

## GADSDEN, WEST MELBOURNE

A warm Brick Inlay façade and bronze metal ground Gadsden in West Melbourne's rich history



Set on a prominent site opposite the North Melbourne train station, Gadsden is a contemporary village that gives a thoughtful nod to its industrial past. Developer PDG set out to deliver a legacy that's unique to context, creating a place to live, work and interact. This ambition shaped a community-focused development that connects directly to the station and the city, while also contributing meaningfully to its surroundings.

Architects DKO saw potential in a key feature of the existing site, the historical J. Gadsden building, once a tin smithing and canning factory, which had been painted white. "We thought that it was a great opportunity to do something beautiful with it. When we first went on site, none of the red brick was exposed. So, we proposed stripping the paint and introducing a two-storey townhouse typology to make good of the existing warehouse," explains Ivan Tan, Senior Associate, DKO.

This decision grounds the project in its history, while giving the building a renewed life as part of the larger precinct.

Gadsden's built form is extraordinary, its variation breaking down the scale into a series of buildings, making it feel like a village or collection of small communities on its island site. Within this framework, Gadsden has 188 dwellings: 16, two level modern townhouses sitting within the historical building and 172 apartments, ranging from one to four bedrooms, housed inside an angular and sloping form.

Each building reflects the character of its street interface. Ireland Street, facing north containing the townhouses is quiet and residential. This building combines history with modern design, containing heritage red brick with an industrial metal form on top, whose subtle shape draws inspiration from the steel frames on the windows and the surrounding heritage forms. The corner of Adderley and Dryburgh Streets contains the 12-storey apartment building, opposite the North Melbourne train station, and is more public and industrial. The slope of its angular facades ties back to the character of West Melbourne, drawing cues from heritage warehouse forms, and softening the building's size.



Gadsden's material palette is carefully considered to balance history and contemporary expression. The interplay of Ash Grey and Iron Mountain brick tiles, bronze metal, glass, greenery and the historic red brick of the J Gadsden building create a rich architectural language.

"We are very fond of brick as a practice," Ivan says. "It's robust, timeless, it has texture and there's a certain warmth and familiarity with it here in Melbourne." Brick complements the historic building, while folded, angled bronze metal provides a beautiful contrast, giving a nod to its history as a canning factory and drawing inspiration from the train station. The result is a beautiful interplay; the solid, warm feeling from the brick contrasting with the lightness of the metal, delivering a highly sculptural built form.

DKO visited Robertson's showroom to choose the brick tiles: "We explored many brick tones, and liked the range Robertson's presented to us, with its range of colour choices and brick sizes," Ivan recalls. Iron Mountain and Ash Grey brick tiles were selected for their compatibility to precast construction and to complement the original red brick of the building without competing with it.

Using Brick Inlay to create the precast panels enabled greater flexibility and precision in construction. "It was the flexibility in its application, in the way it enabled us to deliver a lot of angled facades, a lot faster than with traditional bricklaying, and it also avoided a lot of issues," Ivan explains. "With the different shapes and sizes of the facades, and the different angles of the panels, we wanted a building that had a continuous, seamless look: A 12-storey building, with brick in all corners, and Brick Inlay really helped to achieve that."

One of the project's defining gestures is the double-height archway marking the main entry. "It's the first thing you can see when you come out of the station, it's a grand, iconic gesture, tying everything together" Ivan says. "It's sculptural, creates a desired route for the pedestrians and feels like a front yard welcoming you home."



Inside residents enjoy a wealth of amenities. There's a Woolworths Metro at ground level, a central courtyard in the middle of the townhouses offering relaxation and respite, landscaped terraces on the apartments

courtesy of the stepped façade, and a gym and fitness centre, and bookable dining spaces on the apartments' top level with views across the Docklands to the city. "It's a mix of different spaces—the more social ones are up on the top of the building, and quieter, intimate spaces and landscape on the ground."

Gadsden presents as a confident contemporary form from afar, unfolding up close as a collection of spaces woven together with respect for history and with a focus on community. For Ivan, the project's success lies as much in process

as in outcome. "We worked very closely with the Melbourne City Council, their urban designers, and with PDG and all consultants. It was nice to work towards a great outcome for the city and form close working relationships along the way... We were all working towards a common vision and wanted to push design excellence, and it's the people that got us there."

Developer: PDG  
 Architects: DKO  
 Builder: Hamilton & Marino  
 Product: Brick Inlay with Iron Mountain and Ash Grey brick tiles  
 Precaster: Lux Precast  
 Photography: Tom Roe and DKO