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THE UPSIDE OF DOWNSIZING

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AUSTRALIA

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TURNING *the tables*

Eschewing cookie-cutter interiors, a new breed of cafe is serving up good looks for customers who enjoy a sophisticated style menu with their latte.

Words STEPHEN TODD



This page, from top left Melbourne studio Golden created the breezy interiors of the new Lenny cafe in bayside Albert Park. A handmade timber table offers a communal space. The signature palette at Lenny is light preppy pastels and blond timber floors. Opposite page A more structured seating area further into Lenny cafe is set with benches and wicker chairs.

IN A CULTURE in which coffee is almost a religion, Australian cafes are like temples – places of worship and congregation for the faithful. Like all holy sites, their look and feel is intended to be transcendent, transporting the user by design.

For the new Lenny cafe in Melbourne's bayside Albert Park the owners "wanted to create a destination that would become a go-to venue for the local community", says Kylie Dorotic of Golden, the studio charged with redesigning the heritage corner building. "The front is casual with a communal table, then it becomes more structured as you move down the length of the space," she says. "Towards the back there's more room to be relaxed and sit longer." A palette of light, preppy pastels are offset by pale timber floors, the airy interior enhanced by pivoting plate-glass windows. Furnishings tend to be organic: a handmade timber table, wicker chairs, jaunty lighting by local maker LAAL. Resort-style umbrellas along the sidewalk enhance the seaside vibe; the cult of Lenny is quietly self-assured.

"Golden has a very particular chic in their approach to commercial interiors," says Melbourne 'society baker' Laurent Boillon, who has entrusted Dorotic and partner Alicia McKimm with the refurbishment of his Laurent chain of bakeries. Following the inking of a 10-year agreement earlier this year to supply Coles supermarkets around Australia with sourdough bread and setting up a \$20 million bakery to do so, the Aix-en-Provence-born pastry chef is now investing in the revitalising of his own brand. "Back in the 90s when I moved to Melbourne the coffee culture was all but nonexistent, the CBD was not a destination and we closed on the weekends," Boillon says. "Melbourne is now one of the world's most exciting places for great coffee, food and wine. And I'm very French, so I don't say that lightly!"

What Golden is adding to the mix is great design. "It's a total brand refresh to appeal to a younger demographic," says Dorotic. "It was important we maintained the brand heritage because it has longevity, and its clientele is loyal and we needed to honour that."

Starting with two outlets – a "tired" existing Laurent in Albert Park and a new location in Kew – Golden has developed an elegant

PHOTOGRAPHS TOM BLACHFORD (LENNY)





This page, clockwise from top left Toby's Estate at Sydney's Darling Square. The Toby's espresso bar has a sophisticated "sit-down" feel in line with the brand's new upmarket direction. Design-savvy bills' owner Bill Granger opted for a more formal look for his new Surry Hills space with softly lit, gently curved interiors by Meacham Nockles.



palette of earthy neutrals with burnished metal detailing. Surfaces are streamlined but warm, curves are generous and timber abounds. "They've come up with some incredible ideas, it's a bit of a French touch with modern, clean lines," says Boillon. "I want to take Laurent to a higher level for the comfort and enjoyment of our customers."

"The floor plans and bones of the two sites are very different but we need to ensure the customer experience is similar," says Dorotic. "There will be consistency but variation to make each one unique."

Consistent variation is the challenge also faced by Toby's Estate, the roastery founded by Toby Smith in his mother's Woolloomooloo garage two decades ago. Acquired by Suntory in 2012, the new strategy entails taking one of the country's most recognisable coffee brands decidedly upmarket. "We're aiming for a top-tier, more sit-down à la carte feeling," explains Toby's national retail licensee, Ali Aki, of the newest Toby's incarnation in the lobby of the prestigious Woods Bagot-designed CBA headquarters at Darling Square. "As the market becomes more sophisticated we're stepping up our approach to service and need to create interiors that convey that message."

Aki selected Melbourne's Studio Tate to incarnate that message. On a floor composed of richly coloured marble sections, the bar is demarcated by slender timber battens, green stone tabletops, brass kick rails and coral-hued upholstered banquettes for a vintage banker vibe. High bars, dining booths and drink plateaux affixed to the back of benches encourage different ways of being in the space: from standing for a quick caffeine hit to leisurely dining with friends.

"With Ali we felt it important to evoke this pivotal time in the life of the business," says Studio Tate's principal designer Alex Hopkins. "We wanted it to feel like a cafe where people are going to come to have a unique experience rather than a kind of chain offering. It was important that we created something that felt totally bespoke."

This aversion to cookie-cutter coffee shops is shared by Australian casual dining icon Bill Granger. Despite running 19 outlets around the world, including four in Japan, one in Honolulu and another four in his adopted hometown of London, he oversees the design process himself, in collaboration with Jules Meacham of Sydney studio Meacham Nockles. Granger studied interior design at RMIT in the 80s before moving to Sydney to do a Fine Arts degree. His move into hospitality happened organically but he says he "was always interested in creating environments, not just places to eat".

For his latest venture, he's moved his much-loved bills Surry Hills to the leasehold next door and given it a makeover. Meacham softened the wide, deep room with gently curved walls, dropped in a perforated timber ceiling and paved the floor in bespoke terrazzo tiles sliced on the diagonal by brass rods. Windows have asymmetric metal frames, like a Parisian atelier. "We've wrapped a banquette all the way around to give a sense of being hugged by the space," he says.

"My interiors are becoming slightly more formal as I get older," says Granger, "I want comfort, kind lighting, flowers and art." With Indian wicker chairs à la Pierre Jeanneret in which to sit up straight and plush cushioned bench seating upon which to slouch, it's a broad church for everyone from hipsters to their mums. designbygolden.com.au; studiotate.com.au; meachamnockles.com

