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# THE PEOPLE OF CHATSWOOD

ISSUE 0001

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## THE LOCALS

Meeting the people making Chatswood  
the vibrant city it is today.

A rich diversity of cultures, cuisines and community, Chatswood continues  
to evolve towards a sophisticated and innovative future.

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## THE BRYSON

OF CHATSWOOD

# Loong Oon Owner & Head Chef, Amah

Words by TIFFANY JADE  
Photos by JAKE RODEN

Loong Oon's earliest memories are filled with the rituals of preparing and sharing meals.

The layered generational impressions of Loong Oon's Chinese-Malay origins have provided a touchstone for his adult years, in which he continues to leverage a culture that, like many, orbits the social and sensorial connections established through foods nourishing significance. "I remember my grandmother cooking a traditional Chinese dish; fish ball soup."

"It's a labour intensive dish and I remember how much she loved to make it for me every time I visited. She would prep morning til night, going to the market early and spending the day in the kitchen with me at her side. It brought her so much joy to see our enjoyment of her food."

Coming full circle from those early moments with his grandmother, Loong is today owner and Head Chef of Amah by Ho Jiak, a thriving Malaysian restaurant located in the vibrant First Floor District Dining Precinct at the Chatswood Interchange. Surrounded by the swirling urbanity of downtown Chatswood, Amah (which is Chinese for 'Grandmother') is a restaurant that exists as both a steward of stories and a contemporary beacon, a place where Loong leans into his interests in art and design to create culinary feats that reconcile history, innovation and visual composition all at once.



"We thought Chatswood would be a really great location for an upper market restaurant," says Loong of his and his business partner's decision to set up a restaurant of Amah's calibre in Chatswood. "There are a lot of great cheap eats here so we thought we could bring something different. Something that would educate younger generations on the impact of quality ingredients. There is a big Asian community here and older Asians, like my parents and grandparents, grew up in a less affluent environment."

"Food was something associated with survival, not so much enjoyment." Amah mediates between this sentiment and the patterns and expectations of contemporary living that define its surrounding established community. Changing his patrons expectations of Malaysian cuisine is something Loong shepherds in a slow and intentional way, guided by constant reflection, which – rather than trying to please the masses – loops back to "how can I change my parents thought process."

“There are a lot of great cheap eats here.”

Amah's harmonious integration within the greater atmosphere of Chatswood is immediately apparent. The restaurant's modern interpretation of Asian cuisine is echoed in the downtown density of the neighbourhood, with its sensorial and cultural references to a modern-day Chinatown, albeit without the backdrop of heritage buildings that often populate them.

A coalescence of cultures, time periods and lifestyles is tangible in both the restaurant and its streetscape. A richly layered environment respectful of nostalgia yet with its sights set firmly on the future. "We came up with a lot of different concepts for this location," says Loong of Amah's inception, which was a work in progress just before the pandemic struck. "Then my grandmother passed away, and I couldn't go back to Malaysia because of lockdowns. She inspired me so much and her passing made me question why I was spending time cooking things I didn't want to eat everyday."

Prior to opening Amah with good friend and restaurateur Ho Jiak, Loong cut his teeth at some of the world's top fine-dining destinations. Starting out at the likes of Sydney's Quay and Lafite in Kuala Lumpur, he then accepted a career-defining position as head chef at Mr Wong where he remained for 7 years, exploring his culinary origins and love of artistic plating. His natural affinity for creativity and cooking was shared with Ho Jiak, and together the idea for Amah was born.

"Every dish I change up a little," says Loong of his counterbalanced approach to Amah's menu. "Nothing is 100% traditional – it is evolving, which makes it accepted by more people. Traditional food will largely attract Malaysians."



“We thought it was a great idea for the Chatswood crowd who we thought would appreciate the capacity food has for transcending culture and simply bringing people together”



"I want Amah to have a more diverse offering for more people which means I get to do something different. I get to be creative."

Loong lives in a high-rise not far from the restaurant. His early memories of his native Malaysia are mimicked to a degree in the soaring multi-residential landscape; the profound walkability within Chatswood's densely urban downtown area juxtaposed with the leafy ambiance of the rest of the locale; the huge array of eateries and shops; the closeness of humanity, and the fast pace of a place in the throes of innovation. All this fuses to render a familiarity and connectedness that appeals to Loong. A foundation upon which he has learnt to gently push boundaries, creating something new that can only come as an iteration of all that has preceded it.

"For my cooking, I put more emotion into everything I do because it's so close and so dear to my heart, which makes the results different to every other food I've cooked."

"When you are that close, you care a lot more. It's one lesson my grandmother taught me when I was a teenager. We were having a family meal and she wouldn't eat with us. She just sat and watched us eat, and when I asked her why she replied, "it makes me so happy to watch you enjoy my food."

The same contentment resonates with Loong in the context of Amah's patrons. He relishes seeing his customers try different things, taking enduring associations – such as Malaysia's continued reputation for laksa's and street style dishes – and elevating them through skill and thoughtfulness into "something familiar yet surprising. Comforting and reliable yet memorable. Something with a twist to it." Something that quietly dovetails with the metamorphosis taking place in the surrounding neighbourhood of Chatswood.

# Anna Price Artist

Words by TIFFANY JADE  
Photos by JAKE RODEN

“It’s not so much that Chatswood has been gentrified, as that it’s consciously evolving. Change is coming in the next 20-30 years with so many of the older buildings being sold and repurposed in ways that stay true to their industrial history while providing optimal lifestyles for now. I mean, you can see the ocean from some of them!”



Interior designer turned artist Anna Price admits to not being much of a planner. During the pandemic she happened to be strolling past one such repurposed building 300m from her Chatswood home and made loose enquiries about its ground floor commercial space, which later become her art studio. Anna admits to a number of stars aligning in her pursuit of a workspace, with the suburb’s evolution being one element in a sum of parts. “It was a great time to rent,” she acknowledges, “while everyone was getting out of the workplace, I was getting into one.”

Although unplanned, the space appealed to her design sensibilities. Located on Smith Street, it is blessed with two elements that are paramount to commercial success in the creative industries; high visibility and great natural light. “The part of Chatswood I’m in is really industrial,” she says. “I’m on a main road, anyone coming from the Northern Beaches through to Chatswood comes past, as this is a main artery into and out of Chatswood.”

Today, the space is as much a gallery as a studio. Foot and vehicular traffic alike are offered the gift of joyful impressions of colour as they sweep past. The suggestion of a welcoming ambience reaches out into the public realm thanks to the threshold between footpath and studio which features vignettes of pot plants and an eclectic arrangement of chairs. The result is a beautiful activation with the neighbourhood and a captivating snapshot

for passersby – who often later return for a more leisurely experience of Anna’s richly structured work and the haven-like atmosphere within which juxtaposes the urban milieu throughout.

Born and bred in Chatswood, Anna’s grandfather was Mayor of Willoughby back in the day. She has borne witness to the locale’s profound metamorphosis, something reinforced by distance after a number of years spent living in Canada. “I’m the youngest of 5. Growing up, half our house was in Chatswood and half was in Roseville, literally.” Straddling the boundary of the suburb, Anna has both navigated and leveraged the shifting ecosystem of Chatswood, optimising its enduring qualities that seamlessly correspond with innovation, to now cultivate a renaissance. “Property value has gone crazy in Chatswood in the last 8-10 years, double and then some. Now, with more development happening and the east side industrial buildings selling and being redeveloped as well there is only more growth to come.”

Alongside Chatswood’s residential development, Anna has seen significant investment in the suburbs civic facets with a dedicated focus on art and culture. Seeds which have begun to generate a flourishing sense of community through the simple joy of bringing people together through beauty. Beyond the density of high-rises that cut through the sky in downtown Chatswood, the suburb is a leafy idyll with parks, gardens, waterways, and an abundance of events and initiatives that see people congregate as a community. “It’s so big,” says Anna as she simultaneously acknowledges the efforts that bring a village atmosphere to the myriad pockets of the area. “Willoughby council has created so many great spaces in so many parts of Chatswood. It’s a densely populated suburb with crowds of people. There are street markets and every Thursday, and Friday there’s market food and stalls.



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“So many great initiatives to get people out and about. Everyone loves a good crowd. It means something great is going on.”

Like many, Anna professionally pivoted during the pandemic. When Covid disruptions saw her interior design work dry up as the country largely shut down, an opportunistic self-made artwork – created for her own home to economise during a renovation and then later donated to a school charity fundraiser where it sold for \$800 – saw her set laptop aside in favour of brush and canvas. Against a muted soundtrack of children’s laughter and tears floating over from the childcare centre across the road, the constant hum of traffic and the low grind of construction, Anna now works on a healthy artistic vocation from her studio. A mother of 4 herself, she seeks personal and professional quietude in the comforting embrace of Chatswood’s vibrant tapestry.

Anna’s profession means she is constantly evolving to navigate the art landscape in a highly digitalised and fast-paced world. A world where the choice between gallery or self-management is evenly split, where all the possibilities in digital connections mean gallerists need to do much more than simply provide audiences for their artists. With the soothing backing track of inner-urban life, a strong sense of place is established to scaffold and temper the those ever-shifting entrepreneurial outcomes.

Through part intuition, part happenstance and part strategy, Anna has carved a professional place for herself that traverses the smooth surface of Instagram, leveraging its networking potential and leaving the complexity for those with more eggs in that basket. This means that establishing an anchor to the community she immerses herself within, and the importance of place and belonging is paramount. From home and studio, to the lure of Mr Fat Duck on Victoria Avenue and coffee at SML Cafe, Anna’s place within Chatswood is as locally entrenched as you can really get. Navigating generations and significant changes across the built, cultural and natural landscapes, Chatswood’s influence has guided her and seeped into her artworks which radiate with a kaleidoscopic visual language as vibrant as the surrounding community.



Chatswood – a highly convenient North Shore suburb teeming with quality dining, shopping and educational opportunities.

RESTAURANTS & BARS

- 1 Mama Mulan
- 2 Amah by Ho Jiak
- 3 Senpai Ramen
- 4 Kuro-Sakura BBQ
- 5 Khao Pla
- 6 Din Tai Fung
- 7 465 The Avenue
- 8 Bavarian Bier Cafe
- 9 The Willoughby Hotel

CAFES

- 15 Flowerchild
- 16 Shuk Chatswood
- 17 Toastiesmith
- 18 SML Cafe
- 19 Tea Journal
- 20 Amie Coffee
- 21 Steam Engine Coffee
- 22 Elbow Room Espresso
- 23 Gram Cafe Chatswood

PARKS & RECREATION

- 10 Chatswood Park
- 11 Beauchamp Park
- 12 Bales Park
- 13 Muston Park
- 14 Blue Gum Reserve

EDUCATION

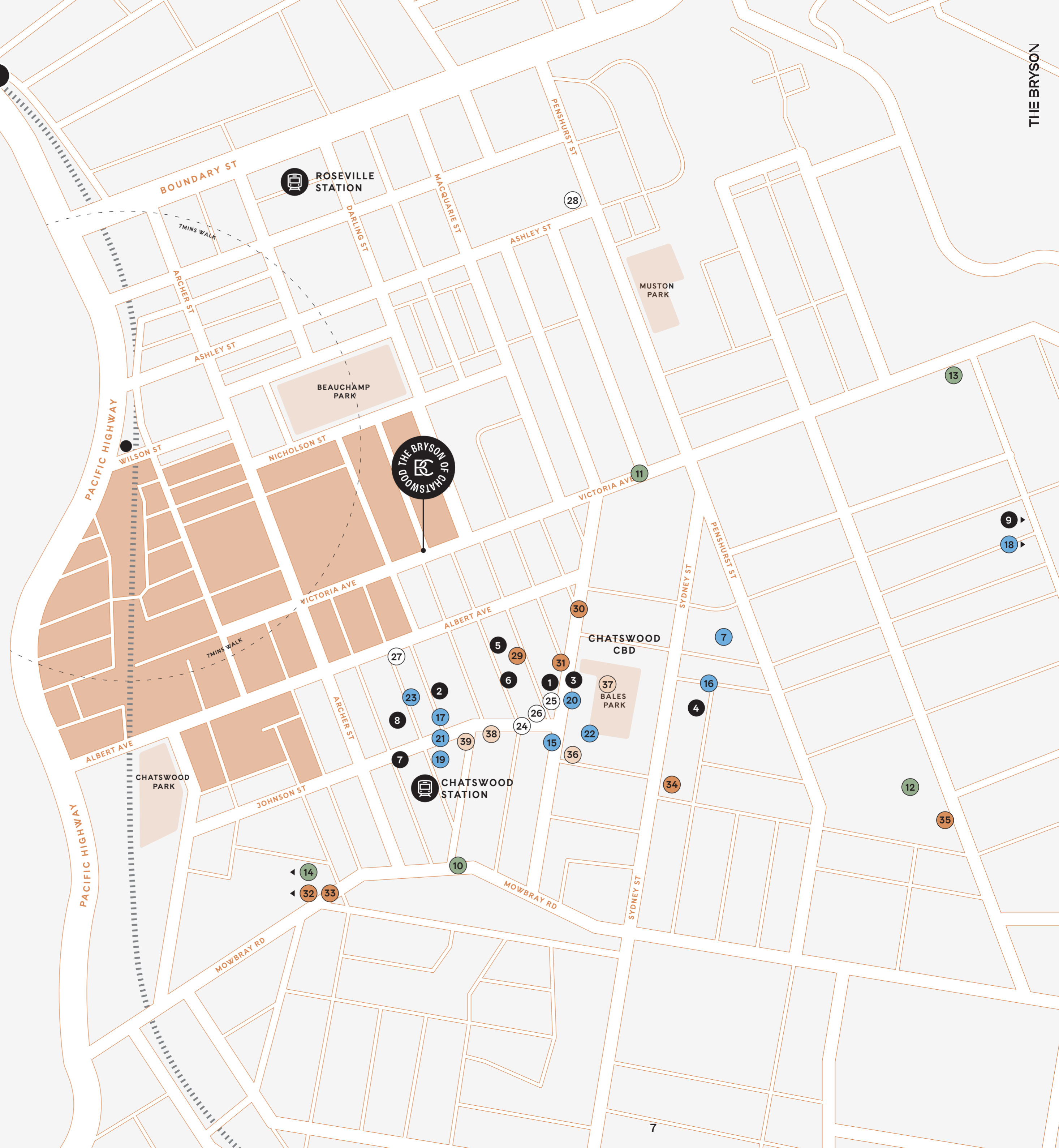
- 29 St Pius X College
- 30 Mercy Catholic College
- 31 Our Lady of Dolours Primary School
- 32 Chatswood High School
- 33 Chatswood Public School
- 34 Chatswood International Kindergarten
- Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner Preschool
- 35

ARTS & CULTURE

- 24 The Concourse
- 25 Chatswood Library
- 26 Artspace
- 27 Zenith Theatre
- 28 Ku-ring-gai Art Centre

RETAIL

- 36 Westfield Chatswood
- 37 Chatswood Chase
- 38 Victoria Plaza
- 39 Lemon Grove Shopping Centre



# Charissa Lam Business Owner

Words by TIFFANY JADE  
Photos by JAKE RODEN

For Charissa Lam, Chatswood is a place that she has continued to orbit.

“There’s a big Asian demographic here who are used to high-density living. It’s familiar and convenient to have that same housing type. To be able to walk downstairs from your apartment and bump into food everywhere you go.”

As a high school student, she spent a lot of time window shopping and socialising in parks with friends. As she grew into her adult years, Charissa lived in an apartment located at the heart of this vibrant urban metropolis on Sydney’s North Shore. Today, while Charissa has moved to nearby Castle Cove with her young family, her patterns of liveability still largely play out in Chatswood.

“It’s where all the shops are. It’s a mecca for shopping and eating, while being one of the very few places in Sydney that you don’t need a car to get around.”

As an ABC (Australian Born Chinese), Charissa proudly blends the culture of her Hong Kong born parents and husband, with Australia’s quintessential way of life. Which, in Sydney, largely centres around its temperate climate and coastal context.

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Like the millions of Australians who celebrate a coalescence of family origins, Charissa’s metric for connecting with family, community and friends is food. Once a week she runs a co-op from her garage, sourcing and providing produce for 60 families who come from Chatswood, Castlecrag, Rosedale and more to collect staples that often resurrect enduring cultural identities, leaning into a sense of heritage and nostalgia while beginning to forge communities connected by geography and a shared passion for food.

“I’ve been a member of a co-op myself on and off for a long time. For 3 or 4 years before starting my own, I was part of one. Then Covid hit and I wondered why the Chatswood area didn’t have one. During the second year of the pandemic, I realised I could really use the support and sense of community a co-op provides. It felt like a way of safeguarding social connections and if I felt that way I knew others would too.”

Chatswood has long been a destination for foodies, cultivating a flourishing gastronomy scene that is as diverse as it is numerous. So it’s no surprise that both culture and community played a large role in Charissa’s establishment of her co-op through Minifarms. As Chatswood continues to evolve into a mini city in its own right, creating and recognising opportunities to temper the urban density through authentic neighbourly connections has become central to its identity.

“Sociology is really interesting to me,” admits Charissa. “I’m fascinated by the way food helps people share culture which is integral to binding communities. I have a lot of Japanese families in my co-op. Who doesn’t love miso eggplant?! Our co-op works together to get 10 kgs of yuzu too and it’s so nice seeing Asian families teaching Anglo families how to cook with it. That sense of sharing is really important to me.”

As a connective tissue the world over, food has always been able to transcend the vernacular, bringing people together to converse, trade stories, find common ground and imbibe the good life. In Chatswood, the thriving foodscape is scaffolded further by a strong and growing art and culture scene which runs in tandem with it. From the amenity rich apartments to the postwar homes and Californian bungalows that prevail in the quiet, leafy areas of the suburb, myriad demographics are drawn in by a kaleidoscope of events, performances and exhibitions held at The Concourse.

“The Concourse really brings people together,” says Charissa. “As a mum, I know that I’m likely to bump into other mum’s I know on the turf area and there are always things going on. A lot of investment goes into Chatswood to make it culturally engaging. The Concourse even has its own mini version of VIVID Festival.”

A destination for locals, tourists and fellow Sydney-siders thanks to the locale’s seamless and extensive transport network, The Concourse introduces a vibrant layer that, like food, exists to bring colour, joy and soul.

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I’ve never been to Seoul but I wonder if it might be a bit like that in Chatswood  
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From projections that light the evenings in digital confetti, to giant inflatables and the immersive, interactive brilliance of live performers the likes of Amigo & Amigo, experience’s for young and old counterbalance both Chatswood’s residential quietude and its resonant urban dynamism.

“There are just so many places to eat. Korean BBQ’s. The smells. The after dark vibe. It’s not as brightly lit as Tokyo, not as dense as Hong Kong, but there is definitely an air of cultures clashing in a brilliant way.”

As the world recalibrates in the wake of the pandemic and we all collectively look at what is ultimately important, those things we are grateful for more often than not exist on our doorsteps. In Chatswood, Charissa considers her perfect day.

“I would start with brunch at Flower Child in Westfield. It’s linked to The Grounds chain in Alexandria which is known for transforming industrial sites into places people can really enjoy. It’s an effortlessly simple place with amazing french toast. Then I’d spend the day shopping — for clothes, Manuka honey from one of the vitamin shops, all sorts of things — then line up with other devotees of Sushi Kaido for lunch.”

“A perfect afternoon would be spent at The Concourse or Beauchamp Park. Drinking coffee and watching the trains go past from the vantage point three-storeys above the station which kids love!”

“Dinner would have to be burgers at Milky Lane, or Kreta Ayer for their incredible chicken laksa or Singaporean chilli crabs followed by a late night gelato from Gondola Gelateria before heading home feeling complete and replete.”

# Jo Nolan Artist

Words by TIFFANY JADE  
Photos by JAKE RODEN

“I love the flow of human population through Chatswood but I retreat to the solitude of the bush whenever I can. It’s 5-minutes down the road and is comfortingly reminiscent of the land I grew up on. It’s not so much the form of the land that resonates, it’s the energy which flows through both it and humans.”



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with my family and also through the  
practice of bush regeneration.  
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Jo Nolan grew up in a European family in rural NSW, heeding a call to university and the vibrant diversity of Sydney’s urban landscape when she was 18. Today, Jo lives in Castlecrag straddling the threshold between built and natural landscapes in a way that gently negotiates between the two.

Mirroring the equanimity that defines her sense of place in the world, Jo’s life experiences have shifted between artistic and scholarly pursuits. A pendulum that swings between the practice of visual and performing arts her family were constantly engaged in when she was young, to the lure of academia and a chapter of life that followed the rigour and precision of the law.

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Growing up in my  
family, painting was  
a part of daily  
practice, part of the  
rhythm of life.  
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“Not “work” but something that you made time for. My father’s practice happened at dawn and then again in the late evenings before bed. He followed the light. More prosaic pursuits happened during the flat light of day. It was his creative rhythm and we all learned to follow it.

For a while I followed a different and more prosaic working path, but the sudden death of my father led me back to my original practice and to the sanctity of the rhythms of my early life.”

Jo’s father, an established landscape painter, passed away just as his own pendulum was beginning to lodge on the side of art. The poignancy of his passing just as he was beginning to indulge a vocation of creativity rather than necessity was not lost on Jo, “I started to question the values that I held dear, to challenge what I was spending my hours on.” This cathartic thought process led her back to study, yet this time her focus came full circle, reconciling the artistic influences that marked her upbringing with a deep respect for those masters — Kandinsky, De Champs, Mondrian and the formidable yet little known Hilma Af Klimt — who left indelible scores on history through their paintings.

It’s been nearly 20 years since Jo set her course in the art world, following a pathway that has seen her assume her place as an established abstract painter who’s works reverberate with an ancient rhythm that finds an accord with the elemental cadence of the natural landscape around her. Her works present washes of watercolour which take on a notion of movement paused, of the moments in between the earth’s myriad cyclical pathways, of the infinite scope of the cosmos manifested through captivating compositions.

Working predominantly on the floor, Jo orchestrates paintings that reach towards the tangible, suggestive of the tiniest microcosms that make up the natural world ricocheting off one another to trace pathways between the depths of the oceans and the heights of the midnight sky.

“Abstraction has emerged from the process of diving back into studying. While the seeds of every-thing were planted in my childhood, they have at times been dormant.

As time has moved on and things have changed, those things have been allowed to mature and develop.”

From her small studio and library just outside Chatswood on Cammeraygal land, Jo conjures canvases that are a culmination of her life experiences thus far. Just as nature evolves to emerge as a continuation of all that has come before it, her work is a fusion of the principles of art and the interpretation of them through the lens of Jo’s own life. “I could have started painting and studying earlier but my life experiences would have been very different,” she acknowledges. “I feel that abstract painting arises from the totality of the artist’s lived experience. When I’m not painting, I use my time to engage with the arts and I immerse myself in the natural world with my family and also through the practice of bush regeneration.”

Jo’s evolution has placed her in a part of the world that concedes perfectly to the intricacies of her life. From the dense urbanity and diverse cultural expressions of Chatswood’s built environment to the ancient bushland that remains just beyond its borders, a compromise has been reached between the two landscapes which eloquently respond to contemporary living. Through an understanding of the relevance of both, an accord has settled between Chatswood’s cultivated built environment — which leverages convenience and social amenity — and the unadulterated beauty of the native landscape just beyond.

A negotiation between the two has ensured an archaic link is retained between the earth and sea; between human connection and daily opportunities to commune with nature; and, between the people and landscape who share an energy of gravitas that radiates from Jo’s artworks.



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