

Commercial Property

RMIT soars above the city

The new campus will be a design landmark, writes Philip Hopkins.

BEING RMIT, with its reputation for design, something special was required for the university's new city campus. Award-winning Melbourne architectural firm Lyons, after four years' of work, is confident it has come up with the goods. Preliminary work has already started on RMIT's \$228 million, 11-storey academic building, which is expected to be completed in about two years.

Tucked in behind the Oxford Hotel in Swanson Street, the multi-coloured building will be a striking presence at the top of the city, with big jagged openings for some windows with a variety of views across the central business district.

It has been a labour of love for Lyons director Adrian Stanic, himself an RMIT architecture graduate. The challenge was to make a vertical campus — an 11-storey building with a 35,000-square-metre footprint at ground level — that will be used for general teaching, including the College of Business, but will also provide amenities and be "green".

A variety of influences were at work in the design. "Generation Y likes to be totally connected to everything — technologies, laptops, use of SMS . . . while the cafes, retail, night spots, the wireless environment around RMIT defined the context," Stanic told BusinessDay.

Allied to this was the idea to embed the diversity of Melbourne into the project, and RMIT's central role in the city. The building was designed to be diverse — with no singular experience at ground level, but "complex and interesting, worth exploring".



In different light, the building will take on a unique appearance . . . a spectrum of colour.

ADRIAN STANIC, architect

Photographer Dianna Snape was hoisted on a boom lift to capture the vistas of Melbourne from the 11 different levels of the building. The process involved mapping lines from the site.

"Using these lines, we then created a computerised algorithm that generated the three-dimensional shape and form of the building," Stanic said.

It was important to enable light to enter the structure. "A vertical atrium is a common mode for a big building, but that is essentially a divisive element. It creates separation when trying to create cohesion in the building," Stanic said.

"We came up with the idea of distributing that space in the building horizontally through spaces called 'portals'. Each space is two storeys high — quite a significant volume at that level of the building."

These portal spaces become part of the "breathability" of the building, joining on to a central space that is not a traditional atrium but a series of stairs and escalators that take you up through the building.

"We looked at how those spaces could become part of the network in the building, the way a student goes from hub to hub on the campus, from the cafe to the library," Stanic said.

"You just don't go in and vertically rise in the building and move out, but the stairs, the escalators are very much a journey. The stairs, the portals, all link up so that every floor experience is different."

The portals also become an opportunity to capture the Melbourne views that have been identified, including such landmarks as the MCG, Town Hall, Parliament House, Federation Square, Flagstaff Gardens, the Supreme Court, Etihad Stadium and Docklands.

The colours of the new building were taken from the colours of Melbourne, with the facade made up of a series of panels. "We did not go for obvious commercial window types — a uni building should look different. We developed a triangular window pattern, the window

distributed right across the floor, to floor height. You can see up, out and down . . . you sense there is a lot of openness," Stanic said.

The other important issue was sun penetration. "In a five-star, Green Star build . . . you need substantial sun shading, high performance glass, and areas of solid panels," he said.

The panels on the facade are made from anodised aluminium — a special external grade with six different colours, ranging from brick red, khaki, mustard, blue, grey, silver, white and charcoal.

"In different light, the building will take on a unique appearance . . . a spectrum of colour. The building is meant to be colourful, but not garish . . . a lovely quality that changes in the light — not a flat solid colour, but much more dramatic," Stanic said.

A two-storey cantilevered student portal will overhang Swanson Street. There will be nine additional double-height student portals for study and recreation, with landscaped indoor gardens and spaces for public art.

Green Star initiatives include double glazing, rainwater harvesting to flush toilets, natural light to cut power bills, grey water recycling, solar hot water and natural ventilation.

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ADRIAN STANIC
Architect

If tenants want to relocate in suburban markets, rents are going to have to increase significantly and quickly.

ROB JOYES
Colliers

Clients are asking what is reasonable and fair in current market conditions. They want to keep their people, but worry about finding earnings growth to support wages growth.

RITA AVDIEV
Avdiev Group

I think it's important to express materials and finishes. Nothing here is hidden. You could say it's like one large piece of joinery.

CHRIS CONNELL
Designer



City landmark on the market

THE former McGill's bookstore at 193 Elizabeth Street is for sale, and the target market is the \$10 million-\$20 million price bracket for prime Melbourne CBD retail investment properties.

It will be auctioned by CB Richard Ellis's city sales division — on site at noon on December 15. The two-level building, near the Bourke Street Mall and opposite Melbourne's GPO, has an income of about \$556,534 net per annum across all four tenants.

Demand high for Queen Street precinct

CHEAPER rents and a focus on west end CBD offices are driving demand for retail property in Melbourne's Queen Street retail precinct, according to Savills Australia.

Savills retail leasing directors Michael Di Carlo and Jeremy Marmur said rents, in the area between Flinders Lane and Lonsdale Street, for sites bigger than 150 square metres, were as low as \$600, while sites under 50 sq m were achieving \$2000 per sq m.

Savills' recent leasing deals include Travelxpress and Pie Face at 123 Queen Street, and new terms for leases at Runner World, 170 and 118 Queen Street.

Mr Marmur said demand was putting upward pressure on rents, which had risen about 10 per cent over the past 12 months, but remained comparatively cheaper than other CBD precincts.

Tally Ho, we're full

NEW lease agreements in Burwood East have brought the Tally Ho Business Park to full occupancy. Two deals totalling 1100 sq m at 1 Lakeside Drive were negotiated by Jones Lang LaSalle agents Anthony Park and Joshua Tebb. The deals, each at about \$240 per sq m net, involve tenants Mary Kay Cosmetics and AV Jennings.

South Wharf offices snapped up

BAYLEY Stuart director Alasdair MacGillivray has sold two strata office units at South Wharf. Unit 3, 103 square metres with three car bays, went for \$567,000 to an owner-occupier, which translated to \$5505 per square metre. Unit 6, 136 sq m with three car bays, sold for \$835,000, reflecting a value of \$5529 per square metre.

McMullin puts Hawthorn East site on market

THE McMullin Group has outgrown its Hawthorn East premises and is relocating to Canterbury, putting its Cato Street building on the market for \$2.5 million. The three strata offices come fully fitted and have a combined area of 551 sq m and 16 basement car parks.