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Green run

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Elite professional skiing to sustainable property development may sound an unlikely career trajectory, but it's been a remarkable run for Liam Wallis and Katya Crema of HIP V. HYPE, whose home reflects not just their way of life – but also their shared mission.

“We’ve both travelled, and particularly to places that have incredibly harsh climates in the mountains. So we’ve experienced what some of the best design and construction around the world is.”





OPENING LEFT & RIGHT Sustainable developers Liam Wallis and Katya Crema have now lived in three of their own developments, as a way to continually learn and iterate for future projects

OPPOSITE Achieving an 8.6 NatHERS rating, Ferrars & York features European-style openings and windows to make the homes airtight and block noise

PREVIOUS & RIGHT Finding new ways for people to live comfortably in dense urban areas, Ferrars & York is an easy commute and positioned right near the South Melbourne Markets



Though they met on the ski slopes of Mount Buller in Victoria, Liam Wallis and Katya Crema both had construction in their lineage. Wallis' stepdad was a project manager on the iconic Melbourne Central development during the 1980s; while Crema's father studied architecture, coming from a family of builders. Her grandfather migrated from Northern Italy in 1951 and started a terrazzo and concrete company with his cousins, expanding into Crema Constructions, now a third-generation company over 70 years old.

"I joke that I've got concrete in my blood," she laughs. "And I probably literally do – I was taken onto construction sites from the age of four or five; a Saturday activity with Dad. So it's been a big part of my upbringing, my culture and my family."

Wallis also recalls many onsite excursions to the nascent Melbourne Central with his stepdad over his primary school years, remembering how "seeing this interesting building and form come together really captured my imagination". He eventually studied architecture at Melbourne University, and, unconventional from the start, apprenticed as a labourer on the home of architect Peter Healy (of Six Degrees Architects) to fulfil the professional practice component of his architecture degree.

A year exchange in Copenhagen further shaped Wallis' architectural sensibilities, where he was exposed to Jan Gehl's ideas, and witnessed the Scandinavian view of design and sustainability and how that plays out on a city scale. "I wanted to influence those outcomes [in

Australia], and I couldn't see myself doing that quickly enough as an architect," he recalls.

Wallis realised that to implement significant change, he might need to shift his focus. "I jumped into a double Bachelor degree, Architectural Planning & Design, plus Property, finished it off and started working for private developers, where I quickly realised that you can have quite a lot of influence. Forming briefs and sitting between the financials and the design briefing is a powerful place – and doing that with more of a design sensibility and a view towards collaboration is even more powerful."

Crema, meanwhile, was making a mark for herself as a professional skier, representing Australia twice at the Olympic level. Her experiences around the world – shared by Wallis, who had also, in between studying, been a semi-professional skier and ski coach – further shaped an appreciation for design and architecture.

"We've both travelled, and particularly to places that have incredibly harsh climates in the mountains," Crema points out. "So we've experienced what some of the best design and construction around the world is." In the context of -40° Celsius temperatures, quality design – air tightness, insulation and proper ventilation – is not just a nice to have, but essential to survival. It was the internal comfort of these alpine lodgings that became a potent memory.

As Crema retired from professional skiing in 2014 and completed her own undergraduate degree in architecture, she started to feel her skillset was better placed to work with people on the creative and business side.



The couple has lived in three HIP V. HYPE projects, as a kind-of experiential data gathering exercise.

So she, too, shifted her focus with a postgraduate Masters of Property.

Meanwhile, after gaining experience with private developers, Wallis embarked on a couple of his own small-scale residential developments, both in Brunswick, both of which he physically built. These projects, while modest at two and three homes, enabled an exploration of ideas, tested processes and set the tone for the highly collaborative working approach that grounds the couple's worklife today.

All of which is encompassed in HIP V. HYPE (HV.H), the sustainable development business of which Wallis is founding director and Crema the director of projects and head of sales. Though HV.H has brought several award-winning multi residential properties to life across Melbourne's inner suburbs, it is much more than a traditional developer. The business also includes a team of data-building engineers, a consulting arm, and workshare spaces – each part of a complex organism actively agitating for a better future.

As well as sharing the high-performance mindset, focus and dedication necessary for the complicated and slow-moving cultural and political change they've made their life's work – Wallis and Crema are determined to deliver projects that genuinely serve the environment, community, and their residents.

To that end, the couple has lived in three of HV.H's projects as a kind-of experiential data gathering exercise. The transition from design collaborator to developer and then resident has become a critical part of HV.H's process, giving them intimate knowledge and critical empathy, which they then feed into future projects.

Wallis and Crema currently call the award-winning Ferrars & York home, where they live in one of the three-bedroom apartments with their two young sons Massimo and Elio. This development echoes a previous HV.H collaboration, the iconic Nightingale 2.0,

demonstrating the iterative approach that enables their cumulative refining; both are long, thin sites featuring a range of single-loaded apartments; both are positioned adjacent to public transport infrastructure (in the case of Ferrars & York, right on the South Melbourne tramline); and both were collaborations with Six Degrees Architects.

Standing on the shoulders of Nightingale 2.0, itself an exemplar, Ferrars & York is an inspiring model of what is possible in sustainable development, achieving an exceptional 8.6-star NATHERS rating. While this is an admirable outcome in itself, a further innovation in their mission to create wider impact is HV.Hotel – a two-bedroom penthouse apartment that has been kept aside as a boutique accommodation offering.

Through this, Wallis and Crema hope more people can experience the lived benefits of sustainable design, if only short-term. Remarkable climate and acoustic comfort can be experienced in real time – the interior remaining a stable 18–23° Celsius all year round through virtue of quality insulation, rigorous air tightness and passive design; and the constant urban soundscape of the busy main road, adjacent tramline and bustling South Melbourne Markets at the rear of the building is effectively neutralised. Of course, residents also gain longer-term benefits – energy and cost savings, improved air quality from the Energy Recovery Ventilation system, and its associated health benefits.

Inside Wallis and Crema's home, there are only a couple of practical modifications from the original design, influenced by Covid and family paradigms: the inclusion of a home study and the removal of a third bathroom to expand the laundry. They've also opted for a hinged shower screen and bath step detail in the second bathroom. This creates better access and safety

PREVIOUS A shared rooftop space adds an additional area, which extends the apartment and allows a connection to the outdoors

OPPOSITE Open walkways to each apartment allow light inside, and friendly bump-ins with neighbours

for the little ones, and, as Wallis points out, would also be a great help for those who are a bit older, injured, or otherwise need assistance stepping in or out of the shower.

While the interior feels warm and homey, curated with art and a slow-growing collection of Great Dane furniture, Wallis and Crema's personalities and values permeate deeper, throughout every aspect of the building. You can see what they stand for in the prioritisation of bikes over cars in the building's garage; in the placement of exterior walkways and a light-filled stairwell which encourage incidental bump-ins as a subtle cultivation of community; in the building's 100 per cent renewable energy and electric vehicle charging stations. You can see it in the ongoing relationships with suppliers they choose to work with over and over again, such as Swiss appliance brand V-ZUG, and local family businesses like Robert Gordon Interiors.

You can see all of this, and more, from the panoramic views of their fourth-floor apartment, where you can imagine the couple surveying the suburbs and city they are tirelessly working to shape. Their conviction, discipline and passion hold them in good stead as they continue to forge a path through the baffling layers of red tape they must navigate to shift the development status quo – not to mention the ever-present challenges of working with large, complex teams of stakeholders with often-competing objectives, and the constantly fluctuating market.

The perspective from up here is a reminder to take a broader view, to keep putting in consistent effort that snowballs into great impact over time – much like an athlete training for competition. This is high risk, high reward territory – and Wallis and Katya are again proving themselves champions.