

AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS BLOOD SERVICE MELBOURNE PROCESSING CENTRE BY DESIGNINC

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This 90 million-dollar project impressed the judges who were looking for outstanding design with green credentials. Originally a Morris Minor assembly factory, the West Melbourne site comprises 17,500sqm of space across four levels, and is split into two buildings. Extending to the edges of its city block, the buildings are divided by an internal and elegantly enclosed laneway.

DesignInc seized the opportunity to enrich a piece of Melbourne's history, tipping its hat to the adaptive and restorative essence of sustainable design. The first step was to bring the laneway back to life. Not only would this create an introspective focal point for the building, but also house the building's circulation on both vertical and horizontal levels. In doing so, the laneway became the 'lungs' of the building.

"DesignInc has opened up the inner area of the atrium and it has tried to open up what was previously a closed function," IDEA 2012 jury member Natasha Palich says. This bodes well with the body-related function of the organisation, while the internal gardens allow the building to breathe. Timber benches are provided for staff too, with the enhanced indoor air quality creating a healthier working environment.

Natural light is introduced into the 60m-deep building, neatly eliminating the 'rabbit warren' culture of pathology buildings to which the staff had become accustomed. "It's a great design," Palich says. "Establishing some sight lines into these spaces is good from a social sustainability point of view."

Salvation was another key element in the sustainable design. The timber from the existing roof was treated, milled and reinstated as cladding for the office pods and lift shafts, and used to form new timber trusses above the open plan office. "DesignInc was creative," continues Palich. "The designers salvaged old speakers into light fittings, which I imagine wasn't an easy thing to do." The recycled timber stairwell received a big tick too: "It encourages people to move."

Other green elements include a 50,000L rainwater harvesting tank, solar hot water, water efficient fittings and GECA furniture selections. Palich believes, "They have given this building a new lease of life for another fifty to one hundred years."

— ANNIE REID

"We were keen to showcase good sustainable outcomes married with good design outcomes."

— NATASHA PALICH,
IDEA 2012 JURY MEMBER

