

By luck or design

Every line Jamie Gladigau draws has its reason. Generations will look back and see the mark he has made.

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Photography John Krüger



Jamie Gladigau of JBG Architects

Morning sunshine falls softly from the skylight across the rustic board room table at JBG Architects in Tanunda, catching Director, Jamie Gladigau's silver-flecked hair in a halo of light as he leans back thoughtfully in his chair.

Behind him, a collage of photographs spans the entire wall; a breathtaking 'best of' selected from the 1,000 projects he and his team have worked on over 23 years.

It's there to impress, naturally, but also to serve as an inspiring everyday reminder of why JBG do what they do.

"I didn't want to be an architect who wore black skivvies and was inaccessible to everyday people," says the 51-year-old, noting that for each "flash" project on the wall there's dozens of smaller ones which brought equal satisfaction.

"We've got a one-pager which summarises who we are and what we do... one of the things is always conduct yourself in a way that would make your grandmother proud, old-fashioned values are still applicable here."

If making grandma proud is one of JBG's core values, no doubt her heart would swell to see the lasting improvement being made to homes, businesses and landscapes on account of her grandson.

JBG has, in a way, become to the Barossa what Antoni Gaudí is to Barcelona: synonymous.

Born in Gladstone to parents, Peter and Wendy, Jamie moved with his family to a small acreage in Tanunda at the age of five, a lifestyle which fuelled his love of the outdoors and instilled a healthy work ethic.

"We grew up with vineyards and sheep, growing gherkins for a bit of extra money and fruit picking and that sort of stuff," he recalls.

Like his old man, Jamie got right into footy, winning a couple of flags at Tanunda Football Club, where he's still involved today as a coach.

The other, perhaps less mainstream, pastime the young left-hander enjoyed was sketching house plans.

"I'd be drawing homes that I liked and they'd have a cricket pitch and footy goals and that sort of stuff," Jamie smiles.

"One day I was showing mum and she said, that's really good, you should be an architect. And I said, what's that?"

From that moment on, Jamie never wanted to be anything else.

"I remember when I applied to uni we had to put five choices, and I thought, God, what's the other four going to be?" he laughs.

Architectural work was scarce in Adelaide after Jamie graduated in 1993, so he and future wife, Shannon, packed everything they could into Jamie's Hyundai hatch and moved to Sydney, where he worked on multi-storey refurbishments of inner-city private schools.

"I got a massive amount of experience in a very short period of time," says Jamie, who remained a proud South Aussie whilst interstate, convincing many a colleague to convert from Tooheys to Coopers, and becoming well known throughout the office as "the guy with wine contacts".



"I've often said winemakers and architects get along because we're both trying to express the intangible in our work."

- Jamie Gladigau

Ironically, it was the wine industry that ultimately drew Jamie back to the Barossa and, thus far, has provided him with some of his greatest professional triumphs.

"I've often said winemakers and architects get along because we're both trying to express the intangible in our work, the essence of time and place," remarks Jamie.

Moving back to a more affordable lifestyle in South Australia when Shannon was pregnant with the couple's first child in 1998, it was actually Jamie's sister, Mandy who tipped him off about a local winery engineer who was seeking an architect to work with.

"I'm incredibly lucky because I fell into starting my own business at a time when the wine industry was going crazy," says Jamie.

"A good friend taught me the motto, bite off more than you can chew then chew like hell.

"Architects are problem solvers so we often need to challenge the norm.

"I've no time for hindsight heroes. Clients expect us to show initiative. Sometimes ideas don't work out so we go back to the drawing board until a solution is found and a design comes together."

Based on Jamie's "old fashioned" values and work ethic, JBG has built a reputation in the wine industry and beyond as enduring as the stone that features as a key element of many of his designs.

"One of the things I love doing is driving around country South Australia and looking at stone ruins, or sheds," says Jamie.

"I discovered pretty early on, if you use traditional, natural materials, people feel very comfortable with them, and it gives you licence to push the boundary on how you compose them and what you do with the space and the appearance of them."

To name a few, projects such as The Barossa Cellar, Kingsford Homestead, St Hugo, Torbreck Cellar Door and Artisans of Barossa, all bear the hallmarks of JBG's distinctive style: provocative angles, striking contrast and materials that ease into the landscape as if they had always meant to be there.

"Our role as architects is to evoke emotion," says Jamie.

"Everything that we put together, we visualise. There's normally a reason why there's a door there or a window there or it's facing a particular direction.

"Just by careful configuration of spaces, you can create these journeys."



After 22 years living back in Tanunda and raising three children, Jadzia, 23, Quinn, 21, and Viene, 16, Jamie's personal journey has led him to a property in Flaxman Valley, where he is currently building his own eco-home, complete with the cricket pitch and footy goals of his childhood, as well as a creek, gum trees, rolling hills, and plenty of grass to mow.

"I love mowing lawn," says Jamie, eyes crinkling with boyish pleasure.

"That's what I'm going to do when I retire. And the reason is, I can see where I've been. I can see what difference I've made."

Like a satisfying strip of freshly cut grass, Jamie's mark on the Barossa will be no less significant.

“I’m sort of looking forward in the years to come, driving my grandkids around and saying, let’s call into this building today,” he says.

“If they like it, I’ll say, yes, we designed this.”

