing walls are constructed from a textured, yellowy brick and the ceilings are clad in timber. To balance and freshen these conditions, we strategically proposed a deep green coloured carpet and painted the ceilings in a sky-blue tone. This injection of colour really helped to modernise and lift the existing aesthetic,” Addison says. She continues, “The existing joinery was fairly heavy in appearance. While maintaining existing walls and niches, we retrofitted the joinery with simple pieces that improved functionality and introduced some personality and fun.” The inclusion of a mini bar and set down, which turns into a dining area, along with colourful and comfortable furniture, has resulted in a great outcome for the guest rooms.

Bathrooms for all levels of accommodation are pared back, with floor-to-ceiling light blue square tiles grouted in black – practical but also very appealing – along with a vanity, mirror, and sconces on one wall and ceilings painted out in light blue.

The colour palette for the interior is a triumph, as the teal, light blue, white, and pink with accents of black, tomato, and burnt orange help absorb but also complement the yellowish hue of the bricks and create an aesthetic lightness within every area.

The design concept was inspired by artists of the 1980s, in particular, Pasquale Giardino, a member of the ROAR collective that challenged the traditional Australian art establishment of the period with their vibrant and energetic style.

While Studio Tate has renovated Motel Flinders with a sensitive touch, there is also a little whimsy too. The design has created a remarkable metamorphosis that perfectly encapsulates contemporary living without erasing the past.

Even the signage for rooms is unique. Utilising the original outside nooks beside doors (where breakfast trays would be left), these small inset boxes are now painted burnt orange, internally lit and include the room number, easy to spot for nighttime arrivals.

In this project, Addison and her team have worked smarter not harder to achieve a standout result. Now, Motel Flinders is a cool, contemporary place to stay, that offers all amenities wrapped in thoughtful and inspiring design. Studio Tate has achieved a stellar result with this project and, after all, that’s what great design is all about.

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Above: Leaning into the 80s theme, the deep green carpeting is reminiscent of the era rather than an actual 80’s choice such as avocado!
Opposite: The tray return opening has been transformed into a bold wayfinding element.

