



Text
Emma-Kate Wilson

Responding to the local climate, Brisbane architecture and interiors firm Myers Ellyett designs urban houses with external 'rooms' that prioritise access to nature. In this Queensland project, the crazy paving extends outdoors with full-height sliding doors opening onto a lush tropical courtyard
Image by David Chatfield

When country kids Jade Myers and William Ellyett met while studying at the University of Queensland, they quickly became fierce rivals. However, it didn't take long before they connected over a shared love of environment-based architecture. 'We realised that we had aligned sensibilities and a similar style and ambitions,' says Ellyett. This led to the launch of their practice Myers Ellyett in 2015. 'At the core of our design ethos is a response to place, a response to a region and site. We think about architecture as an experience first, rather than forms and materials,' Myers says.

Their first project had humble beginnings, with a boatshed for kayaks and a chicken coop, but was immediately followed by the stage two masterplan and Summer Salt pool at the boutique Elements of Byron: Byron Bay Resort. Then came a large retail and residential building, also in Byron Bay. Now, working out of a converted church, the team of 15 has developed a portfolio that includes civic, commercial, hospitality and residential work throughout Queensland.

Over the last six years, Myers and Ellyett have leaned into the idea of urban architecture as a sanctuary for quiet and reflection, and the concept of the modern home as a resort, with minimalist materials and colour palettes of white concrete and timber that act as a canvas onto which the owner can add their own character. 'This quietness is very much an attempt to distil architecture down to three materials that complement each other,' Ellyett explains. This idea of cohesion and synergy is also why they brought on Louise Willey as senior associate and head of interior design, to ensure that interior design is an inherent part of the practice. 'This all speaks the same language, relating to a core idea: What is the spirit of the house?' says Myers.

Perhaps controversially for Brisbane architects, Myers and Ellyett don't believe that the classic Queensland typology works. 'Queenslanders actually don't respond particularly well to a separation between public and private, or to the climate,' says Ellyett. Dismantling the notion of a conventional floor plan with rooms around a central corridor, much of their work centres on the modern evolution of subtropical living that instead revolves around greenery — and the idea that a house needs to breathe. 'Typically, our architectural response is to design the garden before the house,' says Ellyett. 'That core idea drives much of our material selection and even, to some extent, structural systems like masonry and concrete floors, which are earthbound grounding materials.'

It makes sense that in a city with a mild climate like Brisbane — where you can comfortably sit outside ten months of the year and around a fire pit the other two — homes feature external rooms. 'It's a climate that allows our architecture to be free,' says Ellyett. In some projects this means heavy walls hold cool air, in others lightweight moveable walls made entirely of glass bring the garden indoors.

For their recent Scotia project in Brisbane's Auchenflower, the architects designed the lawn first and built the house around it, as if it were a traditional central living room. 'You can occupy it like you would any other room, but it's full of grass and trees,' says Ellyett. The home is oriented inward to a central courtyard, allowing for connection to and interaction with nature. In much of their work, the most prominent element in a home is the living one.

Tropical Forms



This page, top left
In designing this home, the architects stitched together a pre-1911 cottage with contemporary additions. The facade now features timber battens suspended on an off-form concrete slab
Image by Content Lion

This page, top right
The designers make a point to create clean and minimal interiors with pared-back palettes as a canvas for residents to layer their own objects and furniture
Image by Dianna Snape

This page, bottom
Jade Myers (left) and William Ellyett (right) in the converted suburban church from which they run their practice
Image by Cathy Schusler

Facing page
The architects designed the lawn of Scotia House first before building the dwelling around it. The result is a fluid relationship between indoors and out, with communal areas like this one opening onto a garden just outside
Image by Toby Scott

