



Liminal team
photo Jonathan Wherrett

The suspension of ordinary

writer **Carol Freeman**

photographs courtesy **Liminal Studio**

Imagine a workplace where egos are left at the door, where everyone works together and is constantly excited by their assignments, where projects are so varied and challenging that those who contribute to them are never bored, or overwhelmed.

Imagine Liminal Studio in Hobart, a multidisciplinary, collaborative design workshop where the client base is international as well as Tasmanian. Established in 2011, its projects

are growing in diversity and scale and include architecture, industrial design, furniture and interior design, dance and theatre performances and curating exhibitions.

They also designed a brick.

The team is from Hobart, Berlin, New York, Valencia, Zurich, Melbourne and Adelaide, and is predominantly female.

My conversation with its founders, Peta Heffernan and Elvio Brianese, demonstrated their



The Hedberg
render Doug and Wolf

ethos: they are bountiful with their time and ideas, listen attentively to my questions and draw me into their culture. But they are also clear and unflinching when they explain their aims, their work and the way it's practiced.

For Elvio Brianese, Liminal's philosophy is embedded in the term "studio". That is, a creative association of like-minded individuals from diverse fields who offer solutions to problems raised by a

project. A core element is collaborative exchange, undertaken in a spirit of equality and generosity at every level of the design process. The result is a unique, joint creation.

Everything around us — in our homes, workplaces and recreational spaces — is designed. The buildings we inhabit, the cups we drink from, the coffee machines we operate, the computers we work on, the tables we sit around, the books we read, the



Coastal Pavilions at Freycinet Lodge
photo Dianna Snape

gardens we love. The context, function and uses of these spaces and objects need careful consideration if they are to perform well and be admired for their superior design.

Peta Heffernan expands on the crucial relationship between design team, clients and the community. She says Liminal is people-focused – encouraging everyone involved to feel they have ownership of a project. What they look for in potential employees, who will have an integral role in shaping the culture of the studio, is intense curiosity and a cross-disciplinary approach. Once engaged, the mode of working is to sit around a table and unpack ideas until the team arrives at an ideal resolution. To ensure a range of viewpoints, the studio hosts monthly salons – a type of event that originally began among writers and artists in 16th century Europe and continued well into the early 20th

century, where the aim was to provoke debate, stir passion and inspire creativity. Liminal Salon is where the team meets with an invited guest or guests – perhaps a dancer, Tour de France cyclist, or a dementia expert – for an open conversation where a meal and glass of wine are *de rigueur*.

And do these approaches work?

They obviously do, as more and more clients and design partners are interested in working with Liminal. For even at the level of consultancy itself, collaboration is a keyword. This is exemplified in one of Liminal's current developments, The Hedberg, a centre for the performing arts on the corner of Campbell and Collins streets, Hobart, the first project of its size where the principal consultant is local. Liminal asked Singapore-based WOHA and Arup, with headquarters in London, to work with them. WOHA specialises in sustainable design strategies that respond to climate change. Arup,



Cascades Female Factory
render Brick Visuals

established by Danish-born Ove Arup in 1946 and with briefs such as the Sydney Opera House, will handle the all-important acoustic environment and partner with Tasmanian companies JMG and Gandy & Roberts to deliver security, plumbing, fire protection, lighting, structure and façade engineering.

One compelling feature of the building will be strategic glass floor insertions behind the

Hedberg Brothers Garage façade which will leave exposed some of the 3000 colonial artefacts, fragments of foundations, and cobblestones from the 1820s that were uncovered in the archaeological dig. Brianese says that the new building will add “a contemporary layer to this site’s evolution, reinterpreting the past and ensuring the heritage buildings experience longevity through adaptive reuse”.



Dust in development with Dancenorth
photo Peta Heffernan

A recently completed project that is attracting rave reviews in national newspapers is Liminal's stunning Coastal Pavilions, part of the RACT's Freycinet Lodge Renewal Project. Heffernan says the design has "taken its cue from the fluidity and layers of the coastal rock formations, the colouring of rich orange lichen and forms of the nearby bays". The glass pods melt into the landscape, with Tasmanian timbers enfolding the interior walls and ceilings of the different accommodation options, while the netted deck balustrade ensures an uninterrupted view of the waterfront or the granite Hazards, as well as providing a place to relax and enjoy the vista.

Liminal also achieved the winning design proposal for the new Cascades Female Factory History and Interpretation Centre in South

Hobart in an international competition. One of 11 Australian UNESCO convict sites, the Female Factory accommodated, punished and aimed to reform female convicts sent to Tasmania in the 19th century. For this venture Liminal will collaborate with Snøhetta, a Norwegian architecture and design workshop with a studio in Adelaide, as well as Melbourne landscape architect Rush Wright Associates.

Today, little remains of the original buildings that comprised the Female Factory, other than huge stone walls surrounding the entrance opposite Hobart Rivulet. The proposed new design consists of an entry walkway between high, dark walls with only the sky a connection to the outside world, creating a sense of confinement and focusing a visitor's attention. This path





*Liminal Objects coffee table a collaboration with Vicki West
photo Peter Whyte*

opens out to an “empathetatre” where a platform with seating for contemplation is surrounded by landscaped gardens. The plan takes note of the painful stories of the 6000-plus women who spent time there, as well as the positive role in shaping Tasmania played by those who survived. It represents the struggle between light and dark – imprisonment and liberty, punishment and reform, threat and opportunity, horror and hope. Liminal trusts that the centre will provide an opportunity for community education, healing and empowerment.

These are only a few of the projects undertaken by the studio. Heffernan and Brianese consider one of their most enjoyable experiences

*opposite Glenorchy Health Centre with custom-designed bricks
photo Peta Heffernan*

has been working with Dancenorth, a leading contemporary dance company based in Townsville, Queensland. For its innovative new production, *Dust*, the Liminal team is working on an adjustable “installation” where dancers interact with spatial environments onstage. The physical movements of the dancers will reveal and pull open the modular set pieces and then use them to assemble new spaces and different scenes, as the themes of the performance shift. The design makes visible the structures, barriers and borders that we all experience in life, expressing the “architecture of restriction and opportunity” that this dance performance is all about.


It is also obvious that Liminal’s directors admire Dancenorth’s practice of performing for a wide array of audiences. *Dust* will have its debut season in August this year and then tour overseas.

These prestigious projects are all very well, but how did a *brick* manage to gain a place in Liminal's portfolio? In 2016 the studio was part of a design team working on the new Glenorchy Health Centre. A crucial aim of the project was to create a therapeutic facility that "grew out of" its environment between Humphrey's Rivulet and the foothills of kunanyi. Liminal had previously talked to Austral Bricks about making a distinctive Tasmanian product and here was the ideal opportunity to connect the new centre with the 1941 child health building and many of the other red brick structures on Glenorchy's suburban fringes. Long and close collaboration with Austral resulted in a unique, carbon-neutral brick manufactured at its Tasmanian plant in Longford. Two brick ranges with a deep red colour and shimmer, referred to as Liminal Lava and Liminal Lush, and set in distinctive, textured patterns, are the main cladding material of the building. They will soon be available locally and internationally.

Liminal has a commitment to Tasmania and an avid interest in enhancing the island's attributes, particularly in relation to its cultural landscape and the arts. Its team often provides

design services *pro bono* to projects they have confidence in, especially when this may be the only way that members of Tasmania's talented artistic community can realise their potential, or compete at a global level.

I finish my interview by asking Elvio Brianese to describe Peta Heffernan in a few words, and request that she does the same for him. These two have known each other since their studies at University of Tasmania, conceiving the idea of Liminal in 2011 and working together constantly since then. Their responses are considered and serious: Brianese defines Heffernan first as supremely talented, then generous, finally supportive and therefore a great partner. Heffernan stresses Brianese's passion, dedication and aspiration to make a difference to people's lives.

In my view, they are perfect leaders of an outstanding team. 

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For further information about Liminal Studio, see liminalstudio.com.au



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