



peter elliot
architecture +
urban design

melbourne grammar school centenary building

location south yarra campus victoria australia

status completed 2000

client melbourne grammar school

photography john gollings

Founded in 1855, Melbourne Grammar School is one of the oldest denominational schools in Victoria. Located in South Yarra, the School is well known for its picturesque campus, with its fine collection of nineteenth century bluestone Tudor buildings set in generous landscaped grounds. In the early 1950s, architects Mockridge Stahle and Mitchell added a series of bold new buildings around the main oval in the post war International style, one of which was the Centenary Building (1959). This was a major departure from the traditional bluestone buildings in both style and materials. Interestingly, for a School founded upon such strong past traditions, it willingly supports contemporary buildings under the banner of 'building tomorrow's traditions'.

In 1998 the School conducted a limited architectural competition to replace the Centenary Building with a new Student Centre. This was to be an innovative project catering specifically for 'out of class' activities – "a student centre for students where they can study and relax away from the classroom". The centre incorporates career counselling, Year 12 study and common rooms, classrooms, the School cafeteria, bookroom and basement maintenance workshops.

The new Centre retains and refurbishes the existing Centenary Building,

for not only is it well sited, it is a significant building from the 1950s redevelopment era of the School. Being a compact, three-level expressed framed structure, it was readily adaptable to new uses.

Standing to the north front of the existing building is a new double volume cafeteria joined at the ground level only. Beyond is a glass-roofed loggia, which connects the cafeteria to an outdoor terrace and the main oval. New fully glazed stairways pop out of either end of the building into the surrounding tree canopy. Internally, the building is very light and transparent, with framed views of the surrounding landscape and the silhouetted bluestone towers of the Old School beyond. As the School intended the Student Centre has an easy and inviting atmosphere, a place of retreat from the daily classroom routine.

"The views from interior to exterior are delightful and ably controlled...the design carefully modulates the sense of the landscaped exterior world." Dr Karen Burns, *Architecture Australia*, Vol. 90 No. 2 2001

"On behalf of everyone at MGS...I have no hesitation in saying the building is serving our purposes outstandingly." Paul Sheahan, Headmaster MGS

