

ARTICLE WRITTEN BY GILLIAN SERISIER  
PHOTOGRAPHER: SCOTT RILEY

# CHANGE AG



**E**stablished in 2008 by Ruth Meli, Meli Studio effectively ran in tandem with Julie Ockerby's practice, Style Space Colour, established in 2005. Firm friends through Ruth's daughter

Amanda, a graphic artist Julie had worked with, each practice held a strong position within the residential milieu. Similarly, each had a high-end client base and portfolio to match. By 2011, however a fortuitous circumstance arose where Ruth was looking to spend more time with her family, while Julie was looking to expand. As such, the practices were merged under the Meli Studio name, with Julie in full ownership.

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*Julie Ockerby, Creative Director, Meli Studio*

# EVENT





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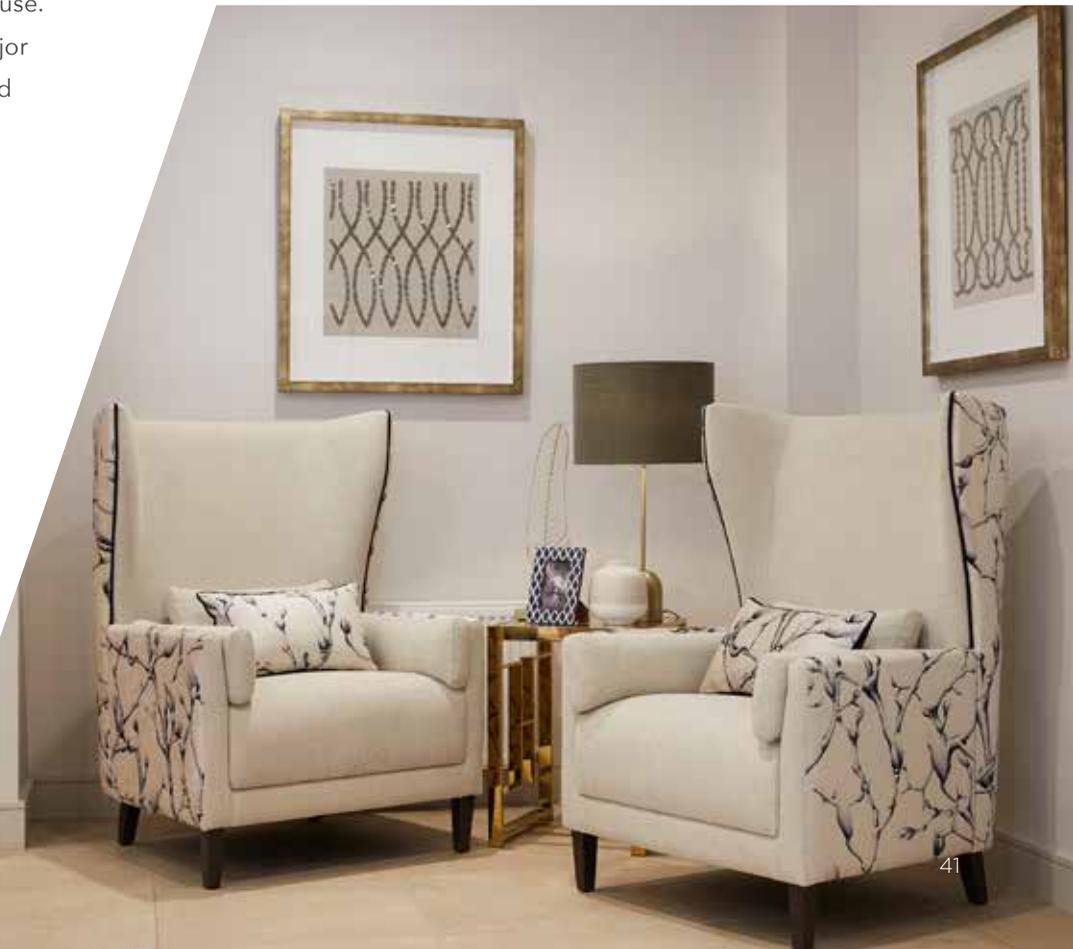
**W**ith a background as a registered nurse and in marketing for boutique hotels in Europe, Julie saw a need for change in the way the aged are cared for, and by 2013 had shifted the company focus to aged care: “I saw a commercial potential, but more than that I had a passion to reinvent the aged care space” says Julie. On the one hand her background as a nurse gave her insight into the practical functionality of an operational facility, while her work with boutique hotels informed the style of care she advocates. Compounding these elements is the deeply personal experience of her family: “My father was ill and needed a nursing home, but I couldn’t find one to the standards I felt he deserved. I was visiting these spaces and thinking they

are not how they should be: no one was considering the environment as adding to the quality of life.”

Working from the serene and beautiful setting of the marina at Kirribilli, Julie finds the location ideal with easy access to the city but none of the stress: “It’s an inspiring tranquil position and good creative space for us to be in without the hustle and bustle of the city” says Julie. It has also allowed her to focus Meli Studio with an early partnership of minds formed with Allity CEO David Armstrong, and Aurrum Chairman David di Pilla. With a likeminded view of what aged care should be, the first of the projects included Allity Gosling Creek in Orange and Allity Redleaf in Concord. Concurrently, the greenfield developments Aurrum Terrigal Drive and Aurrum Plenty were brought to light.

The Allity signature was truly defined in 2016 with Allity Greenwood Normanhurst. Here, custom elements, joinery, flooring and a curated art collection with commissioned pieces delivers a bespoke home-like experience commensurate with high end residential or hotel accommodations. Offering three types of resident rooms each is spacious and detailed to include luxurious finishes, upholstered bedheads and custom soft furnishings “I’m very proud and honoured to have been given the opportunity to take something from the creative mind to fruition with every detail coming alive. For me it’s aged care living as it should be with no compromises” says Julie. More than just the rooms, the whole facility is a carefully curated community space of blended era aesthetics from the European café and ornate private dining room to the hair salon and fully integrated cinema room. For Allity Pemulwuy Meli Studio wanted to give residents a cool chic experience of the home, which overall has the look and feel of a grand Hamptons house. Pairing to this aesthetic, the interiors are highly crafted with textiles a major element. It is perhaps though, the large open fireplace in the lobby and staged journey throughout the home, which includes a café and courtyard, that gives this project heart.

The first of the Aurrum projects was developed over an 18 month period in Terrigal, NSW. “David di Pilla was very hands on and very conscious of making a difference, which we delivered as a five star aged care home on the central coast” says Julie. To this end, the project emulates a hotel feel with residential touches, colours for example, reflect the coastal beauty of the location: “It’s a fresh approach to the location. It feels comfortably elegant, which is what Terrigal is all about, relaxation and comfort, but with an elegance” says Julie. Additionally, the smaller sized residence of 77 rooms delivers an authentic boutique experience. “It means it can be very personal, and aged care is personal for residents, staff and family. Aged care should be about that boutique experience, it should be personal and this is.”





At 120 rooms, Aurrum Plenty in Victoria is sufficiently scaled to offer a good mix of single and double rooms. Given the size, Julie felt a different approach was needed. The residence has the look and feel of a grand hotel entrance. Reflective of place, a touch of Melbourne and the Yarra Valley has been interwoven with deeper colours towards a moodier ambiance with a slight metallic lux. For Meli Studio the project also denotes a practice shift with work undertaken on the exterior as well as the interior. This included the implementation of significant features such as the vertical garden. In keeping with the grand hotel theme, luxurious bespoke designed Tappeti rugs are inserted within a custom flooring. It is this attention to detail that defines Meli Studio, with key considerations of aesthetics, comfort and durability met without compromise. Furniture and finishes for example, are selected for their aesthetic contribution without being of the Nana ilk of bygone aged care, yet, each is rigorously compliant with fire ratings, durability and commercial standards.



The next five years sees Meli Studio in a continued pattern of expansion with a push to reinvigorate more of Australia’s aged care facilities. It also sees the firm shifting into the New Zealand and Asian markets. Asia in particular is close to Julie’s heart: “From a heritage perspective, I’m Vietnamese and they have the same growth as us and they similarly deserve to be in a space where they are cared for with privacy and dignity. All the things we are providing here, should be available in Asia and it needs to be pushed that way” says Julie.

Approaching this need for change from a social, philosophical and cultural aspect, Julie has become a highly regarded leader in the industry, where she is

recognised as a change agent. Key to her actions is the group Fast Track. Having partnered with the Ageing Asia Alliance, in 2017 Julie joined this group with Thomson Adsett Architects, Bridge Advisory Group and Dentons Lawyers. Now touring major cities in Asia the group provides masterclasses in aged care to developers where they deliver insights into how aged care is being delivered in Australia.

With her passion guiding her and a firm grasp on the functional realities of aged care, Meli Studio is set to change the way aged care is both conceived and delivered. It is however Julie Ockerby’s far reaching approach that sees the need for this change as universal that sets her apart as a thought leader within this burgeoning industry.