

# CREATIVE *movement*



A new breed of wellness spaces are a far cry from the

dank, dark gyms and impersonal health facilities

we were once forced to frequent.

Words STEPHEN TODD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHARIN CAIRNS (WARRIOR ONE)



**PARAMOUNT RECREATION CLUB** is perched on the rooftop of a grand old heritage building in Surry Hills, Sydney. Nestled within the 1930s parapet, its main training room is open to the elements – a heavy translucent curtain slides across should the weather become inclement (though there’s something wonderful about feeling a southerly buster gathering force as you go through your paces). On the spacious terrace, sky-blue canvas sunshades and lush succulent plantings lend the popular meeting space a Palm Springs allure, while views out onto the medium-rise skyline create a very downtown vibe. The on-site kiosk also happens to serve some of the healthiest (and tastiest) fare in town.

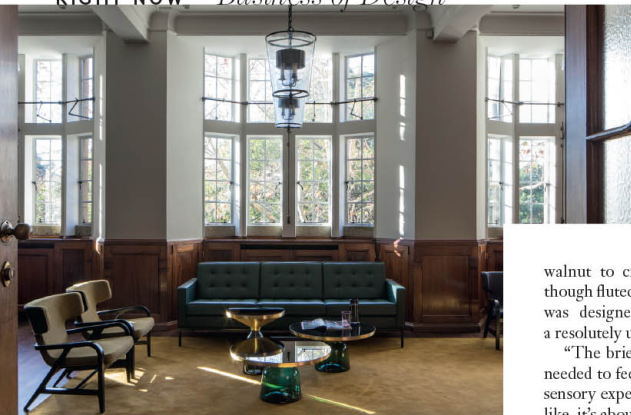
Like many businesses in the rapidly expanding wellness sector, Paramount Recreation Club (PRC) was designed to offer more than just an elementary fitness service. It was conceived to facilitate a new way of being in the city. “PRC is about a balance of social, mental and physical health,” says Bob Barton, design director of the club. “Our brief was focused on eliminating everything that is heavy, enclosed or aggressive in the fitness industry, and creating a space that is uplifting and light in its approach. We wanted to elevate the beauty of the building and provide practical spaces for the highly variable program.”

That program consists of around 100 classes per week, from kick-boxing, Pilates, yoga and meditation to the ‘Paramount workout’, which is an adapted circuit program with four trainers each focusing on mobility, stability, conditioning or strength. “I think the most satisfying result is that we see a great social atmosphere among our members, and also the staff, which is in some part about a shared appreciation of the rooftop as a beautiful space to be in,” Bob says.

Alicia McKimm of Melbourne interior design studio Golden gets “several enquiries every week” from entrepreneurs keen on entering the wellness sector. “It could be anything from a totally new health concept, a unique version of meditation, another yoga studio or a mixture of several techniques,” says Alicia. “Wellness is definitely hot right now.” As is Golden. While the studio helmed by Alicia and her partner Kylie Dorotic is active across all sectors, it’s in wellness that they currently shine. That’s largely thanks to their accoladed design of the Warrior One yoga studio in the bayside Melbourne suburb of Mordialloc, which is essentially two separate yoga studios, a large reception area and guest changing rooms. Golden’s skill is in turning a basic layout into a nuanced destination. Taking inspiration from the melancholic stretch of local coastline, they’ve used pebble hues and tactile finishes such as sisal (on the ceiling), solid oak and

This page, clockwise from top left Manduka mats and props are provided at Warrior One’s studio. A custom Den Holm reception desk sets the contemporary-coastal theme. The bathrooms feature pink marble tiles and brass fixtures. Enjoy city views while you exercise at Paramount Recreation Club’s rooftop pavilion. Blue modernist parasols provide shade. Opposite page Warrior One’s Indra room.





walnut to create a quietly reflective space. Natural light filters through fluted glass panels. The bespoke sculptural reception counter was designed by local stonemason Den Holm. The result is a resolutely uncluttered interior that is mindful of its inhabitants.

"The brief was to make it feel like a retreat," says Alicia. "So it needed to feel warm and inviting. We focused a lot on the emotive, sensory experience in the design, so it's not just about what it looks like, it's about the feeling you get in the space."

Wellness by design may be all the rage right now, but the concept is not new. In fact, health and wellbeing is a linchpin of modernism itself, as evidenced in Alvar Aalto's seminal Paimio Sanatorium delivered in a forest in southern Finland in 1933. An immaculate white monolith, its light-filled, cross-ventilated interior was conceived as an instrument of healing for the tuberculosis patients who took refuge there. Many of the timber furniture pieces that Alvar and his wife Aino designed specifically for the prototypical wellness centre are still produced by Artek, the company they founded in 1935 (available from Anibou).

Around the same time Aalto was designing Paimio, Sydney architects Joseph Fowell and Kenneth McConnel were working on their masterly British Medical Association building on Macquarie Street, Sydney. While the styles are radically different (BMA House is perhaps best described as 'antipodean-gothic', its ornamental gargoyles were conjured from native animals) the goal was very similar: fit-for-purpose medical suites.

It's here that Dr Stephen Morris, a leading Sydney obstetrician, established his practices 17 years ago, eventually buying up suites on the first, second and ninth floors. He turned to architect William Smart of Smart Design Studio to create a coherent identity to incarnate the supreme quality of care he offers his patients.

"Our goal was to take it back to its original condition, but not too far back," says William, pointing out the European oak parquetry that his team had painstakingly cleaned, repaired, stained and waxed. The heritage panelling in the former library has also been scrubbed back with scourers, then rubbed rather than polished "so they look beautifully finished but their age is evident," he says. "My primary role was to restore and bring in all the mod cons, but to make them quite invisible," explains William.

An example of this: a bank of regal purple cupboards concealing air conditioning and audio-visual equipment is finished in piano lacquer, which entails spray-painting then sanding more than 20 times to attain a perfectly reflective, durable surface.

"What Dr Morris loves is quality material," says William, "and the suites are designed to reflect the integrity of the historical building and the intended longevity of the practice."

Dr Morris explains, "My practice offers care for the patients from three midwives, four front-of-house staff and me. This allows the practice and business model to provide services and experience that others cannot match." The redesign of the suites is intended, he says, "to create a sense of space that allows relaxation, comfort and something special, which gives the patient confidence in me and the practice environment".

[smartdesignstudio.com](http://smartdesignstudio.com); [designbygolden.com.au](http://designbygolden.com.au).

This page, clockwise from top left The Morris Suites reception areas are replete with Florence Knoll sofas, Maxalto 'Fulgens' chairs and ClassiCon 'Bell' tables. A work by Marco del Re hangs above the piano-lacquered sideboard. Artek 'Paimio' chair. Alvar Aalto's iconic Paimio Sanatorium still resonates today. New parents sit on Carl Hansen & Son 'Elbow' chairs below a Christopher Boots pendant light in the Mother & Baby classroom.

