



A NEW ARCHITECTS' STUDIO IN MELBOURNE'S GPO BUILDING IS AN EXAMPLE OF A CONTEMPORARY SPACE THAT SLOTS PERFECTLY INTO ITS HERITAGE SURROUNDS



FAR LEFT: A reception area shows the way air is given to the space, while displaying aspects of the old and new iterations of the site. **LEFT:** Pendulum lights and custom lighting columns illuminate the workspace. **BELOW:** Light flows in through the large windows. **BOTTOM:** The end result is a professional area that takes advantage of the ample light and air afforded by its shell.



ARCHITECT *DesignInc*
 WRITER *Rebecca Howden*
 PHOTOGRAPHER *Trevor Mein*

HOLDING ON TO HISTORY

A philosophy of integrated design and a commitment to sustainability formed the backbone of DesignInc's new studio design. Located in the heritage-listed Melbourne GPO building, the design called for a thoughtful blend of the old and the new, making use of the high ceilings and existing archways to create a classic but contemporary new space.

"We wanted to have a timeless aesthetic within what is a very lovely space, and a space that hopefully is going to last for another 150 years," says DesignInc project director Stephen Webb.

A simple palette of black steel, solid timber and recycled elements was used on a backdrop of white masonry. Large blocks of recycled timber – leftovers salvaged from

another of DesignInc's construction sites – are appropriated throughout the space, such as in the cladding and the reception desk, creating a warm and natural atmosphere. The workstations from the old design studio have also been recycled, with a new storage element built in between them. "This becomes a docking point for the workstations to fit into, which is a way of creating a new element that helps give them new life," says Webb.

Links to nature are also found through the generous amount of indoor plants – the studio is designed so that from any point in the fit-out greenery is visible – and eco-friendly systems and processes such as the mixed-mode ventilation. "All the windows have automatic openings, and we were able to link this to the air conditioning system, so we can press a button and the air conditioning turns off and the windows open," explains Webb.

As well as creating a beautiful space, a core requirement of the studio was to allow a collaborative work environment. "We wanted to make sure that there were opportunities to collaborate in our immediate work environment, not just in large meeting spaces or spill-out spaces," says Webb.

Most of the studio spaces have large shared tables adjoined to the workstations, so staff can meet and collaborate close to their personal work areas. Other formal collaboration areas include a resource area centred around the kitchen, an outdoor terrace, and a flexible, classroom-type space called 'the lab' that can be used for events, seminars and discussions.

A sense of life and colour is also injected into the space through a large projection screen in the main foyer, which is visible from most of the main studios. "One idea we've had from the start is to have natural landscapes projected onto the screen, or to set up a camera giving a view of the street, bringing the outside into the studio," says Webb. ■

