



rmit university building one

location city campus la trobe street melbourne australia

status completed august 2010

client rmit university

photography john gollings

Building 1 as the number suggests is RMIT's oldest building. It was built in 2 stages between 1886 and 1892 and named after Francis Ormond, founder and benefactor of the original Working Men's College. This is a landmark building of great stature and historic significance. It occupies a prominent position on La Trobe Street along with the historic legal precinct which became part of RMIT in 1997.

The former Magistrate's Court (Building 20) and the Francis Ormond Building have been linked together to become the administrative headquarters for the university. Given its grand and voluminous interior spaces, Building 1 has become a distinguished venue for welcoming and receiving visitors and members of the RMIT community, as well as provide executive office accommodation.

Over time Building 1 had undergone a number of ad hoc and unsympathetic changes both to the interior and the rear north facing courtyard. Much of the original fabric survived but was hidden under a myriad of later alterations and additions. The service infrastructure for the building was also completely outmoded and in need of replacement. Overall the building was in need of a comprehensive refurbishment along with the replacement of the whole of the services infrastructure.

The interior planning of the building has been undertaken on a "best fit" basis where each room or space has been closely matched to each function or use. By their nature, nineteenth century buildings are load-bearing cellular structures and therefore relatively inflexible. By good fortune Building 1 has a compact well organised plan which is quite adaptable to new uses, being mostly offices, meeting and function spaces. All new inserted elements are contemporary in nature and designed to "float" within the original spaces. This is an adaptive re-use which retains the best of the original building but brings it clearly into the twenty first century.

The concept for the interior was to open up and reveal a series of original grand spaces, including the main east-west corridor zone, and the main suite of rooms on each level. In particular the top floor offers a spectacular trussed volume some nine metres high. Perhaps the most significant change to the building is the creation of a new north facing courtyard by the removal of many later structures and the opening up of the re-entrant spaces to the side of the main chamber drum.

The design approach is based on "long life – loose fit", where core building infrastructure has been planned independently of the fitout. This is to allow for long term accommodation flexibility. The core infrastructure includes the resolution of the main building entry and exit points, internal circulation systems, lifts and stairway locations, toilet, plant and service riser spaces.

The building is organised around three main wings over three levels. The ground floor is the main public level. It is very permeable with a number of entrances linking the spaces to Building 20 to the east, La Trobe Street to the south, Ellis court to the west and the new café courtyard to the north.

The project has a 5 Star Office Design v2 rating certified by the Green Building Council of Australia.

"Peter Elliott Architects have exceeded my expectations in taking a dark and cramped heritage building and redesigning it into a building that RMIT can again be proud to call its headquarters. Many of my visitors and guests...comment on the exceptional quality of the redevelopment. In my view, the project is an exceptional example of heritage re-adaption." Professor Margaret Gardner AO, Vice-Chancellor & President, RMIT University 2012

