



rmit university building 9 rooftop extension

location rmit city campus bowen & franklin streets melbourne australia

status completed august 2009

client rmit university, school of media & communication

photography trevor mein

Building 9 is prominently located in the heart of the RMIT University city campus on the corner of Bowen and Franklin Streets. It was constructed as the Radio & Electrical Trades School in two stages from 1937 to 1942 and is on the Victorian Heritage Register. Building 9 forms part of a group of contiguous buildings designed to be seen as single entity. Buildings 5, 7 & 9 were designed by Percy Everett, Government Architect for the Public Works Department. They form an impressive and cohesive group of buildings in the “streamlined horizontal moderne style”, which is characterised by continuous brick spandrel panels and strip windows. Building 9 was constructed as a 3 storey steel and concrete structure with part basement and trafficable roof. It was also designed for additional floors but these never occurred. Instead over time various ad-hoc structures filled the roof terrace with a small village of portables.

The project involves adding two new floors (levels 4 & 5) as well as providing an overall infrastructure master plan for the whole building. The interior of the building has been treated as “loose-fit” to maximise long term flexibility as the new home for the School of Media & Communication. The proposal to add additional floors to this group of buildings dates back to 1990 with the original design concept prepared by Peter Elliott Architects. Nearly 20 years later the fundamentals of that scheme were still relevant, albeit with a new façade treatment and numerous additional ESD initiatives.

The new floors continue the general plan configuration of the existing building with vertically stacked columns, stairs and service risers. All services infrastructure has been renewed including new toilets to all levels, new lifts and other common amenities. The new floors are well laid out around a central terrace light court as a major social space. The interior

has good perimeter access to daylight, natural ventilation and views with heating and cooling provided via a chilled beam system linked to operable windows. Due to structural limitations the additional floors are steel framed lightweight construction with composite metal and glass panellised wall and roof systems.

The new rooftop extension has been conceived as a companion building, related but of another generation. The new façade has adopted another version of the horizontal layered skin characterising the base building. A continuous ribbon window is separated by deeply concertinaed zinc spandrels. This creates a highly modelled form to the building which both emphasises the horizontal as well as the sculptural. In addition the deep overhang to the concertinaed facade provides solar and weather protection to the glazing.

The interior to levels 4 & 5 provides accommodation for staff and graduate students along with support facilities. It contains a mixture of collaborative work spaces, meeting rooms, individual offices and break-out social spaces. Work zones are organised around shared lounges which occupy pivotal places on the floor plate. Services have been exposed and generally there are no ceilings so the interior space feels voluminous and dynamic.

“This adept, intelligent and highly resolved addition is an outstanding example of a heritage building’s evolution to meet the practicalities of contemporary (academic) life. The significance of the two-storey addition is especially pronounced in the language of the exterior, which sympathetically reinterprets the spirit of the original.” AIA John George Knight Award jury 2010

