



victoria law school

location queen street melbourne australia

status completed june 2003

client victoria university

photography john gollings, trevor mein

Victoria University acquired the former Public Records Office in Queen Street Melbourne in late 2000, to become the headquarters for the Victoria Law School. The site is located in the heart of the Law Precinct, which includes all of the city's major Court buildings. The former Records Office was built in 1900-1904 by the Public Works Department and is a late example of the flamboyant French Second Empire Style. It is listed on the Heritage Victoria Register and remains a significant public building. The refurbished building provides accommodation for the School of Law and the Sir Zelman Cowen Centre for Continuing Legal Education.

The project involves the conversion of the main 4 storey Records Office together with a single storey rear Strong Room into general academic facilities, seminar rooms, Moot Courts, and lecture theatres. Above the Strong Room there is a 2 storey extension containing the Law Library. The new Law School is an ideal adaptation for this fine early twentieth century building.

The exterior of the main building, with its formal symmetry of 3 pavilion bays, massive rusticated stone base and attic mansard roofs remains virtually in original condition. Similarly most of the interior spaces remain in near original condition and have been easily adapted to their new use with minimal change. Given the cellular nature of the building, and the fixed configuration of the original floor plan, the new fit-out responds to the available spaces

on a best-fit basis. Offices, seminar rooms and moot courts fit easily into the suites of original rooms. Aside from a very elaborate central stair hall the balance of the interior treatment is relatively simple with bluestone flagged floors and vaulted (traegerwellblech) fireproof ceilings. New inserted elements including lighting, partitions and services are contemporary and designed to "float" within the original spaces.

The rear Strong Room Building is joined to the main building by a compact internal courtyard. Above the Strong Room sits the new library addition. Its zigzag folded walls are redolent of a large concertina accordion springing above the roof. Deep horizontal furrows create an illusion of scaleless form, where crumpled course lines disguise the real storey height. Within the inner courtyard the folded form dissolves into a glass curtain wall opening the interior of the library to view and daylight.

"Intelligent and amusing, Peter Elliott Architecture's project for the Victoria University Law School makes a fine contribution to the city." Graham Crist, Architecture Australia, March 2004

"VU's new Law school is courageous yet understated contemporary architecture. It takes risk and they pay off....the effect is to create a giant piece of sculpture rather than a new building..." Norman Day, The Age 27 April 2004

