



## Northbourne Architecture + Design

Words by  
Elizabeth Campbell

Sally Holbrook is primarily interested in the relationships between people. Anyone who has had a drink at Bad Frankie will understand this concept. The way the space is articulated gently promotes intimate discussion; persuading focus between people – and with the drinks or food on the small tables dotted throughout the interior – rather than on the design of the space.

Sally is the Director and founder of Northbourne Architecture + Design. I met Sally (and her lovely rescue-dog, Squid) at her home office in Coburg for a chat, indulging in quite possibly the finest baking in the suburb.

As a high-school student, Sally was creative yet practical and believed architecture might be the perfect profession for such tendencies. However, after receiving some ill-fated career advice, she commenced her university studies in economics and IT. Upon completion of her second year, she transitioned to architecture, which felt like a far more natural career choice.

Her professional experience is an interesting mix. Sally completed a Bachelor degree in architecture at The

University of Canberra and Masters at The University of Melbourne. During this time, she began working at a large practice and as a university tutor.

Upon finishing her studies, she continued tutoring and began working full-time at Wood Marsh, where she remained for five years. At Wood Marsh, Sally's main focus was on high-end single residences, medium density housing, and hotel design. Following this, she worked as an architectural consultant for a large developer – a role that was 'challenging, rewarding and highly educational'. As architects, one of the most invaluable aspects of the profession is learning on site from different industries – especially the contractors that build our projects.

Aspiring to one day open her own studio, Sally began work with an inspiring and supportive all-female practice. Working at Studiofour was the final piece in the puzzle, enabling the foundation of Northbourne Architecture + Design.

To pay it forward, Sally introduced a mentorship program for young female graduates to her practice. Her ambition is to provide opportunities for women

not only within architecture but also construction and related service industries. Sally is currently working on several residential projects, one in particular is set to have an all-female team involved: architecture, engineering, construction and services.

For Sally, working closely with clients and colleagues is the biggest joy in her work. When working with clients, she spends a lot of time at the beginning of a project – developing a deep understanding of how they live, what they are interested in, and the aspects of their daily life they truly value. This insight allows Sally to take her clients on a journey during the development of a project, not only to assist them in understanding what architecture and interior design can be, but also to introduce new spatial experiences through design that enrich her clients' daily routines. Additionally, she notes that having her clients so involved in the design process results in '... a lot of ownership from them [the client] over the direction of the project. I find then, that I don't really need to sell the idea – because it belongs to them.'

Looking to the future, Sally is excited about continuing to work with clients, diversifying her portfolio and growing her business. Currently, 'residential work is the flavour'; however, she looks forward to working on some larger-scale projects to help Melbourne move sustainably into a denser city, starting with subdividing and building in her own backyard.

Left Perfpad by Northbourne Architects + Design  
Photo by Tatjana Plitt



Above Interior, Aitch House by Northbourne Architects + Design Photo by Stella Rae Zelnik  
Left Perfpad by Northbourne Architects + Design Photo by Tatjana Plitt